



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

<b>Title</b>	Verbal irony in literary discourse : a pragmatic-stylistic study with particular emphasis on contemporary narrative fiction
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<b>Qualification</b>	PhD
<b>Year</b>	1992

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*Verbal Irony In Literary Discourse:  
A Pragmatic-Stylistic Study with Particular Emphasis  
on Contemporary Narrative fiction*

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*1992*



*DECLARATION*

*This thesis is the work of the undersigned and has been composed by herself.*

*Parts of the thesis have been published elsewhere in revised versions.*

*Sonia S'hiri*

## Acknowledgements

I would like first of all to express my considerable gratitude to the British Council for granting me the scholarship that has allowed me to undertake this research and the M.Sc. course before it (1987/1988, 1988/1991), and to Dr Monji Raddadi, ex-Dean of the Faculté des Lettres de Tunis, who supported me to obtain it. My deepest thanks also to Mr Terry Cole for his kind assistance with the Cowan House Scholarship during the last two terms (1992) of my stay in Pollock Halls.

This thesis has benefited from careful and suggestive readings in part or in total by Dr Alan Davies, Mr Keith Mitchell, my friends Aleka Georgakopoulou, Eileen Broughton, Jeff Mc Carthy, Sérgio Coelho, and Professor Ibrahim Muhawi. To their time, encouragement and comments I am obliged in more than I can describe. The ebbs and flows of the development and the process of composition of this thesis have however been mostly suffered by my supervisor and source of guidance Mrs Elizabeth Black. Her tireless support, most stimulating critical acumen, and not least her exquisite sense of humour have been my enduring oasis. To her go my profound affection and gratitude.

Infinite thanks are also due to all the people who have made my stay in Edinburgh such an enjoyable and constructive time. I would like to mention in particular Virginia Foká, Aleka Georgakopoulou, Karin Mohler, as well as Faryza Benmakrouha and Hisham Ali for all the big and especially the little things they did for me. Special thanks are also due to Professor Ibrahim Muhawi who first showed me the way and affectionately and attentively sustained the inspiration he had induced.

Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, my sister Leïla and my brothers Sofyenne and Anis for their discretion and warm support, and for bearing this separation with such patience and understanding. It is to them that I dedicate this thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to shed new light on the functioning of verbal irony in literary discourse and contemporary narrative fiction in particular, adopting a pragmatic, stylistic approach to the topic. It argues in favour of Sperber and Wilson's pragmatic account of verbal irony which it deems extendable and generalisable, despite its two main shortcomings concerned with the basically one-to-one situation analysis it offers and its disregard for components (of a psycho-sociolinguistic nature) which are essential for explaining and securing the existence of irony. The defence of this argument follows two steps.

The first (Chs. I, II, III, IV) is concerned with the exploration of the potential that discourse as a whole and literary discourse in particular offer for warranting such a view of irony. Tremendous support has been unravelled from the notions of intertextuality, recontextualisation and re-attribution which readily accommodate the proposed view of irony and help to elucidate it.

The second step explores irony in contemporary narrative fiction taking into consideration aspects of its discourse, and the way it can be reconciled with Sperber and Wilson's account. Chapter V singles out some paratextual elements (the title, the epigraph and the note) as instantiating intertextuality *par excellence* and therefore offering a fertile ground for the communication of irony, at the periphery of the body of the fictional text. Chapters VI and VII scrutinise the organisation of the narrative both as report of events and as report of speech in order to single out the potential each narrative technique offers for the generation and comprehension of irony. It is argued that the duplicity between "story" and "discourse" is at the heart of a great deal of the possibilities open for irony in narrative fiction given what it offers for the manipulation of the organisation of the events in terms of time, focalisation and narration as well as speech and thought presentation.

This investigation is further accompanied by an exploration of the pragmatic or rhetorical purposes behind the use of irony through the manipulation of these techniques. Characterisation, thematic reinforcement and self-conscious criticism are found to be the elements of narrative that seem to benefit most from ironic communication.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Since ... Erich Heller, in his Ironic German, has already quite adequately not defined irony, there would be little point in not defining it all over again.*

*Peut-être que cela était-il vrai,  
peut-être que cela était-il faux:  
que sait-on?*

One can assume that verbal irony existed even before the development of literacy given its close links with social and psychological issues such as censorship, power, group formation, knowledge, distance, and multiplicity of perspective and values. Research conducted in the fields of sociolinguistics and anthropology witnesses the presence of this verbal practice in variably literate societies as well as in societies of a predominantly oral culture. This need for the use of irony springs from the need for constant questioning and evaluation of situations and events. It also emanates from the need for implicitly and indirectly ridiculing and/or commenting on others, and showing disagreement or superiority to them or to what they stand for. Irony is spontaneous and universal and is by no means confined to a particular group of people who have learned to use it from a position of privilege<sup>1</sup>, as some studies erroneously suggest.

Verbal irony is one of the problematic phenomena that were traditionally recognised as "figures of speech." Given the breadth and elusiveness of what its scope comprises, irony is not readily definable without falling into oversimplification or overgeneralisation. One might describe it as a concept that is easier to illustrate than to

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<sup>1</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1989).

define. This difficulty derives from its highly context-bound nature as more is involved in its production and identification than the words that carry it alone. Research on the concept "irony" itself dates back to early works in philosophy and rhetoric and still continues intensively in different guises and with different emphases. It is noticeable, however, that it is only during the last generation or so that theories concerned with the questions "what," "how," and "why" of irony as a linguistic phenomenon have developed. The preoccupation with isolating a single parameter capable of defining verbal irony has remained a common factor to most of these theories. The recent progress achieved in the study of irony parallels the recent developments in overlapping fields such as discourse studies, philosophy, pragmatics, semiotics and literary stylistics (which tries to exploit all the other disciplines in its study of literary and non-literary discourse).

The main purpose of the present study is to attempt to shed some new light on the functioning of verbal irony in literary discourse and in contemporary narrative fiction in particular, adopting a pragmatic, stylistic approach towards the topic. Its major contribution to the subject is twofold. First, it offers a deeper exploration of fruitful and relevant directions of investigation that were merely sketched or hinted at in the literature on the subject (e.g., irony in relation to intertextuality and presupposition, or the paratext), if not entirely overlooked and ignored (e.g., narrative techniques as means of evaluation and irony). Second, it groups together and establishes links between areas of study so far treated independently of each other by various other scholars (relevance theory and literature, pragmatics and narratology, pragmatics and paratextual studies, and intertextuality and irony). This study also suggests a linear direction of investigation based on these fields and leading to the formation of a unified study of the subject: a pragmatic, stylistic analysis of irony in narrative fiction based on the notions of echoic interpretation, intertextuality, the paratext as well as evaluation and narratology.

This study and the issue around which it revolves emanate from a belief in the

merit of Sperber and Wilson's work on verbal irony and communication. Their work, which partly falls within the field of pragmatics, differs from philosophical, semantic and other pragmatic approaches to irony both in its scope and perspective. It offers what is judged here as a powerful explanatory framework for verbal irony.

According to Sperber and Wilson, irony does not consist in the relationship of contradiction operating between sentences or events. It lies, instead, in the relationship that ties ironists to what they are uttering, that is, in the fact that they treat their utterances as "echoic." The echoic element springs both from the fact that the utterance is implicitly attributable to somebody other than the speaker and from the attitude he or she adopts towards it: "An ironical utterance," Sperber and Wilson (1986: 30) suggest, "is one that echoes an actual or possible opinion of a certain person or type of person, in order to dissociate oneself from it or make fun of it." Sperber and Wilson claim that irony can be treated as a form of "echoic interpretation" of an attributed thought or utterance: "irony involves an interpretive relation between the speaker's thought and attributed thoughts or utterances" (1986: 231). The notion of interpretation is used by Sperber and Wilson as part of the distinction they posit between descriptive and interpretive (second-degree) utterances. The former provide a description of a state of affairs while the latter provide an interpretation of an attributed thought or utterance -- the assumption being that every utterance is already, in the first place, a public interpretation, not necessarily of the literal type, of the thought of a speaker.

When it involves an interpretation of the understanding the speaker has of someone else's thought, an utterance is said to be used interpretively. Where an utterance is interpretively used in order to communicate an attitude towards the attributed thought or utterance, it is defined as echoic. In irony, a form of echoic interpretation, this attitude is regarded as being invariably of the disapproving negative type, dissociating the speaker from the thought or utterance echoed. The notion of echo is thus ascribed to irony in order to put it forward as a form of representation or borrowing of another utterer's words while conveying the sense of modification or

distortion that accompanies such a process.

A particular effect of this operation is that it singles out an element that is shared by all manifestations of verbal irony. It thus provides a broader view of what irony is and also classifies it under the category that encompasses the various forms of report of speech or second-degree interpretation utterances, in Sperber and Wilson's terms. This eventually leads to a demystification of the long venerated concept of irony: as Sperber and Wilson point out (1986: 238, 1989), it brings it to the same level, in terms of the mechanism underlying its functioning, with other linguistic forms (e.g., quotations, paraphrases, indirect speech reports) that have not enjoyed the status that irony has possessed over the centuries among rhetoricians, linguists and literary scholars. At the level of the utterance, however, this definition of irony unveils some form of implicit struggle, so far disregarded by other approaches, between the voice of the ironist and that of the originator, actual or possible, of the ironised opinion. The obviously unbalanced struggle for power initiated by the ironist is bound to end to the detriment of the putative speaker. The ironist triumphs because of irony's capacity to recontextualise and therefore manipulate the original (the echoed) utterance or thought, in order to undermine and/or ridicule it.

Sperber and Wilson's approach is, I think, particularly suggestive and resourceful for the analysis of irony in literary discourse (despite the fact that there is hardly any trace of the application of their account to such a task in the related literature). This thesis aims, in part, to demonstrate that the horizons Sperber and Wilson's work opens for the investigation of irony and of its manifestations in narrative discourse are multiple. The focus their approach places on the question of attribution on the one hand, and that of disapprobatory or undermining attitude or evaluation, on the other, takes it far beyond the restrictive boundaries of traditional, semantic, and even earlier pragmatic definitions. Furthermore, it provides a better understanding of the functioning of verbal irony and offers other directions for its analysis.

The present study thus undertakes to show ways in which Sperber and

Wilson's approach can prove profitable when applied to the analysis of irony in the discourse of narrative fiction. The beneficial aspects of the approach are adopted and when necessary adapted to the questions encountered in this operation. The shortcomings of this account are, however, tackled by looking at other fields of study (narratology mainly) that are deemed appropriate to complement or correct them. The thesis consists, therefore, of two main parts. The first is mainly theoretical. It is concerned with the explanation of the theory and its validation within a wider theoretical context, and with its applicability, at the same time, to the layered character of literary discourse in particular. The second part considers the application of the approach to narrative fiction and attempts to balance its shortcomings with a proposed alternative based on narratology. It illustrates the points it makes with selected texts from contemporary fiction, assessing the effects the use of irony achieves in these texts.

The role of the first part is thus to argue in favour of the echoic approach to verbal irony by highlighting the positive aspects related to its definition, explaining it and testing to what degree it is acceptable and generalisable as an analytic device. Considering concepts like intertextuality, polyphony and presupposition proves essential for these purposes. The four chapters described below constitute the core of this first part.

Chapter I discusses a number of theories of irony in search of a plausible theoretical framework to account for its properties, and of means for its comprehension (Part A). This view, it will be argued, is proposed essentially by Sperber and Wilson's work which offers answers to the "what" and "how" questions of irony (Part B). The "why" question, however, is only partly tackled by them and is eventually elucidated by looking at other theories concerned with the sociolinguistic and rhetorical aspects of irony (Part C). These aspects are outlined here because of the multiple implications they have for the consideration of irony in narrative fiction, examined in the second part of the thesis.

Chapter II involves situating and validating this approach to irony within an

intertextual, polyphonic view of discourse through a consideration of various related theories. Although they span a wide number of fields, these views are often seen as overlapping and lending support to each other in illuminating the background to this phenomenon. Chapter II also includes an examination of the role incongruity plays in the recognition of irony and intertextuality.

In Chapter III, the investigation of the relation of irony to intertextuality continues. Particular emphasis is placed on the questions of recontextualisation and re-attribution. To illustrate their relevance in this context, an analysis of Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" and Barthelme's "Eugénie Grandet" is suggested. The discussion particularly leads to and concentrates on the scrutiny of the nature of ironic intertexts or "echoes," as they relate to Sperber and Wilson's account of the subject. It proposes to classify them into actual and non-actual intertexts and argues that they are constituted through pragmatic notions such as presupposition and implicature.

Chapter IV offers an idea of the great potential that literary discourse provides for irony considered within the perspective proposed by Sperber and Wilson. This potential stems from two main characteristics of the discourse: its inherent dialogism and its layeredness. The chapter also examines the nature of the question of secrecy ("secret communion") involved in the communication of irony in this kind of layered discourse.

At the threshold to the second part of this study which addresses textual analysis of verbal irony in literary discourse, a problem arises. It emanates from the difficulty encountered in the application of this approach to larger stretches of discourse. Although valid throughout in principle, this approach which can be ideal for the analysis of one-to-one interactions with short utterances where communicator and audience are simultaneously present, might prove problematic when dealing with longer stretches of discourse especially of the narrative type which infringes this requirement. With various participants interacting at the same time, where the question of attribution is not straightforward and where evaluation and comments are carried through the way

utterances and other elements of discourse interact with each other, the communication of irony becomes more complex and an awareness of other textual properties is necessary. It is important to point out that ironic interactions at the macro-level are accommodated by the approach outlined as much as interactions at the micro-level (one-to-one situations). The only problem resides in the lack of more detailed means of analysis capable of explaining why a particular stretch of discourse becomes ironic based on the relationship prevailing between its elements. This problem is significant for the present study which focuses on irony in narrative fiction - a form of discourse which might include straightforward ironies as well as other types that are more sophisticated and elusive, and therefore harder to pin down. These ironies are conditioned by the way the text is constructed and therefore shaped by the co-textual and contextual elements that interact with each other in its formation. The solution proposed here to tackle this difficulty consists in closely examining the question of evaluation, both in its general sense and its technical sense as treated by Labov (1972). The assumption is that a speaker or a narrator's evaluation of a particular discourse can be communicated not only through language that is openly or explicitly evaluative but also through the organisation of the discourse itself. As a covert form of evaluation, irony can therefore be communicated through the way its discourse is organised or manipulated. In narrative fiction, room for manipulation is increased, it is argued, by the theoretical duplicity assumed to exist between "story" and "discourse," an actual story and its rendering through narration. This duplicity leaves room for presuming the existence of an already existing discourse interacting with the one at hand, allowing its treatment as a form of second-degree interpretation type of discourse.

This study proposes to consider irony in the discourse of narrative fiction through the examination of several of its constituent aspects as they relate to the original or "story" which they are recounting. These constituents, according to modern narratologists, are believed to govern its structure and therefore the meaning conveyed by its language. Prince (1982), and Genette (1972, 1987) in particular, I believe, offer

some typologies of these constituents which I find fruitful in analysing irony in narrative fiction.

Chapter VI thus considers the temporal organisation of the events in order to show that the categories "order," "duration," and "frequency" can exhibit several discrepancies between story-time and text-time which can result in ironies that are explainable following the echoic account. Each point is illustrated by examples from contemporary fiction writing.

Chapter VII treats the interaction between narration and focalisation, and the different modes of narration of speech and thought. They are shown to present a great potential for ironic communication based on the duplicity between story and discourse, which again permits the application of the echoic account for their analysis. It is argued in Chapter V that several elements peripheral to the text itself are likely to carry some evaluative or commenting function which can be of the ironic type. These "paratextual" elements, as Genette calls them, the title, the epigraph, and the note, can be essential for lending a text its ironic character. As already pointed out in these last chapters, the echoic approach remains essential to the explanation of irony but needs to be assisted and combined with this textual typology supplied by narratology to account for ironies in this type of discourse.

In the last two chapters (VI and VII), the pragmatic, rhetorical role irony plays in connection with the narrative itself is examined. The effects for which irony is used in the contemporary and metafictional narratives considered are interestingly varied. They encompass and affect other narrative aspects like characterisation and thematic reinforcement and also concern critical matters or self-reflexive criticism.

In a nutshell, this study aims to provide a means for analysing verbal irony in contemporary narrative fiction. It is based on a consideration of Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony combined with techniques of narrative fiction writing, and also considers the effects the use of irony achieves in this type of discourse.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Part A**

#### **An Overview on the Theoretical**

#### **Framework of Irony**

##### **1. Introduction**

This chapter undertakes, first of all, to outline the problematic nature of verbal irony in order to explain the difficulties encountered by the various approaches that have attempted to tackle it. What irony is and how it works constitute the concern of the sections which follow. A number of approaches to irony are thus reviewed to demonstrate the arguments for their deficiency especially in comparison to the combined accounts of Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1986, 1989) and Scholes (1982), which are judged more adequate here and are adopted in this study. The pragmatic and semiotic perspectives of these last approaches allow them to consider the elements of context which reach beyond the sentence itself to include for instance the co-text and interpersonal matters, such as politeness and intimacy, involving the participants in the interaction. They allow them also to provide a more accurate and adequate description of the mechanics governing the communication of irony. The notions of duplicity, covertness, dissociation and expression of attitude emerge, moreover, as essential factors characterising irony. The "what" and "how" questions of irony (both Part A and Part B) need, however, to be complemented by the question "why" which determines the effects or role that irony might play in a given discourse. The interpersonal relations of dissociation and association or inclusiveness and exclusiveness are singled out in this respect as major reasons for, as well as effects of ironic communication. This socio-pragmatic aspect of irony is treated in the last part (Part C) of this chapter. It is, furthermore, pointed out in this chapter that despite their

adequacy in the treatment of irony, the selected approaches still exhibit some limitations when it comes to actual analysis of texts that are longer than the one or two-sentence interactions that constitute the majority of the examples usually discussed. Since this thesis is concerned with irony in literary discourse and in narrative fiction in particular, this problem is acute. It is necessary to find a way to accommodate these accounts of irony to the analysis of such discourse and to seek possible remedies for their deficiencies. The remedies suggested are derived mainly from the view that argues that discourse is intertextual and another view that claims that the evaluative character of language is prevalent and pervasive in story telling and that it can be traced in the manipulation of the narrative techniques themselves. The rest of the thesis undertakes to explore these possibilities.

## 2. Problems of an Elusive Phenomenon: Preliminaries

Irony is a linguistic practice that is widely used despite the risks of communication breakdown that it carries and despite the difficulty encountered in providing accounts of the way it works. It is one of the most intricate linguistic phenomena and among the most liable to misfire. It can be perceived in all sorts of communicative activities whether in daily life, in literature, in theatre or in art in general. Sometimes, it is recognized and appreciated, but at times, it goes unnoticed. Nash (1985: 153) describes it as a "vulnerable mode of humorous composition" because of its liability to fail transactionally. Jankélévitch (1964: 9) points out that irony is a type of communication that thrives when urgency is not at stake. This is a property it shares with art and the comic, he says. He asserts, however, that "L'ironie, assurément est bien trop morale pour être vraiment artiste, comme elle est trop cruelle pour être vraiment comique. Néanmoins, voici un trait qui les rapproche: l'art, le comique et l'ironie deviennent possibles là où se relâche l'*urgence vitale*."

The pragmatic failure of irony can result either from the ignorance of the addressee and his or her inability to recognise it, or from his or her seeing irony where there is none. "Unintended ironies are misfires" asserts Amante (1975: 66), "such

mistakes can be made by both ironists and audience." In Booth's terms, such mistakes can be discerned whenever there is a case of "overreading" or a case of "misreading." Both constitute a threat to successful interpretation of irony. There is no rule specifying where irony starts or where it ends and that can leave negotiation of the meaning of any particular utterance open-ended. This continuous threat to the successful communication of irony can only be remedied by a careful process of disambiguation tracking down the ironist's meaning. Interpretations that are not intended by the speaker are, however, inevitable and instances of unintended irony are not infrequent. It might seem unreasonable or unusual therefore that such a "risky," intricate and double-edged form of communication should be so pervasively and frequently used if there are more straightforward ways of conveying the same meaning. The answer to this *prima facie* impression will constitute a large part of the enquiry this thesis undertakes (cf. Ch. I, Part C, and Chs. VI, VII). The following sub-sections, however, examine some factors that need to be taken into consideration at the outset of this study as they serve to prepare the ground for the elucidation of the problematic nature of the definition of irony.

### 2.1. Values, Expectations, Perspective

It is noticeable that these pragmatic risks by no means affect the frequency of use of irony. On the contrary, irony is often used on occasions that call for the expression of an unfavourable or mocking attitude by a speaker or observer towards an object, a person, or a situation that seems to fail to reach the standard required or expected by the particular culture, individual or group of people. For irony is based on the sharing of a number of values which puts anybody that goes against them in a position open to criticism and therefore easily liable to become the butt of irony. Yet because values differ from one culture to another and from one individual to the next, determining what counts as standard values for a speaker might prove hard for an addressee adhering to a different set of values. In such cases, doubt about the way a given utterance is to be taken is generated and chances of misfire are multiplied.

Irony is also based on the process through which expectations are defeated and are replaced instead by unexpected or contradictory results. Expectations according to Amante (1975: 41) "concern the future and are reasonable or unreasonable responses to the past ... The participant interprets the past events and his interpretation determines what he expects." Hence, it would perhaps be sad or tragic if king Duncan of *Macbeth* went to visit the castle where he is going to be killed, did not like it and then had to face his death in it. This might even be regarded as a premonition or a warning against the surroundings where the plot is to be executed. However, the fact that he *did* like the place and even praised it and related to it turns the situation into a case of irony where he features as the victim. In a way, Duncan's first reactions to the castle are belied and reversed when the following events unfold and prove far worse than he could have ever thought. Since it is already aware of the plot against Duncan, the theatre audience is capable of perceiving his reactions in an ironic way. The clash between reality and appearance, of which the audience is aware because of the extra-knowledge to which it has access (and of which the character remains ignorant), allows it to detect the dramatist's irony at this stage, that is before the actual killing takes place. This is what is recognised as Dramatic Irony.

Irony in this example springs not from the imminent death of the king in itself. It is derived rather from the fact that he was unaware of what was being prepared for him and was fooled into innocently appreciating the place where he is going to be killed and feeling safe and confident in it. His positive expectations are contrasted and reversed by the real turn of events. There would be no irony if he did not express his liking of the castle. It is the element of "*confident* unawareness or impercipient" as Muecke (1969: 30) calls it, this "innocent but *positive* assumption that nothing is wrong" that turns him into a (potential) victim of irony. The very fact of making assumptions or assertions, Muecke claims, qualifies an individual for the role of victim or "alazon." He points out that

All that is necessary is the merest avoidable assumption on the part of the victim that he is not mistaken. For one of the odd things about irony is that it regards assumptions as presumption and therefore innocence as guilt. Simple ignorance is safe from irony, but ignorance compounded with the least degree of confidence counts as intellectual hubris and is a punishable offence... The only shield against irony, therefore, is absolute circumspection, a shield no man can lift.

(1969: 30-31)

It is interesting to note that this view is compatible with Sperber and Wilson's account of irony considered in Part B below. The assumption that can be held against its speaker when things turn to be (or are seen as) otherwise than asserted or expected for Muecke is what stands at the basis of the echoic component for Sperber and Wilson. What a person says or thinks can be turned against them when an ironist decides to appropriate it and show its inadequacy or absurdity in a given context, or when it occurs for the same purposes embedded in someone else's discourse.

Irony is, furthermore, a practice that is very much a matter of perspective; what might constitute a touchstone for one person might be seen as ridiculous by another looking at it from a different point of view. Self-irony or irony directed against an earlier version of oneself is an ultimate instance of this distance and change in point of view that characterises the re-consideration of matters in a different light, from a higher, more panoramic or simply different view as it were. Leech and Short (1981: 278) define fictional irony as "a double significance which arises from the contrast in values associated with two points of view." This disparity of viewpoint, responsible for the continuous re-evaluation or re-description is potentially capable of casting doubt on anything that might seem sound and serene. Rorty (1989: 89) claims that "Ironism ... results from awareness of the power of redescription." He further asserts that

Irony is, if not intrinsically resentful, at least reactive. Ironists have to have something to have doubts about, something from which to be alienated.

(1989: 89)

It is due to this perspectivism that hierarchies of irony can be built making ironists and victims swap positions, as reasons for mutual criticism and ridicule abound. In irony, it is not always clear or final who has the last word: who fits the role of ironist and who fits that of victim, what can be ironised about and what can escape

irony. A complex network of relations and meanings is interwoven into the constitution of irony accompanying the continual shift in perspectives and the non-finality resulting from it. Muecke suggests, insightfully, that

the ironist is equally vulnerable, for the very act of being ironical implies an assumption of superiority, an assumption one cannot make without forgetting either that the tables may be turned ... or that one may be subject to irony from a level higher than one's own ...

(1969: 31)

Irony can thus be compared to a double-edged weapon. People using it have to be careful not to turn it against themselves: "Irony is a sharp instrument; but ill to handle without cutting *yourself!*" (Thomas Carlyle 1833 cited in Furst 1984: 1). Wayne Booth rightly describes it as

an aggressively intellectual exercise that fuses fact and value, requiring us to construct alternative hierarchies and choose among them; demands that we look down on other men's follies or sins; floods us with emotion-charged value judgements which claim to be backed by the mind; accuses other men not only of wrong beliefs but of being wrong at their very foundations and blind to what these foundations imply - all of this coupled with a kind of subtlety that cannot be deciphered or "proved" simply by looking closely at the words; no wonder that "failure to communicate" and resulting quarrels are often found where irony dwells.

(1974: 44)

## 2.2. Problems of Interpretation and Definition

The intricacy and subtlety of irony thus make it not only hard to detect but even harder to define. The problems surrounding the pinning down of this notion have always proved to be a hindrance for its analysts. That it had to wait until the end of the twentieth century to be tackled at length in works like those of Booth (1974) and Muecke (1969) supports this point. There has been a problem, it seems, with the provision of a nomenclature, adequate descriptions and adequate explanations capable of dealing with irony and its workings. The impact of the belief in the difficulties of grasping the phenomenon can be detected in the works of some leading figures in New Criticism and other critics and philosophers in different traditions. Many of them have come to ascribe irony to all poetry or literature. They considered it a criterion of literary value and made it the superordinate characteristic of literature. They thus responded to

the elusiveness of irony and ended up blurring the distinction between what is ironic and what is not. Not that clues for irony in works of literature, for instance, are lacking. On the contrary, as Booth's lists of ways of detecting irony show, clues are provided more or less explicitly, ranging from mere hints and allusions to open statements about the nature of the discourse. An ironist wanting the irony to be detected must give clues to help in its interpretation - the choice of the degree of subtlety remains open, however, depending on the situation and the relationship of the ironist to the audience. These clues are intuitively recovered by hearers or readers who are careful and attentive enough to the material to which they are exposed. Amante (1975) is probably right in claiming that critics have somehow exaggerated the whole issue by emphasising the eclectic nature of irony since, he argues, misunderstanding arises mostly when an utterer fails to provide enough clues to the irony. This, in turn, indicates the ironist's failure to estimate exactly what knowledge is available to the audience and therefore how much can be said and how much can be left unsaid.

To sum up then, expectations, values and perspective are three relative and continually shifting elements which are essential to irony. Their importance justifies the impressions of evasiveness and elusiveness associated with the concept. They act unfavourably on the interpretation of irony in two ways. They make it difficult to grasp and thus more liable to pragmatic failure, and they render attempts towards providing definitions or theories about its functioning vague and verging on overgeneralisation or oversimplification.

### **3. Traditional Approaches to Irony**

#### 3.1. Verbal Irony vs. Situational Irony

Providing a description of Verbal Irony at this stage might be useful in directing the focus and defining the scope of this study. It might also be helpful and probably essential to introduce it by comparing it to another type of irony, Situational Irony, through the distinction drawn between the two by Muecke (1969, 1970) and Dyson (1966). For a start, Muecke declares that

irony like beauty is in the eye of the beholder and is not a quality inherent in any remark, event, or situation.

(1969: 14)

Hence, doing right as it were to the priority of the ironist's or observer's intention of irony questions like "Was it meant ironically?" of a remark, and "Do you see it as irony?" of a situation are questions to be asked respectively in order to distinguish between verbal irony and situational irony. The distinction between the two is based on this question of intention: being ironical necessarily involves an intention to do so, while an event or a situation unintentionally becomes ironic when an observer sees it as such. "Talking about Verbal Irony" for Muecke moreover, "means talking about the ironist's techniques and strategies" (1969: 43). It "raises questions that come under the headings of rhetoric, stylistics, narrative and satiric forms, satiric strategies" (1970: 50). For Dyson (1966: 220-223), verbal irony consists in a "creative manipulation of words" culminating in "the intrinsic delights" of "the crazy fabric" of literary irony. Situational Irony, however, is "a vision of the universe itself." It reproduces the "crazy fabric of human nature itself." For Muecke (1969: 43), it consists of the "kinds of situations we see as ironic" and consequently of the "observer's sense of irony, his attitudes, and responses."

It might be worth pointing out that it is verbal irony, i.e. irony resulting from an ironist's intentional arrangement of language that serves and reflects his or her purpose, that will constitute the central concern of this study. Verbal irony in the sense adopted here is therefore not restricted to what is described as "the figure of speech irony" alone, but also includes other manifestations of irony. Situational irony, for instance, will be discussed as it occurs within the ironist's description of situations seen under an ironic light where the role of Fate or God is assumed by the writer or narrator of a literary work.

As pointed out in the previous section, accounts of this practice have reflected its intricacy and elusiveness and some have resulted in the creation of a concept that is overgeneralised and/or oversimplified, encompassing much more than it can provide

for at times and reduced to very little at others. The following sections delineate roughly the development of this concept as it is reflected in the various attempts to elucidate it.

### 3.2. Socratic Irony

The concept of irony dates back to the time of the ancient Greeks, when it was designated by the word "eiron," pejoratively used to denote the behaviour of a cunning person called a "sly fox" because of his developed capacity for trickery. The next step in the evolution of the word takes it to "eironeia" which meant "mocking pretence and deception." Afterwards, it came to be identified with Socratic irony (a self-disparaging type of irony in Muecke's (1969: 44) typology of ironies) in which Socrates would pretend to be ignorant and try the knowledge of those who are reputedly knowledgeable, only to find out that they know less.

### 3.3. Irony: A Value Ascribed to Art

The concept of irony evolved slowly over the centuries. It started to attract attention with the advent and expansion of moral satires in the eighteenth century, but it had to wait for the second half of the twentieth century to be declared *the* characteristic of literature. The New Critics, especially Cleanth Brooks and Northrop Frye were responsible for the new turn in the attitude towards this concept. In his article "Irony as a Principle of Structure" (1951), Brooks emphasises, as the title already suggests, the crucial importance of irony as an element of structure and draws the generalisation that poetry is primarily an ironic structure. This view was later backed by Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*:

The critics who tell us that the basis of poetic expression is irony, or a pattern of words that turns away from obvious (i.e. descriptive) meaning, are much closer to the facts of literary experience, at least on a literal level. The literary structure is ironic because "what it says" is always different in kind or degree from "what it means."

(1975: 81)

It was thus that irony was "rescued ... from being a simple and determinate figure of speech," and "was presented as a constant feature of works of art." It

"became paradoxically, a value ascribed to art" (Hartman 1980: 278).

Irony was also ascribed to literature as a "heterogeneous and contingent discontinuity" displayed by the novel next to "a homogeneous and organic stability": in his *Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács asserts that "The ironic structure acts disruptively, yet it reveals the truth of the paradoxical predicament that the novel represents" (cited in Paul De Man, 1971: 56). Here again, irony is considered the leading feature of literary structure.

This stretching of the concept of irony, however, and the generalisation of its use have turned it into an uninformative, indefinite term threatened by vagueness and inappropriate application. A definition of its scope thus becomes a necessity.

#### 3.4. Restrictive Definitions

A look at the two definitions of irony most frequently cited also provides some explanations for the problematic nature of the term and further reasons for the warnings issued against it (cf. Furst 1984: Ch 1). Both definitions capture the duality of the nature of irony but prove to be inadequate and incomplete in at least two ways: on the one hand, they allow the inclusion of linguistic forms that are not necessarily ironic, and fail, on the other, to include some realisations of irony.

##### 3.4.1. Meaning Something Other than What You Say

The first definition includes the cases where the ironist means something different from what he actually says. It accounts for the indirectness that characterises irony but wrongly and indiscriminately includes other forms which require indirectness as well like allegory, metaphor, synecdoche, indirect speech acts etc. This definition, as Muecke (1969: 21) states, is "no more than the etymological sense of "allegoria."" It is simply too vague and misleading.

##### 3.4.2. Saying the Opposite of What You Mean

The second definition - saying the opposite of what is meant - is even more commonly accepted than the first. It, likewise, involves the element of contrast between reality and appearance that Haakon Chevalier (1932: 42 cited in Muecke 1969:

26) believes to be "the basic feature of every irony." This definition is, however, vague because it readily encompasses other linguistic practices such as lies. But it is also too narrow in that it is restricted to types of irony where there exists a clear opposition between what is said and what is meant. Cases where what is meant is not exactly the opposite of what is said or where what is said is meant and yet is coloured by the element of irony are missed out.

Many of the examples usually cited in dictionaries to illustrate these definitions, of the type saying "What lovely weather" on a stormy day, have eventually become conventionalized through repeated use for ironic purposes. Their understanding in terms of saying the opposite of what is meant is bound not to pose any problems. No questions are raised about the nature, purpose or degree of oppositeness they convey either. Constant use on particular occasions makes the meaning of such utterances conventionalised and consequently near-transparent. Obviously, only a reduced number of ironic utterances is used in this way. Irony remains subtler than the second definition tells us and more definite and different than the first one suggests. Combining these definitions and modifying them might be useful but not sufficient to account for irony. Muecke, points out a way in which both definitions can be conciliated. He adopts a more balanced view joining both definitions, to describe irony as

ways of speaking, writing, acting, behaving, painting, etc., in which the real or intended meaning presented or evoked is intentionally quite other than, and incompatible with, the ostensible or pretended meaning. (The "real meaning" may be the contrary of the pretended meaning or it may be no more than a hinting at a mental reservation ...).

(1969: 53)

More needs to be said about irony, however, as the following sections show.

### 3.5. More Recent Approaches

#### 3.5.1. Oppositeness and Negation

This question of oppositeness in irony seems to have a strong grip on most accounts of the phenomenon. Amante (1975), for instance, in his "Ironic Speech Acts: A Stylistic Analysis of A Rhetorical Ploy," dedicates a good deal of his work to the

investigation of the notions of negation and opposition which he considers to be at the "heart of irony," whether it be at the level of the sentence or that of the narrative. He analyses oppositeness in terms of negative semantic relationships obtaining between the meaning of lexical items at the surface level and the deep level (viz. incompatibility (contradictoriness), complementarity, antonymy, and converseness). He suggests (1975: 81) that "The formation of dichotomies seems to be a very basic trait of language and it is absolutely essential that opposites can be created if irony is to exist." He further exploits Klima's (1964) *NEG* component - an approach that Amante himself recognises as controversial among semanticists of the time - to "explain why most readers can very clearly understand the unstated negative meaning present in verbal irony" (1975: 71). This *NEG* component is assumed to be at work in several linguistic categories which are "partly but not wholly negative." It is absorbed by these elements so that it can be detected at a deep structure level. For instance, *NEG-ever* -----> never. In the case of *seldom*, an "incomplete negative" and its synonym *not often*, it is clear that the *NEG* is expressed in the latter but absorbed and yet unexpressed in the former. Amante then explains that "In ironic use, the principle of *NEG* absorption is generalised and extended so that no negative lexical item need appear in the surface structure" (1975: 71). Finally, to illustrate his point, he applies this analysis to the word "right" as it occurs in Robert Frost's "Design." The lines cited are

Assorted characters of death and light  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right

The word "right," according to him, has absorbed some "negative particle" described in its deep structure as *not right* and allows the readers not to take the adjective at face value.

Besides, Amante's approach can be criticised for its exaggerated concern for the question of oppositeness, which might be applicable to some forms of irony but by no means constitutes its distinctive characteristic or *raison d'être*. The postulate of the existence of hidden, untangible negative elements incorporated in surface structure

elements is perhaps a notion that sounds more appropriate now for the purposes of a deconstructionist philosopher than to those of a grammarian. Such an assumption is belied by modern syntactic theory. Negations are tangible rules that are applied to sentences and in no way cling invisibly or discretely to surface structure units: if they exist they are detectable at the deep structure level. Hence, besides being impressionistic, Amante's point clearly defies the implications that context has for any interpretation; it focuses on relations between lexical items that are present in the text and others that are absent from it, with the latter yielding the former their meaning for no stated reason.

### 3.5.2. Double Audience

Some recent different definitions of irony like those of Green<sup>2</sup> and Fowler,<sup>3</sup> shift the focus by introducing the element of audience that has been left out for the benefit of essentially semantic relations. They make a distinction between a sophisticated initiated audience that is capable of grasping the intended ironic meaning and another uninitiated one that is unable to do so.

Postulating the existence of an audience is an essential factor in the differentiation of irony from a lie. It is the difference in the relationship between the participants in both activities which helps distinguish them out from each other. As Jankélévitch (1964) points out, lying is a one way process in which a speaker exhibits scorn for his or her interlocutor treating him or her as a means to reach personal ends.

He says that

Le mensonge est la relation unilatérale ou irréversible d'une activité à une passivité et d'un agent à un patient, l'un qui est trompeur, l'autre qui est trompé ou pur participe-passif ... (1964: 69)

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<sup>2</sup> D. H. Green. *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (1979: 9). "Irony is a statement, or presentation of an action or situation, in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the initiated intentionally diverges from and is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated."

<sup>3</sup> H. W. Fowler. *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1965: 305-6). "Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsider's incomprehension."

In irony, however, the speaker shows respect for the intelligence of his audience by trusting its capacity to decipher or supplement what he or she leaves unsaid. The ironist is thus on equal terms with the audience which is expected to follow his or her steps in reconstructing and therefore recreating the irony. As Jankélévitch observes,

L'ironie fait ensemble honneur et crédit à la sagacité divinatoire de son partenaire ... Elle le traite comme le véritable partenaire d'un véritable dialogue; l'ironiste est de plain-pied avec ses pairs, il rend hommage en eux à la dignité de l'esprit, il leur fait l'honneur de les croire capables de comprendre ... Et l'ironie, elle, est la *corrélacion* bilatérale de deux activités qui se réchauffent l'une l'autre, l'ironisé étant, par la grâce de l'ironie, promu lui-même au rang d'ironiste.

(1964: 68-69)

The reference to the existence of a double audience, moreover, can be useful in pointing out the pragmatic separative/exclusive potential of irony (as will be discussed in Part C (3.2.2) of this chapter). This potential resides mainly in drawing lines between the "confederates" of the ironists and their victims, the latter being the ones against whom the irony is directed or those who have failed to recognise it. But a distinction needs to be made here between understanding an ironist's intention and agreeing with or subscribing to it. *Comprendre*, indeed, is not *pardonner*. Kaufer (1977: 98) asserts that "sharing irony only presupposes speaker and hearer to have common knowledge about other, it does not commit them to agreement on what is ironically communicated."

Both Green's and Fowler's definitions are defective. Despite the fact that both emphasise the existence of an intentional divergence and incongruity between apparent and intended meaning and includes the issue of double audience, their wording can still be accommodated to the description of other linguistic practices such as lies. For a lie has equally an intention to deceive; it involves a wrong message accepted by one audience and possibly detected in its true nature by another more lucid audience. Moreover, irony does not invariably depend on the existence of a double audience or perhaps even of an audience at all. In self-irony and in cases where no more than the

ironist and the object of the irony (or victim) are present are not infrequent (cf. Mc Kee 1976). In these instances, the person against whom the irony is directed might or might not be aware of the irony. Therefore he or she might assume the role of a victim and that of a perceiver at the same time, or simply be the butt of irony, thus satisfying the ironist's sense of humour or cynicism and so on.

### 3.6. Summary of Shortcomings

The definitions of irony discussed above (Section 3), can be characterised as being neither necessary nor sufficient for providing an adequate picture of the phenomenon. They fail, moreover, to recognise the following points which are deemed, here, to be essential questions to be tackled by any study of irony:

- 1- What it is that qualifies an utterance to be called ironic rather than anything else,
- 2- What it is that allows its production and understanding,
- 3- Why should language, as Myers observes (1977: 171), "permit such an apparently perverse means of communication."

The search for an answer to these questions leads towards the factors and accounts which are considered in the next sections.

## **4. Irony within a Pragmatic Framework of Communication**

### 4.1. Importance of Context in Interpretation

One important property of the communication of irony is that it is a subtle camouflaged verbal form which is in no way detectable from the meaning of its words alone. This characteristic further contributes to proving the fallacy of the view of the communication process as consisting of an encoding and decoding of messages in "linguistic packages." To present it as such is to commit a gross simplification of the comprehension process, for while trying to interpret the messages or the actions of other people, one gets involved in a process of hypothesis formation about "goals, plans and intentions" underlying these messages and/or actions (Green and Morgan, 1981: 174, 176). The comprehension process is not completed at the mere reception of the message.

Knowing a language implies knowledge of its uses (register, pragmatic rules and effects etc.). Although one perhaps never becomes competent in all uses of language (scientific, legal etc.) and registers (language variation, degree of formality), one at least learns how to communicate in as many as are available in one's environment, sometimes learning to process a few more, though perhaps not being able to or having to produce them. For instance, one could be able to understand a religious sermon or a Marxist pamphlet without being able to produce one or ever having to. Yet, this knowledge about the form of language, and conventions of its use (idioms for instance and non-literal use) has to be supplemented by a knowledge about the world, which itself requires one to keep track of its changes and be cognisant of its subtleties and nuances.

Hence, because interacting in a language requires more than knowledge of its grammar or semantic properties, irony, this "art of saying something without really saying it," this "art that gets its effects from below the surface," as Muecke (1969: 5) describes it, simply discourages any attempt at its elucidation through an investigation limited to its semantics alone. "To ironize something ... is to place it, without comment, in whatever context will invalidate or correct it," Muecke (1969: 23) claims of what he calls "Simple Ironies."

It is therefore not so much the wording of the utterance in itself which makes it ironical. It is the context which plays a crucial role in determining its ironic meaning. Scholes (1982: 26) asserts that "What we might regard as the "figure" or trope, irony, is in fact a function of context and cannot be determined by the form of the message alone." All sentences, in fact, are believed to be potentially ironic (Furst, 1984; Sperber and Wilson, 1989). A process of disambiguation and context selection is required for every utterance in order to decide on the direction its interpretation will follow. This process has to consider its interaction with all those elements directly or indirectly contributing to its production and surrounding it. No wonder that traditional descriptions prove to be inadequate in the face of an utterance like:

"Make yourself at home, won't you?"

(cited in Leech 1983)

said to someone whose presence in the house is not very welcome but who, coming into the living room, automatically switches on the television, puts his feet on the table and starts nibbling at the cake that was meant for the host's children. Treating such an utterance in terms of oppositeness or negation explains nothing about its ironic meaning and in fact does not square with it at all. To treat it in terms of truthfulness will not do it right either. The utterance *is* an invitation and as a directive, it has a future time reference which does not allow its treatment in terms of the binary true/false distinction. The irony is, however, dependent precisely on its being an invitation, that is, a request for an action to be complied with at some time in the future (as will be demonstrated in Part C below).

Considering such an utterance adequately has to include admitting its being a verbal or linguistic phenomenon functioning within a social, cognitive context, and not treating it as a separate decontextualised expression. This involves, first of all, being aware that it is formulated *in* a certain way, *by* a certain person, *at the expense* of another person, object, situation, or statement, *for* a specific addressee, *in order to* serve a particular goal and purpose. Reconstructing the assumed intention of its producer, reflected and conveyed by the particular organisation of language as it interacts with the context, will constitute a large part of the result of the disambiguation process.

The notion of context is, however, one that is problematic (cf. Levinson 1983: 22-23). It is both hard to isolate and hard to define given the large variety of parameters that could be taken into consideration in its description. Its scope ranges from the co-text, which is the verbal environment of a given utterance, to the immediate situation in which an utterance occurs, that is its who, where and when, to the larger situation or environment of a social, cultural or other character. Context equally touches on concepts like mutual knowledge or common knowledge which are

questionable and are subject to various attacks from more recent pragmatics, as will be shown in Part B below. In any case, nevertheless, what is meant by the context of a given utterance is not the collection of features surrounding it, but merely "those features that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation" of this utterance (Levinson 1983: 22). Predicting which features of context influence or are to be selected by a hearer in interpreting a given utterance constitutes an essential step towards predicting the way he or she is going to interpret that utterance. Sperber and Wilson (1986) present an interesting view of what context is, putting special emphasis on the difficulty residing in the resolution of the last point (context selection). According to them, context is not a given entity accompanying the utterance it comes with but is instead supplied by the participants in the interaction. Reaching the interpretation intended by the speaker thus necessitates an identity between the context "envisaged" by the speaker and the one supplied by the hearer, otherwise, misunderstanding might result (1986: 16). Avoiding misunderstanding would therefore conversely mean to achieve this identity of context by both speaker and hearer.

A problem arises, however, concerning the way to achieve this identity and be sure of its presence in any given interaction, since there is no clear cut method of recognising which assumptions are shared by the participants and which ones are not - that is if they are not clearly stated of course. The solution that has been proposed and accepted so far in pragmatics and which is rejected by Sperber and Wilson is that of mutual or common knowledge. According to this hypothesis, the context in which an utterance is understood is to be restricted to mutual knowledge, that is, it must not only be known to the speaker and the hearer but must be mutually known by them both, following the formula "the speaker knows that the hearer knows that the speaker knows that the hearer knows that X, and *ad infinitum*." Although it is unquestionable that people do share information, this assumption proves to be defective in various ways as Sperber and Wilson demonstrate (1986). The first criticism of this hypothesis being

that most verbal communication is undertaken at risk and in most situations participants do not expect what they say to be mutually known but assume that it will become so as a result of their interactions with others.

Sperber and Wilson propose to replace this view with what they call mutual cognitive environment and mutual manifestness. In their view,

To be manifest ... is to be perceptible or inferrable. An individual's total cognitive environment is the set of all the facts that he can perceive or infer: all the facts that are manifest to him. An individual's total cognitive environment is a function of his physical environment and his cognitive abilities. It consists of not only all the facts that he is aware of, but also all the facts that he is capable of becoming aware of, in his physical environment.

(1986: 39)

According to them, the purpose of an interaction is to modify the cognitive environment of an addressee, that is, the number of facts about the world that are manifest to him or her and that he or she believes to be true or possibly true. Since they assume that it is the responsibility of the speaker to choose the form and the context that will be readily accessible to the hearer in communication, and that it is also the responsibility of the speaker to eliminate potential misunderstandings in this way, the hearer's task becomes to "go ahead and use whatever code and contextual information come most easily to hand" (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 43). The hearer will assume that whatever assumptions become manifest to him or her as a result of the speaker's utterance were intended to become so by that speaker. These assumptions might have never occurred to the hearer before but as long as he or she is capable of making them for the purpose of the communication and that they consequently become manifest to this hearer in the same way they are to the speaker, communication is likely to be successful. It is in this way that the mutual cognitive environment of both participants is widened (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 44). These points will be considered further in relation to irony in Ch. IV. It might, however, be useful at this stage to note the importance of Sperber and Wilson's claim about what context is in general and the way it affects interpretation. They assert that

A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation.

(1986: 15-16)

Keeping in mind this definition of context, it is worth considering, in the following sections, what the different types of context are that might be at work in the interpretation of irony.

#### 4.2. Irony and Types of Context

Recognising the importance that context plays in interpretation leads in this discussion to the consideration of the possible types of context that might be at play in the interpretation of irony. A particularly necessary type of context is the one related to the interpersonal level (the participants or *tenor* in Halliday and Hasan's (1985) terminology). Establishing whether irony is at work depends to a large extent on the knowledge that the participants, whether directly involved in the interaction or not, have of each other since that will determine the assessment of what constitutes valid and non-valid facts and values for them. In a broad way, however, two distinct categories of context particularly relevant to the interpretation of irony can be identified: one can be described as external and the other as internal, with the first particularly related to the interpersonal aspect of the given interaction.

##### 4.2.1. External Context

The external context is concerned with the physical environment in which the interaction occurs. It can be identified as the spatio-temporal or three-dimensional context. It incorporates the interpersonal level as it includes who is speaking, but also encompasses the where and when of the utterance. Awareness of this context implies an assessment of both what and how much each participant knows about the other and about the situation, as well as an assessment of other variables in the situation like those of time and place. It can be responsible for determining the perspective each participant

adopts, and may be a crucial factor for the success of communication.

In addition to the knowledge of the immediate situation, this type of context can comprehend an awareness of the social, political and cultural variables responsible for the determination of norms and values within which the interaction takes place. The proximity of such norms to the participants allows the latter to check upon them and thus helps them to create meaning. An absence or distance of these norms and values because of temporal, cultural or social factors opens the way for misunderstandings. Everybody is exposed to this kind of threat of communication failure given that although people might share a large amount of information about the world, their individual perceptions of this information might vary greatly from one person to the other depending on their perspectives. This kind of situation can even turn a person into a passive victim of irony as he or she will fit the type of victim who is in "an ironic situation without knowing it" (Muecke, 1969: 35). As anybody teaching Swift's *A Modest Proposal* in a foreign setting might know, what can be taken for granted given the historical and cultural knowledge commonly available to one group of people might prove far from clear and straightforward to another. In Swift's example, it is not unusual for a learner to miss the ironies and feel outraged by the "barbarous" proposal. The importance of this kind of context for irony can also be detected in the role it plays in its creation. The discrepancy between an utterance and the nature and reality of the physical world can be responsible for generating irony. From his semiotic point of view, Scholes (1982) sees irony as either a form of duplicity of context or as a present context violation. Following his terminology, it is possible to explain some instances of irony by saying that the phenomenal (physical world) denies the semiotic (the utterance), thus creating a fictional context (in which what is said is true) that signals the speaker's disapproval of the actual phenomenon. He gives the example of the utterance "Nice weather" (the semiotic) said at the time of a downpour (the phenomenal). The latter denies the former and consequently, a fictional context in which the weather is nice is created in order to convey the speaker's disapproval of the

rain. For Scholes, irony is thus "the most extreme semiotic violation of present context" (1982: 26). It is also, Scholes believes, "of all figures, ... the one that must always take us out of the text and into codes, contexts, and situations" (1982: 76). Through the comparison of the latter with another that is absent but evoked in the utterance, it becomes clear that there is a gap between what the utterance seems to be saying and its real meaning. This incongruity between the linguistic context and the physical context is also at the basis of literariness for Scholes. According to him ,

A context that is present and phenomenally available does not invite the literary the way an absent context does. In fact, literariness based on a present context is likely to result from some semiotic violation of that context.

(1982: 26)

It can exist in a simple irony uttered in an everyday conversation but grows more and more literary as it occurs in elaborate forms of literature. (Scholes's notions of literariness and irony will be discussed in Part B (2.2.) in more detail).

In the interpretation of literature, this type of context plays an equally important role. First, and in the same way presented above, some elements of context belonging to the non-fictional world, for instance, can affect its interpretation. Biographical knowledge for instance of the author might influence greatly the way a work is perceived. Historical knowledge of the period in which a work is written might help shed light on its value. Swift's example can be considered again to illustrate this point. This context can, moreover, be confined to what is called the co-text, that is the body of text surrounding a particular utterance. It consists of elements within the fictional world as described in the immediately preceding utterances, and can serve as a background for comparison that might reveal irony when a clash in the information provided is detected.

#### 4.2.2. Internal Context

The internal context, on the other hand, is of a more restricted nature. It is concerned with the participants' competence in interpretation as such, as well as their competence in identifying and fitting language within a particular genre. Halliday and

Hasan (1985) describe it as the *field* of discourse, which for them is one of the elements constituting context together with *tenor* and *mode*. Field is what enables one to differentiate a political speech from a piece of party gossip, a scientific article from an advertisement, for instance. The importance of this type of context in interpretation was also recognised in the work of several other scholars. While Genette talks of the "narrative competence" and Culler of the "literary competence" of the reader, E. D. Hirsch, for instance, explains that this "generic context," or "intrinsic genre" as he calls it, is "*that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its indeterminacy*" (1967: 86 cited in Furst 1984: 19). Placing a particular work within the framework of a particular genre helps shed light on the meaning of its constituents. Considering Swift once again, adequate interpretation would be much easier for the non-initiated readers in the foreign context if they knew that *A Modest Proposal* is not the expository piece of writing that it feigns to be but instead falls under the genre of satire. Ability to recognise the genre of writing might thus be essential for interpretation because of the expectations it activates in the audience. As Amante points out,

Generic expectations are extremely important to interpretation because they are the pre-setting devices determining the conventions with which the interpreter thinks he is dealing: these broad expectations are the grand design into which the reader fits the details he comes across. (1975: 46)

These expectations help in understanding and resolving indeterminate parts in view of the whole to which they belong. This is particularly important for the interpretation of covert forms of communication like irony where the form does not straightforwardly indicate the direction the meaning is taking. As Amante rightly observes,

The concept of generic expectations is crucial to the understanding and interpretation of an inexplicit form of communication such as irony. Signals and clues to generic expectations are commonly derived from titles, chapter headings, significant names, the arrangement of the plot, the period in which the work was written, and perhaps knowledge of other works by the same author. The syntactic and vocabulary choices, which also can be classified roughly by periods, provide additional clues to expectations. (1975: 47)

### 4.3. Summary

To sum up then, reliance on the different elements interacting within the whole contextual situation for any particular sentence proves to be essential for a better assessment of the meaning that it carries, and guarantees to a great extent its successful disambiguation. Whether it is ironic or not can only be decided by taking its context into consideration. As Scholes's emphasis on the duplicity of context demonstrates, ignorance of one element or other in a situation might result in blindness to an ironic meaning.

## **5. Irony, Speech Acts and the Conversational Maxims**

Recognising the importance of the role context plays in both the creation and recognition of irony eliminates studies of irony which fall under disciplines that exclude context, like semantics for instance. This places the study of irony, instead, within the confines of pragmatics, a discipline that is concerned with the use of language in context. In *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, pragmatics is defined as

The study of language from the viewpoint of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.

(1988: 674-5)

Various approaches to irony can be counted among the works of pragmaticians like Searle (1979), Grice (1975, 1978), Myers (1977) and Bollobás (1981). In this section, these pragmatic views are briefly outlined and discussed in terms of what they offer to the study of irony. Their major shortcomings are, moreover, singled out and possible but not final ways of redressing them are suggested.

### 5.1. Introduction: Speech Acts and Conversational Maxims

The notion of speaker intention is an important component in the production and recognition of irony. The identification of this intention constitutes a main part of the comprehension process. Some attempts at the codification of rules governing intentionality in linguistic communication have been undertaken by philosophers like

Austin (1962) and Searle (1979) within their theory of Speech Acts. Illocutionary acts, describing the purpose for which language is used on particular occasions, range from the most straightforward Commissives (e.g. promising, threatening) to the most general acts like Representatives (e.g. stating, telling, suggesting). For all illocutionary acts to be successful or sincere, the utterer has to comply with what the rules of the act require. Thanking, for instance, entails a recognition on the part of the speaker of the accomplishment of an action that was, or at least was intended to be, profitable to him or her, and the willingness to show that recognition to the hearer. This approach has been criticised for being unable to account for more than the most common and simple acts, thus failing to accommodate the diverse and complex acts performed in everyday communication (de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981: 117).

Another approach to the codification of verbal interaction at the pragmatic level, based this time on co-operation, is presented by Grice (1975, 1978). His approach is centered around his renowned Cooperative Principle (CP), which is a form of unspoken agreement between human beings to observe a certain number of principles in conversation and in communication in general guaranteeing for them successful interaction. The Cooperative Principle emphasises the faith that interlocutors have in the relevance of each other's contributions in the communicative act and its purposefulness. Because of this faith, hearers will do their best to make sense of an utterance however trivial or irrelevant it might seem *prima facie*. In Grice's terms, the CP is spelled out as follows:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

(1975: 45)

This principle is explicated by four maxims : Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. The first three regulate the what of what is said and the last, its how. Unlike other maxims, however, Grice's are generally likely to be infringed (through opting out, flouting, clash or violation) by the users, while maintaining the CP, and thus

allowing the generation of conversational implicatures. It is this characteristic which is at the basis of the differentiation Leech (1983) makes between maxims or principles and rules. The latter are meant to be strictly obeyed, while the former are not - which, accordingly, allows for a lot of the indirect communication that takes place. Hence, the function of implicatures is to recover what is communicated when people "imply, suggest, mean, etc." something distinct from what they "say" as Grice (1975: 43) observes.

### 5.2. Intentional expression of insincerity

According to Grice (1975), irony occurs in the form of an implicature resulting from the blatant, ostentatious violation of the Quality maxim (Do not say what you believe to be false, or that for which you lack adequate evidence). For example, a speaker says something about somebody else that is heard by an audience to whom it is clear that what is being said is incompatible with what they, as well as the speaker, believe to be the case. Therefore, for the speaker's utterance to be meaningful, it has to be interpreted as acquiring the meaning of its closest obvious proposition: its contradiction. This is allowed to occur only as a result of the faith the audience has in the speaker's willingness to observe the Cooperative Principle. Hence, when A says "X is a fine friend" after X has just betrayed a secret of his, it is obvious for his hearers that what he means is the opposite of what he says. He, therefore, has spoken ironically of X. That is the implicature.

Two approaches to irony in tune with Grice's emphasis on truthfulness are advocated by Bollobás (1981) and Myers (1977). According to Bollobás, flouting the maxim of Quality means the violation of the sincerity conditions of the illocutionary acts. And since not all illocutionary acts require sincerity conditions, not all of them can be expressed ironically. For according to Brown (1978: 10), Bollobás argues, "only illocutionary acts with sincerity conditions can be ironically performed." This logically leads to the conclusion that "irony is the intentional expression of insincerity" (Bollobás: 329). This can be illustrated, Bollobás asserts, by looking at Operatives like

marrying, nominating, christening or appointing which cannot be performed ironically because they present no sincerity conditions to be violated. They merely depend on the hearer's conviction that the performer has the authority to perform them.

Considering the same point from a different angle, Myers (1977: 177) claims that irony "breaks or fails to satisfy the conditions of the speech act it is in the shape of." Thus, if it occurs in the shape of a statement, the irony would break the sincerity condition which requires the speaker to believe in what he or she asserts. The sincerity condition of a question (S wants to know answer) can equally be broken if the question is ironic. Myers (1977: 178) proceeds from this view to write sincerity conditions for irony that she claims account for the way it is produced :

preparatory: Speaker believes the hearer shares his assumptions or has the necessary information to understand the irony

sincerity: Speaker believes the opposite or negative of part or all of the act.

### 5.3. Shortcomings

The three approaches look plausible and promising. They introduce the notion of speaker intention both as regards to the content of the utterance and to the addressee (Grice and Myers in particular). However, they are deficient in at least two ways. First, they emphasise the question of truthfulness and that of opposite meaning without saying how that kind of implicature or meaning is reached; and second, they provide no explanation for the reason why irony, this "distorted" form of communication, should exist if all it does is complicate matters for the addressee by saying the opposite of or something other than what is meant.

The approaches outlined above share a common emphasis on the lack of truthfulness in what a speaker communicates with an ironic utterance and take it for granted that there has to be a relation of oppositeness or negation between the literal meaning and the intended ironic meaning or implicature. This can hardly be considered an improvement on traditional approaches to the phenomenon since they merely seem to reiterate the same points in more technical terms. Following traditional approaches

again, they fail to describe the nature or degree of this presumed oppositeness. In fact, saying that "X is a fine friend" ironically does not necessarily mean that X is an enemy. A paraphrase of the ironic utterance, like "X is not a fine friend," might be acceptable as it is close to its propositional content but the irony does not spring from communicating the opposite. A great difference separates the two utterances in terms of pragmatic and interpersonal effects (as will be demonstrated in Parts B and C of this chapter).

Untruthfulness, in the sense of lack of actual correspondence to reality, can be characteristic of irony but so it is of lies and fiction. The absence of an intention to deceive is, however, what exempts fiction from being a lie (Searle, 1979: 65). Irony can also be placed in a parallel light given its ultimate aim of communication. Both are thus based on an eventual mutual awareness of the whole situation on the part of both participants (at least generally), guaranteeing their pragmatic success within their context-governed production and comprehension. However, taking the intentional expression of insincerity as a definition of irony might have negative restrictive drawbacks on its scope. One such drawback is its exclusion of Operatives from the range of candidate Speech Acts for irony, for instance, simply because they require no sincerity conditions and therefore cannot be insincerely performed. The necessity of this question of sincerity is arguable and can be rejected by imagining a simple situation where a man for instance upon finishing to build a shaky ugly little hut on a beach turns to his friends and solemnly, as if in an official ceremony, says

"I hereby name this mighty building the Royal Palace."

His utterance might not have sincerity conditions to break since it performs an act of naming, but it is nonetheless perceived as ironical. Hence, a simple borrowing of an utterance from a different register, its application to a context in which it is inappropriate results in irony. In fact, in some cases, one can even speak the literal truth while being ironical. An example cited in Myers (1977: 172) can illustrate this point clearly:

"I love drivers who signal"

uttered by a driver to someone else in the car as they are being passed by another car that did not signal. While this utterance is unmistakably ironical, it is also literal in the sense that the speaker does believe in what he is saying.

Another example proving the restrictiveness of the exclusive reliance on truthfulness and opposition in the treatment of irony is presented in Sperber and Wilson (1989): "Tuscany in May" said by someone who, on arrival in Tuscany after infinite promises from his host about the pleasantness of the weather during that time of the year, realises that he has to find his way to his host's home in a torrential downpour. Such an utterance can certainly be seen as ironic and yet, it is not even a proposition and therefore cannot be proved true or false. Besides, it cannot be translated into "Tuscany in June, August or September." It is absurd, moreover, to expect it to mean "Not Tuscany in May or Tuscany not in May."

Neither the contradictory nor the negative renderings of the utterance, whatever form they might take, are capable of providing an approximate paraphrase of the ironic meaning intended, or its pragmatic effect. Instead, irony is portrayed as a superfluous, redundant and replaceable form of communication. As Sperber and Wilson point out (1989: 99), this approach fails to "deal with the obvious differences in effects achieved by ironical utterances and their strictly literal counterparts" - a shortcoming that they avoid in their own approach to irony, as will be demonstrated in Part B, 2.3. below.

A final objection to this treatment of irony, pointed out by Sperber and Wilson (1981: 295), concerns Grice's failure to demonstrate the way in which the implicatures responsible for generating irony are related to more standard ones. In fact, Sperber and Wilson find it unsatisfactory to claim that the interpretation of irony be reduced to "the search for conversational implicatures" in the first place. They believe that such a claim distorts the "notion of implicature itself" (1981: 289) and they eventually reject the idea of irony as the violation of pragmatic maxims altogether.

#### 5.4. Balancing the shortcomings

A quick reference to Grice's other maxims as proposed in Sperber and Wilson

(1981), however, might help to balance the shortcomings caused by a definition of irony exclusively formulated in terms of the violation of the Quality maxim. In fact, considering the implicatures generated by the flouting and exploitation of the Quantity, Relation, and Manner maxims helps to redress a few fallacies by widening the criteria for what might fall under the scope of irony and signalling its presence. This framework might thus prove useful in the recognition of irony, without the restricted view necessitating that it communicate the opposite of what it says.

#### 5.4.1. Maxim of Quantity

Hence, the maxim of Quantity (Make your contribution as informative as - but not more or less informative than - is required) can be violated in at least two directions, as indicated by Myers (1977) who makes the same point. Both demonstrate manners for an utterance to be ironical without having to mean its opposite. In understatement, the speaker provides less information than is required for an accurate description of the situation or state of affairs referred to, as in Myers' (1977: 178) example:

"You were a little under the weather last night"

said to someone who got drunk, lost control of himself and turned the speaker's place upside down; or in Carston's (1981: 24) example:

"She's not altogether overjoyed at the news"

said of someone who is in a furious rage over whatever "the news" was. Overstatement, on the other hand, is characterised by its exaggerations, which can shed doubt on its apparent meaning. It can be detected in redundant expressions such as Myers' (1977: 178)

"Oh yeah, sure, you're going to be the next Vice President"

where the assertion is doubly emphasised with "yeah" and the redundant "sure."

#### 5.4.2. Maxim of Relation

The exploitation of the maxim of Relation (Be relevant) can be illustrated by the exchange cited in Levinson's *Pragmatics* :

A: What if the USSR blockaded the Gulf and all the oil?

B: Oh come now, Britain rules the seas.

(1983: 109)

Following Levinson's analysis, this is a case of flouting of the Quality maxim. The utterance of B is clearly a false one since it is common (or shared) knowledge that the state it is describing is no longer true. Assuming speaker B is observing the CP, he or she cannot be trying to deceive A. He or she must have meant, therefore, something that can be explained in relation to the previous utterance: the negation or opposite of what is said. It could be argued that the consideration of the flouting of the maxim of Relation in this interchange is not only possible but also more plausible. For by opting out and giving a false assertion, speaker B, still observing the CP, could only have meant to answer A's query through the implicature: "We would be in real trouble if that happens," or something of this kind. The pragmatic effect - reminding A of the powerless situation in which Britain finds itself today, as well as of the position that some people might still hold as a result of their clinging to bygone times when Britain indeed ruled the seas, and thus ridiculing either their conservatism and snobbery or their naivety while possibly criticising Britain for lagging behind other countries in defence matters etc. - is missed out. This maxim provides a possible explanation for the belief that irony only apparently constitutes a breach of communication as its apparent uncooperativeness in fact hides a cooperative nature that is appreciated as soon as the right interpretation is reached.

#### 5.4.3. Maxim of Manner

Finally, the violation of the maxim of Manner as in

He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument. I abhor such fanatical phantacisms, such insociable and point-device companions; such rackers of orthography.

said by Holophernes in *Love's Labour's lost* (V.I.) describing another character's style. Shakespeare puts obscurity, linguistic mannerism, and ambiguity in the mouth of his character to ridicule him and mock the extravagant way of expression that he makes him at once criticise and practice. The irony in this case partly emanates from

the exaggerated manner of speaking that resembles the one that is criticised.

### 5.5. Conclusion

After this brief survey of irony within the confines of the Gricean account, it becomes clear that the exploitation of the conversational maxims explains various ways in which a speaker/writer can convey an ironic meaning, and provides clues that the hearer/reader can exploit in recovering the intended irony. The Gricean maxims, being mainly concerned with the what and how of utterances, are useful in signalling the presence of irony and can thus help to pin it down. But what the Gricean account still falls short of, as Sperber and Wilson (1981) observe, is twofold. On the one hand, it fails to determine the nature of what is implicated in relation to the literal and how the leap is made between the two. On the other hand, it does not explain why one uses such "devious" means to convey a meaning that can hypothetically be expressed in more straightforward language. Although more workable than traditional accounts, Grice's is incomplete and leaves unanswered the main questions posed by the earlier approaches. Part B attempts to answer these questions.

**Part B**  
**The Echoic Account of Irony**

**1. Irony, Expression of Attitude, and Evaluation**

1.1. The missing element

The question that the above accounts of irony leave unanswered is: What is it that distinguishes an ironic utterance from its (closest) straightforward, literal paraphrase? What is there, for instance, about the utterance "We got lonely for the soft purr of your little voice" (Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1964: 47), uttered by George to his wife Martha, that makes it ironic and clearly so in the play? To say that this is a case of violation of the maxim of quality is not enough to differentiate this utterance from the infinity of false assertions that the two characters keep producing in the play, without necessarily being ironical. To say that this is a case of violation of the maxim of manner does not differentiate it from the passages cited in Latin, for instance. What these remarks do instead is draw attention to the fact that there is a clash between the exaggerated praise George attributes to Martha and his earlier accusations of her for "braying" as well as his earlier disapprobative comments on her way of speaking. For the audience as well as for the couple's guests, it is clear that George's utterance does not serve as a straightforward description of Martha's voice. It serves instead to express his disapproval of it: he is simply criticising her in a jocular-serious way. He conveys this criticism by using clichés which tend to be applied to qualify, approvingly, a woman's voice but that he obviously judges inapplicable to Martha's. He describes a situation which is desirable (in which her voice would satisfy the standard desired), but non-available in, and blatantly clashing with the actual situation. Thus, George has, as it were, borrowed somebody else's voice or perhaps words (that are favourable) and juxtaposed them with his wife's

earlier behaviour. The outcome is a comment that is unfavourable and clearly so, even to Martha (the stage direction to her move says that she decides "not to rise to it"). It is worth noting at this stage that the earlier examples "Tuscany in May" and "Britain rules the seas" can be adequately explained following these lines (which are compatible with Sperber and Wilson's approach outlined below). That is, it is more adequate to treat them as borrowing other speakers' words, juxtaposing them with incompatible facts, in order to communicate a negative attitude or comment toward them, and consequently about the facts or situation at hand. Irony is accordingly distinguished by two elements: a tight association with duplicity of voice and the conveyance of an unfavourable judgement and attitude. In his "Further Notes on Logic and Conversation" Grice has already emphasised this last point by observing that

irony is intimately connected with a feeling, attitude, or evaluation. I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt.  
(1978: 124)

However, as shown in the last section, he does not account for the centrality of this element to irony in the treatment he offers of the subject. This is due not only to the fact that his main emphasis was on meaning the opposite of what is said, but probably also because "feeling, attitude, or evaluation" are elements that were considered difficult to account for in a "scientific" theory of communication like pragmatics. These questions are, however, tackled by Sperber and Wilson as will be clear from Part B (6.3.) below, after they were dismissed as falling within the realm of rhetoric in an earlier work (1981). More will be said about the importance of these points for ironic communication at this stage, while keeping in mind that "evaluation" here is used in its general, non-technical sense as opposed to its later use in this study as a feature of narrative as singled out by Labov (Ch. VI).

### 1.2. Irony as disapprobatory attitude and evaluation

There is a very wide range of attitudes that can be encompassed in irony. Although these attitudes tend to be negatively judgemental and evaluative since they can

convey disdain, mockery, condemnation, contempt, etc. they can also be sympathetic and humorous. Works on irony tend to agree that the attitude it conveys is that of disapproval of the object of irony<sup>4</sup>. For Anne Cutler (1974), this "disapprobatory" attitude present in the conveyed meaning is the reverse of the approbatory attitude found at the literal level. Although she insists on the existence of an opposition between literal and ironic meaning, which, as demonstrated above, is by no means a necessary condition for irony, her insistence on the necessary presence of a positive attitude towards the object of irony at the literal level seems plausible in most situations. The exception would probably be the "praise by blame" cases, as they are identified in rhetoric, where the attitude conveyed at the literal level is a negative one. In Cutler's parlance, an ironic sentence must

in the context in which it is produced, express on its literal reading a desirable state of affairs; the literal meaning must be approbatory in tone. Thus the ironical reading must, obviously, express the converse - disapprobation.

(1974: 118)

This general assumption is exposed in more detail in Kaufer (1981), who instead of drawing the comparison between literal and conveyed meanings, emphasises the ironic utterance itself. Kaufer, who believes evaluation to be at the heart of irony, asserts that

while it is far from clear what prompts a speaker's choice between an ironic and a literal model of speech or writing, it is clear that the choice is conditioned on the speaker's having something of an evaluative nature to convey to a listener or reader.

(1981: 503)

Before contemplating the way Kaufer treats this evaluative nature of irony, it is worth mentioning that although one might agree with him that the reasons for choice between an ironic and a non-ironic way of expression might be difficult to pin down, various attempts at its examination have been undertaken and proved fruitful. Part C

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<sup>4</sup> The "object of irony" is used here in Muecke's sense (1969: 34), that is "what one is ironical about." It "may be a person (including the ironist himself), an attitude, a belief, a social custom or institution, a philosophical system, a religion, even a whole civilization, even life itself."

sheds some light on the work in this direction.

### 1.3. Ironic language vs. non-serious language

Kaufer draws a distinction between ironic language and non-serious language based, on the one hand, on the use of evaluative language or lack of it, and on the speaker's attitude to the type of language produced and its use in a particular context, on the other. He claims that while non-serious speech can use evaluative as well as non evaluative language, ironic speech can only use evaluative language. The attitude of the speaker is of great importance in drawing the distinction between the two modes of speech: the nonserious speaker has serious commitment neither to the utterance P nor to its performance in context C. An ironist, however, in pointing to the evaluative force in his relation to the utterance P, "lacks a serious commitment to P, but does claim a serious commitment" to its expression in Context C. Moreover, "Whereas the nonserious speaker uncritically applies an evaluation to a target, the ironist must be seen as critically misapplying one" (1981: 507). Reaching this last inference about the ironist, however, requires a prior knowledge of what he or she considers as "legitimate standards and legitimate exemplifications of those standards." Kaufer draws next the conclusion that misapplication of an evaluation can take two forms :

- 1- "the pretended association of a person, object, state of affair with a true standard" as in *Beautiful weather*, for instance, or
- 2- "the real association of a person, object, state of affair with a pretended standard" as in *I admire drivers who don't signal*.

(1981: 507)

In both cases, Kaufer seems to mean by "standard" a qualification, attribution or evaluation. To yield irony, misapplication of this evaluation has to be performed: this standard, true or pretended, is simply juxtaposed with and applied, respectively, to a true or pretended entity (object or person or state of affairs). Determination of the status of the standard would probably require the hearer or reader to use his or her knowledge about the external context as well as knowledge about the speaker.

In the last section of his article, Kaufer extends this type of analysis to what he

calls discourse ironies. He shows how "the linguistic material precedes the ironic evaluation as a setting and/or follows it as an evaluation" increasing the rhetorical and aesthetic impact of the judgemental misapplication in linguistically more complex forms of irony. "The ironist can," thus, "use elaborations more or less subtly in exposing (what may first seem) a deliberate judgement as a deliberate misjudgement" (1981: 509).

#### 1.4. Conclusion

What Kaufer emphasises in this account is, first, the existence of a certain standard of evaluation that is intentionally misapplied by a speaker. Second, that the necessity of being cognisant of what represents true and false standards for that speaker, by whoever is exposed to his utterance, might constitute the main clue for the recovery of the irony. But, as Kaufer himself notes, correct identification of true standards and their requirements constitutes a rather hard task in discourse ironies.

Following this account therefore, George's utterance quoted above from *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can further be viewed as containing an evaluative element that consists in the metaphor (if dead) "soft purr in your voice." Both "soft " and "purr" are clichés conventionally set for the measurement of women's voices. The assumption here is that George is subscribing to this standard and is now issuing a deliberate misjudgement of Martha. More exactly, he can be seen to be *pretending* to associate Martha with a standard that he finds *true*.

The main point in this section, then, is that the expression of attitude and judgement are two notions closely related to irony. Compared with a neutral statement for instance, an ironical utterance contains the additional element of expressing an attitude (that is not favourable), a misapplied evaluation. The ironist distances himself or herself from what is being asserted and presents the disguised, covert message to an audience who will have to detect the ironic intention by relying on various relevant aspects of the context whatever form they might take but particularly on their knowledge of the ironist.

## 2. Two Converging Approaches

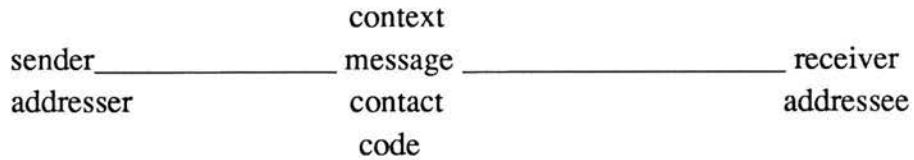
### 2.1. Introduction

Recognising the importance that the expression of attitude or evaluation has for irony is a crucial step in its study. This step needs to be supplemented, however, with an examination of the other possible aspects of irony and the way they fit with this question of evaluation, in order to provide satisfactorily for the questions left unanswered by the various approaches considered so far. Two approaches, one in the field of semiotics (Scholes) and the other in pragmatics and cognition (Sperber and Wilson) address themselves to these questions and provide comparable and complementary answers. First of all, a shift in emphasis is noticeable in their perspectives on the subject compared to the rest of the literature: the expression of attitude so far believed to exist *in* the utterance itself, is instead seen as an attitude *towards* the utterance. Although they differ in their emphases and details, Scholes's (1982) as well as Sperber and Wilson's (1981, 1986, 1989) approaches tend to agree that an ironic utterance has the power to appropriate and consequently manipulate some other utterance by evoking it. Through the evocation of this other absent utterance, the ironic utterance betrays the ironist's intention to embed it in the present context in which it stands out, inappropriate or irrelevant, as if in quotes. The irony is seen to emanate from this manipulation of the situation in order to convey a critical or ridiculing attitude towards the opinion expressed. The possible ways in which this is achieved and perceived according to these two approaches are delineated below with particular emphasis on the perspective offered by Sperber and Wilson because it is more systematic and comprehensive.

### 2.2. Irony and Literariness: A Duplicity of Communicative Features

As pointed out above, Scholes (1982) refers to irony within his treatment of the notion of literariness. Avoiding a definition of literature, he undertakes to define literariness instead. Though different from Roman Jakobson's notion of literariness,

Scholes's is based on the six features Jakobson has devised for describing the components involved in any single communicative act:



While literariness for Jakobson dwells in the emphasis of an utterance on its own formal structure or poetic function, which leads somehow to the definition of literature as a self-centered, purposeless activity, Scholes prefers to see literariness as a feature of communication. He insists on rejecting the notion of literature as a kind of "failed act" stained by its perpetual "arguing," "referring" and "advocating." He rather believes that most literature does in fact argue, refer, and advocate and is by no means a pure non-referential act. He believes that there has to be some degree of comparability and parallelism between the real world and the world created in literature. Another definition of literariness is therefore needed to reflect these unrecognised qualities.

Hence, "we sense literariness in an utterance," Scholes (1982: 21) suggests, whenever "any of the six features of communication loses its simplicity and becomes multiple or duplicitous." This view of literariness is somehow stretched to encompass linguistic practices that might not readily be called literature in the sense in which a poem, a play or a novel is, he suggests. Yet, this definition provides a different insight on irony by treating it as a result of the duplicity of a few of the communicative features on which it is based, two of which, more relevant to our purposes, will be discussed in this section.

### 2.2.1. Duplicity of Context

The doubling of contexts, as already mentioned above, is yielded by cases where the phenomenal (context) denies the semiotic (verbal expression). Whenever there is a clash between what is said and its context, another context, fictional this time, is created by the utterance. In the case of irony, when what is said does not conform to the context of the utterance and both speaker and hearer are aware of this

incompatibility or distortion, the speaker must be believed to be creating a fictional context in which the utterance is actually appropriate (signalling disapproval with the actual present context). "Beautiful weather" uttered as a downpour starts is a classical example of this duplicity of context. Hence, by evoking this fictional context, the speaker emphasises its absence and makes the present context even less desirable and more open to criticism.

### 2.2.2. Duplicity of Sender

The other feature that proves responsible for the generation of irony as well as literariness is that of the duplicity of the sender, a notion very close to the idea of borrowed voice. Scholes claims that it is the kind of phenomenon identified every time we recognize a difference between the maker of an utterance and its speaker. This duplicity calls to mind the persona/author distinction that is used to denote the presence of an author or essayist whose adoption of a particular tone, register or role inconsistent with some given expectation betrays his or her attempts at keeping a distance from what is being said. By creating this distance, between his or her voice and that of the persona adopted, the author could be trying to convey some disapproving attitude to what he or she is saying. It is interesting to note that, by adopting somebody else's voice, one in fact is adopting the actual words of that person. The words would consequently be treated as if in quotes. And it is this very characteristic which legitimises the detection of distance and the opening of possibilities for irony directed towards the utterance.

It is with these two features that Scholes's approach comes closest to Wilson and Sperber's (1986: 30) definition of ironic utterances where they treat them as echoing "an actual or possible opinion of a certain person or type of person, in order to dissociate oneself from it or make fun of it." Before looking at the ways in which the two accounts coincide and interact, a brief survey of Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory and perspective on irony will be given.

### 2.3. Irony and Relevance Theory

#### 2.3.1. Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson's account of irony is formulated within a larger theory of communication and cognition built on what they call the principle of relevance. Like Grice, they show a particular concern for efficiency in communication, whatever the content or the purpose of the communicative act is. But very much unlike Grice, they reject the notion of cooperation or truthfulness as the basis for successful communication and replace them instead with the notion of relevance. Literality and truthfulness, they claim (1986: 233-5), are not necessarily essential for adequate communication to take place. Sticking to them might even be regarded as a form of handicap to efficient communication. Sperber and Wilson (1981: 299) further assert that "disambiguation" is a basic element "in the interpretation of every utterance." It is the task of the hearer to choose the right interpretation, that is, the interpretation that is most consistent with the principle of relevance. This choice will be made on the assumption that the speaker has been as relevant as possible in the circumstances. In their parlance

speakers try, and hearers expect them to try, to meet a single general standard in producing an utterance: a standard of relevance.

(1982: 72)

Sperber and Wilson (1982: 75) claim that the "speaker tries to express the proposition which is the most relevant one possible to the hearer." This is based on the belief that in addressing another person, a speaker is going to modify the former's cognitive environment. A cognitive environment for them is the set of assumptions and facts which a person is capable of representing mentally, and/or accepting its representation as true or probably true. To modify someone's cognitive environment, one must believe that what is going to be said is worth that person's attention and processing effort by being relevant enough to him or her: "Any utterance addressed to someone," therefore, "automatically conveys a presumption of its own relevance" (1989: 109). Relevance incorporates here the meaning of the word "relevance" but

surpasses it for a more technical use. It is defined in similar terms to the notion of productivity. Two intertwined factors are involved in shaping it: the range of contextual effects it conveys, and how economically it conveys them.

This effort/effect parameter can be translated in these terms: the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance. By the same token, the smaller the processing effort, the greater the relevance. An example from Sperber and Wilson (1986: 233) can be cited to illustrate the way the principle of relevance works:

- a. I earn £797.32 pence a month.
- b. I earn £800 a month.

said to a friend that one has not seen for a while in answer to his enquiry about this person's present income. Both answers will allow the friend to reach the same conclusions about the status, life style and so on of the speaker. Sperber and Wilson argue that given the principle of relevance, the second answer becomes preferable to, although not as truthful as, the first due to its economical quality in terms of processing effort (since it is less complex than the first).

It is interesting to note that while the relevance of an utterance might depend on its economy of processing effort as in the above example, its relevance might instead depend on the creation of special contextual effects in others, as is usually the case with utterances carrying poetic effects (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 223). Irony falls under this second category since its interpretation requires more processing effort on the part of the addressee and is, accordingly, rewarded through the multiplicity of contextual effects it achieves (and the repercussions these have on the psychological states and the interpersonal, or social relations of the participants in the interaction).

Another concern of relevance theory is the interaction between the semantic aspect of an utterance with its pragmatic aspect. This is stressed and considered as important for the interpretation of irony (1981: 295) as it is for interpretation in general. Sperber and Wilson claim that

A contextual implication of an utterance is a non-trivial logical implication

derivable not from the content of the utterance alone, nor from the context alone, but only from context and content combined.

(1982: 73)

It is thus that Sperber and Wilson believe the principle of relevance to be capable on its own (as opposed to Grice's various maxims, for instance), to explain how verbal comprehension works. The context in their view is not taken as an existing given, ready only for a few changes during the comprehension process, but rather as part of this process itself, helping the search for the interpretation that is most relevant. This can be seen more at work in cases like irony where the linguistic form of an utterance obscures or "underdetermines," as they suggest (1989:110), its interpretation. Given these details about relevance theory, when misunderstandings occur, they will be caused, Wilson and Sperber claim, by the speaker's failure to "notice and hence eliminate, an interpretation that was both accessible enough to the hearer and productive enough in terms of contextual implications to be accepted without question" (1986: 22). In other words, the speaker has failed to produce an utterance that has

one and only one interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance - one and only one interpretation, that is, on which a rational speaker might have thought it would be relevant enough to be worth the hearer's attention.

(1989: 110)

Misunderstanding is also bound to occur in the opposite direction if the hearer fails to reach the interpretation that is consistent with the principle of relevance. It becomes legitimate according to Wilson and Sperber on these grounds to claim that

Though an utterance will be judged irrelevant if it conveys no true information at all, as long as it conveys a satisfactory range of true contextual implications, and does so more economically than any alternative utterance that the speaker could have produced, it may quite well satisfy the principle of relevance, and there is no reason, in our framework, for regarding it as deviant at all.

(1986: 29)

A final aspect of Sperber and Wilson's approach to communication and cognition that is particularly relevant to the study of irony is the distinction they establish between strong and weak communication on the basis of the notion of degrees of manifestness. Among the advantages of this distinction is the fact that it accounts for vague and pervasive forms of communication like impressions and attitudes in the same



way that it accounts for more standard implicatures. Hence, it is the degree of manifestness of the informative intention (that is, the speaker's intention) responsible for modifying the cognitive environment of the hearer which determines how strongly or weakly the attitude conveyed is. For Sperber and Wilson, verbal communication (as opposed to non-verbal communication) has the capacity of allowing communication to be conveyed strongly. For every individual a number of assumptions are manifest, constituting his or her cognitive environment. These assumptions are manifest in the sense that this individual can represent them "conceptually" and can accept "that representation as true or probably true" (1989: 112). In a communicative act, the speaker's informative intention, i.e., his or her intention to modify the hearer's cognitive environment, is made manifest or more manifest to the hearer. That is, a number of assumptions are communicated some of which are more likely to be entertained than others. The more likely an assumption is to be entertained, the more strongly it is manifest and the more strongly it is communicated.

What is explicitly communicated is usually strongly communicated and has no more than one strongly manifest intention that would be the only one consistent with the criterion of the principle of relevance. However, intentions are not always strongly communicated. They can be made less manifest, so increasing the hearer's indeterminacy concerning the right conclusions to be made about them. In such cases, the communication is weakly conveyed and the hearer is faced with a wide array of contexts and contextual effects to choose from. Hence, Sperber and Wilson argue that

when the communicator's intention is to increase simultaneously the manifestness of a wide range of assumptions, so that her intention concerning each of these assumptions is itself weakly manifest, each of these assumptions is *weakly implicated*.

(1989: 113-114)

The effects generated from such a communication are simply weak implicatures whose derivation is deemed the responsibility of the addressee. Weakly conveyed information is seen as an indication of the degree of intimacy or mutual understanding between speaker and hearer because of the amount of information that it leaves unsaid.

However, the two types of communication are closely interrelated and shade off into each other as a hearer might be *encouraged* to reach less determinate conclusions without necessarily having to choose a definite one.

In order to illustrate some of the points made so far about relevance theory, consider Levinson's (1983: 109) (now historically obsolete) example cited in section 5.4.2. of Part A above:

A: What if the USSR blockades the Gulf and all the oil?

B: Oh come now, Britain rules the seas.

B's utterance is an answer to A's query about the state of affairs that would obtain if the Soviets were to get hold of the Gulf and monopolise the oil. It occurs in the form of an assertion that could be roughly interpreted following Sperber and Wilson's framework as either 1 or 2:

1 - Britain would handle the situation, I believe

2 - Britain would handle the situation, someone else believes

Supposing that A chooses to test interpretation 1 for consistency with the principle of relevance, that is whether it achieves adequate contextual effects for a minimal processing effort. It would automatically become clear that this interpretation is inadequate since B's utterance does not strengthen an existing assumption, has no contextual implications and fails, moreover, to contradict and eliminate any existing assumption because anybody with the least amount of knowledge about the world would realise its falsehood and inappropriateness. B, therefore, could not have intended A to spend any processing effort on such an interpretation that has no contextual effects. B thus could not have intended to make manifest the assumption that Britain would be capable of defending the West's interests, even against such a world power as the USSR.

On the other hand, if 2 were the interpretation chosen by A, then, a decision would need to be made about whether it is a report of speech or whether it is an echoic interpretation of an attributed thought or utterance (cf. section 2.3.2 below where these

concepts are discussed). Choosing the latter interpretation would be more likely, by simple reliance on knowledge about the contemporary world. The alternative would be to treat the utterance as echoic and B as expressing his or her attitude(s) to it: that of disapproval in the first place.

The original idea echoed can easily be attributed to the stance of a group of people who still believe in the power of the empire, the precious legacy of the previous century and refuse to admit the new reality. In any case, the utterance is referring to a situation that was true at a certain time in the past while holding this view in the present world is ridiculous.

The speaker is therefore making manifest the assumption that believing Britain capable of combatting the Soviets, if ever they decide to intervene in the Gulf, is absurd and that there is in fact nothing that Britain can do to prevent it; that is what is strongly communicated. This strong communication is moreover combined with a weaker form of communication. A large number of weakly implicated contextual effects is inferrable concerning for instance some negative features of the group of people to whom the utterance is attributed, their snobbery and conservatism and so on. The utterance can also be considered as a criticism that is made partly to achieve phatic effects in the exchange. It could be meant as a joke on all the backward thinking people who still believe in the power of a Britain that "rules the seas" and are in no way ready to admit the actual capacities of the adversary bloc, while the assumption that it is going to be correctly interpreted by A puts the two interlocutors on the same side.

B's utterance can also trigger questions like, since Britain cannot defend these interests, who can? Would the Americans fit into this role? What are the repercussions of such an intervention on Britain's relation to USA and Britain's status in world politics? Answers to these and other questions can serve to constitute the infinite number of weakly implicated effects that the hearer can derive in this situation. Hence, while trying to get to the speaker's informative intentions, the hearer is exposed to a number of contexts, and contextual effects to choose from. In processing this newly

presented piece of information, the hearer will have to rely on all kinds of background knowledge to decide on whether the remark is meant as a joke or whether it expresses bitterness or perhaps both and other things at once. In this case, reliance on clues apart from the propositional content, like intonation, facial expression, or an earlier discussion can help. But still, the existence of this variety of alternative interpretations, given that no choice is necessarily needed or where no clear cut choice is possible, makes communication weak.

It is interesting to note that reaching the conclusion that, instead of reassuring A about the safety of the West's interests in the Gulf, B in fact makes it clear that the threat could be more real than ever, is made more impactful because of the use of irony. By referring to a standard or a norm that is (or was) present in another possible world, its absence in the present real world is highlighted and made more striking. The absurdity of the assumption is so obvious for both interlocutors that do not need to spell its inadequacy out. Its indirectness strengthens instead their sense of agreement on the assessment of the situation. The next section, explores more aspects of the nature of irony and its recognition as seen within Sperber and Wilson's framework

### 2.3.2. Irony : A Case of Echoic Interpretation

It is following the above-mentioned account that irony ceases to be a departure from a norm or a maxim and becomes a category within the wider class of "echoic utterances." As pointed out in Part A (4.1), any sentence is potentially ironical; decision about its interpretation is considered the responsibility of the hearer. According to Sperber and Wilson (1989), this potential for irony can be explained by the fact that utterances can be understood as either expressing a person's own opinion, or as echoing, reporting someone else's. The second interpretation is responsible for determining irony; "an ironical utterance," Wilson and Sperber claim, "is one that echoes an actual or possible opinion of a certain person or type of person, in order to dissociate oneself from it or make fun of it" (1986: 30). Ironic utterances, they moreover argue, occur as naturally and spontaneously as other echoic utterances. They

are equally accepted and understood through normal processes. They need not be taught or learnt: there is, therefore, no reason on these grounds to ascribe deviation to irony.

In their article "Irony and the Use/Mention Distinction" (1981), Sperber and Wilson developed the above view of irony basing it on the distinction between the *use* of an utterance and its *mention*. According to them, the *use* of an expression "involves reference to what the expression refers to." *Mention* of an expression, however, "involves reference to the expression itself." Mention, here, is very close to the notion of reported speech or quotation. But since it is not always the case that the very exact words of an original sentence constitute what is mentioned, it is possible to see mention as concerned with the propositional content instead. When there is no clear indication that it is a form of reported speech (i.e., in the absence of quotation marks), an utterance becomes vulnerable to misinterpretation: it can be mistaken for a case of use. In irony, an utterance is mentioned in order to give information about the attitude that the ironist holds of the utterance or its originator.

To appreciate irony, a double recognition is required on the part of the audience. First, it has to recognise that the utterance is a case of "echoic mention," that is the speaker, on the one hand, is saying something *about* the utterance rather than *by means of* it, and on the other, he or she is merely expressing an attitude to the proposition, not committing himself or herself to its truth (cf. Kaufer in 1.3. above). Second, the audience has to look for clues within the context that make the utterance sound "false, inappropriate, or irrelevant" before being able to have a grasp of the intended interpretation.

In a recent reconsideration of the place irony occupies among echoic utterances (Sperber and Wilson 1989), the notion of "echoic mention" was replaced by the notion of "echoic interpretation." This move is meant to widen the scope of the definition by accounting for both attributed utterances and attributed thoughts. Since mention is mainly restricted to the propositional content of utterances alone (literal interpretation),

interpretation in this sense is seen to include variably literal renderings of an original utterance. Sperber and Wilson claim that

Reports of speech are not always identical reproductions of the content of the original: they may be paraphrases or summaries; they may be elaborations, spelling out some assumptions or implications that the original speaker took for granted, or that struck the hearer as particularly relevant. In such cases, the content of the indirect report resembles the content of the original without, however, being an identical reproduction of it.  
(1989: 106)

Sperber and Wilson thus introduce the notion of interpretive resemblance or resemblance of content to replace the notion of mention. They claim that

any object in the world can be used to represent any other object it resembles ... Such representations are used in communication for two main purposes: to inform an audience about the properties of an original, and for the expression of attitude.  
(1989: 106)

The notion of interpretive resemblance is determined by the "sharing of logical and contextual implications: the more shared implications, the greater the interpretive resemblance" (1989: 106). This notion is mainly used because mention has proved to be restrictive in the analysis of indirect speech and irony. Since not all indirect quotations are reproductions of the original, they cannot be treated adequately in terms of mention. They can, however, be described as interpretively used, whether literally or not, depending on the degree of coincidence they have with the original in terms of implications.

Given this wider view, echoic utterances are now re-analysed (1989: 106) as "echoic *interpretations* of an attributed thought or utterance and verbal irony as a variety of echoic interpretations." In an article published in 1987, Hymes explains this perception of irony in a way that dissipates potential criticisms of its use of the echoic element. He says that irony

when intended may not be echoic in a sense that implies a previous or standard use. An ironic remark may be novel. The ingredient of "echoic" mention may be an implicit comparison of perspectives, a comparison of a present situation to another possibility in which what is said might be said, a possibility perhaps in the future.  
(1987: 299-300)

In fact, Sperber and Wilson regard echoic interpretation utterances as falling

under the larger category of second-degree interpretation utterances. These are used to interpret someone else's speech or thought as opposed to describing a state of affairs, in which case, they would be regarded as descriptive utterances. The second-degree element springs from the fact that an utterance is considered to be, in the first place, a public interpretation of the thought of its utterer. To use an utterance interpretively or as a second-degree interpretation means that it is used to interpret someone else's thought and therefore is conveying one's understanding of that thought. When an utterance that is interpretively used also conveys an attitude to what it is interpreting in order to achieve relevance, it is described as echoic:

these interpretations achieve relevance by informing the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what so-and-so said, and has a certain attitude to it: the speaker's interpretation of so-and-so's utterance is relevant in itself. When utterances achieve relevance in this way, we will say that they are *echoic* ...

(1986: 238)

The source of the echoic utterance as pointed out by Hymes does not need to be of the actual linguistic type—cf. Ch. III for a detailed exploration of this notion. It can be very vague and hard to trace down. As Sperber and Wilson (1989: 102) observe,

The thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it might not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm ... the speaker echoes an implicitly attributable opinion, while simultaneously dissociating herself from it. What differs from case to case are the reasons for the dissociation.

(1989: 102)

#### 2.4. Echoic Interpretation, Duplicity of Sender and Context

It might be legitimate at this point to consider the ways in which Scholes's and Sperber and Wilson's accounts come together. It can be argued that the identification of ironic utterances as echoic squares with their description as the outcome of the duplicity of the sender ('s voice). An echo is usually seen as a kind of distortion of an original voice. Unlike an image reflected on a (plane) mirror, voice when echoed is always disguised, modified as a result of the impact with the surface that reflects it. This modification of the voice of the speaker in fact affects the words themselves. The

words of an ironic utterance stand out as if they are not the ironist's own but somebody else's, as he or she distances himself or herself from them. Hence the common reference to the "tone of voice" that is believed to accompany spoken irony.

The duplicity of context also comes into play here as the fictional context created by the ironic utterance corresponds to the echoed thought. But unlike Scholes's account, the ironist's attitude can be seen as primarily directed against this context in a criticism of its inappropriateness in the present context as it were, and only by virtue of its absence does it acquire the pragmatic force which leads it to be seen as a criticism of the present situation.

To take the example of the impolite visitor again, the host's utterance "Make yourself at home, won't you?" illustrates this point well. The ironic meaning in this utterance comes not from its liability to express a negation but from the very fact of its being an invitation to relax. This point can be explained in terms of the elements discussed above. The utterance used by the speaker is creating its own fictional context, echoing another situation in which the set expression, the invitation, is appropriate and valid. Because the utterance is clearly inappropriate in the present context, the speaker can only be seen as dissociating and distancing himself from its invalidity. It thus stands as if in quotes (notice that even if the guest were a close friend of the speaker and thus his behaviour denotes familiarity rather than impoliteness, the utterance would still be considered ironic though obviously of the more teasing, jocular type). The visitor can certainly not mistake the utterance for an actual courtesy (unless the speaker shouted it from another room where he would not be aware of the guest's behaviour). The utterance clearly contradicts an existing assumption (the guest's polite waiting to be invited to make himself at home), and can thus only be interpreted in terms of irony. Only by perceiving it as such can the visitor interpret it as an unfavourable comment on his behaviour: the host is intentionally asking him to perform an action in the future while being well aware of its being already an action in the past.

Another example showing the ways Scholes's duplicity of context and sender

can be accommodated by Sperber and Wilson's echoic interpretation account, of a subtler and more covert type of irony this time, is Jane Austen's famous opening sentence to *Pride and Prejudice*

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

Confronted with such a sentence, a reader has to decide on one of two alternative interpretations: either it is a case of use ("Narrator thinks that it is a truth...") or it is a case of echoic interpretation ("Somebody else thinks it is a truth..."). Assuming the reader has no prior knowledge of Jane Austen's writing, the disambiguation will have to wait for the provision of a context in the following sentence or paragraph to lead its interpretation. It is possible that the emphatic quasi-scientific way in which the utterance is formulated ("truth universally acknowledged," the passive form "It is a truth ... acknowledged") can serve as a clue to raising suspicion in the apprehensive readers who might not readily agree that this truth is universal or that it is a truth in the first place. The elaboration following this sentence explains that whether the man in question holds such a view or not is of no importance, as the neighbourhood to which he has moved will automatically presuppose the existence of this marriage wish and even start looking for brides-to-be for him among their daughters. The reader now eliminates the possibility of the interpretation "the narrator thinks," and, recognizing the duplicity of the sender, treats the utterance as a case of echoic interpretation. The fictional context created by the alleged tautology can be attributed to this group of people who subscribe to it and take it as use. Its being assigned to such a small group of people whose values seem slightly different from an ideal implied reader's calls its validity ("universally acknowledged") into question. The (implied) writer is in fact dissociating herself from the utterance and making fun of its originators' corrupt values. The comment of the writer is made in a silent way. She presents a statement whose validity and attribution are left blurred. It is in the next paragraph that they are indirectly unveiled. The writer exposes the originators' self

indulgence, and forcing their views on others (the rich new neighbour) to the extent of believing them to be universal truths, when they are only restricted to the insulated world of a handful of families in a neighbourhood. Interpreting such an utterance in terms other than irony can only be a proof of neglect of the contextual, co-textual clues provided in the narrative.

### 2.5. Conclusion: Problems Avoided and Advantages Gained

Because of this echoic character ascribed to ironic utterances within Sperber and Wilson's approach, the following fallacies and controversies existing in the previous accounts of irony have been readily avoided:

1. the postulate of a distinction between literal and figurative meanings, with the absence of both an adequate definition for the latter, and an adequate description of the relations linking the two meanings;
2. the difficulties in providing an adequate description of the nature of the implicatures responsible for the recognition of irony;
3. the confusion between definitions of irony, allegory, lie, metaphor, etc. resulting from their reliance on the semantic aspect alone (instead, a remarkable rapprochement with parody, allusion, intertextuality is allowed, as will be demonstrated in the chapters on intertextuality).

The echoic account has on the other hand allowed the incorporation of all types of irony under its scope, recognising that they might express an opposite meaning but not necessarily so. The emphasis in this approach lies particularly in the expression of an evaluative attitude towards what the utterance is about instead of expressing an attitude by means of it. This account has helped to establish irony as a normal feature of communication behaving like other features of its own class instead of its consideration as a devious, superfluous, replaceable (that is, paraphrasable) phenomenon. This last point helps recognise the pragmatic and rhetorical effects that distinguish ironic utterances from near literal paraphrases of them. While the latter express the speaker's attitude openly (i.e. lexically or semantically), the former show

the speaker's engagement in a portrayal of how that echoic interpretation utterance fails to convey its descriptive use in the present context and is undermined for that reason. Following this account, two utterances meaning the same thing propositionally would differ in terms of attitude to the utterance: the speaker would be saying something *with* the utterance in the case of description, while expressing something *about* the utterance itself in the case of echoic interpretation. Sperber and Wilson can be seen as subscribing to what is identified as a monistic view of language, parallel to Halliday's, where form and content cannot be separated; choosing to use a different way of saying something leads to the production of a different meaning. In his *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday (1985) suggests that

A system network is a theory of language as choice. It represents a language, or any part of language as a resource for making meaning by choosing.

(1985: XXVII)

Thus, as discourse proceeds, a continuous process of choosing takes place. Every choice made in this process acts as a background governing the choice of what precedes it as well as what follows it. Meaning is shaped by the interaction of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. Any slight alteration in either factor can be responsible for changing the meaning and its effect. A straightforward expression of anger for instance is clearly different from its ironic rendering; first because of the difference in form, second because of the difference in attitude to that form, third because of distinct kinds of interpersonal relationship, and finally because of the utterer's reasons for choosing to use either for the occasion.

## Part C

### Socio-pragmatic Aspects of Irony

#### 1. Introduction

This third part of Chapter I is concerned with examining why irony is used. That is what it is that prompts it generally, and what effects it achieves. The question "why" therefore comprises both the reasons for the use of irony as well as the effects its use can have in a given situation. Sperber and Wilson suggest in the approach delineated in Part B that the use of irony involves the speaker's aim to dissociate himself or herself from what is being uttered and show disapproval or some form of negative attitude towards it and/or its originator(s). This dissociative function of irony, as will be demonstrated in relation to the work of other scholars, is essential to its communication. It is, however, often accompanied by an associative function which unites the speaker with another party in the interaction. Sperber and Wilson only indirectly refer to this function of irony. They indicate that recovering irony necessitates some special processing efforts (access to particular contexts that should be or should become shared by both speaker and hearer) because of the amount of implicitness involved in its communication. Overcoming the hindrance to comprehension residing in the possible difficulties encountered in recovering what is left unsaid, can reveal some form of affinity between the participants in the interaction.

These two aspects of irony are quintessentially interpersonal and can be regarded as characteristic of its communication. They tend to occur, however, hand in hand with a number of other elements of an equally socio-pragmatic nature warranting the very existence of irony and explaining the necessity for its use. Such elements are closely linked to questions like politeness, power and solidarity and can be seen as relevant to the analysis of irony in all types of discourse including literary discourse. There are, nevertheless, effects of the use of irony that are purely confined to narrative

fiction writing, as will be illustrated in Chs. VI and VII.

## **2. Coverttness and Comprehension**

An element that is most significant for the expression of attitude in irony is coverttness. The main source for misunderstanding and misfiring in irony is due to its non-reliance on the words alone for the conveyance of meaning. The words alone can be extremely deceptive unless blatantly contradicted by the immediate context. A main clue, or help in the absence of such a clash would be an awareness of relevant knowledge of the world. This knowledge will have to include awareness of what count as venerated values within the culture of the speaker as well as awareness of what makes values for the speaker. The world consists of a wide array of objects and states of affair whose classes are "tacitly specified," as de Wolff (1985) points out. Knowledge of what counts as good class membership would help to decide on the status of a particular entity brought about in a linguistic interaction. The entity in question will be the butt of irony if, while still managing to belong to a particular class, its membership is clearly called into question. Because of this doubtful borderline sense of belonging, the subject of the utterance, or the entity, is as if put in quotation marks, hence betraying the speaker's stance or attitude towards the utterance that contains it. This is probably no more than a rough delineation of what makes irony, but it is significant for singling out a certain closeness between the ironist and the audience. Understanding, despite the coverttness of the message, is a signal of unity and likeness and can be considered to epitomise a form of solidarity between the sender and the receiver of the irony.

## **3. Social-Psychological-Rhetorical Considerations: the Self and the Other in Irony**

Three main types of function of the use of irony, clearly nurtured by its coverttness, can be depicted. They can be classified in terms of the social, psychological and rhetorical roles they play in the production and interpretation of irony. A clearcut distinction between the three is, however, difficult to draw. This

formal distinction can only be based on an attempt to specify what irony allows the ironists to do for themselves and what it allows them to do in relation to their audiences. It is necessary to examine these elements so intertwined with the covertness of the expression of attitude in irony in order to learn more about the workings and the nature of this practice. The more specific effects it achieves in narrative fiction writing resulting from these functions being at play will be considered in Chs. VI and VII. To start with, it is important to recognise the highly social function of irony. It is a variably covert verbal way of expressing an unfavourable, dissociative attitude about an object, person, or state of affairs. Scholes describes irony as

a way of avoiding censorship, too, whether the censor is a politician or the superego. It is, in fact, much like the Freudian "negation," which is the device that allows us to say "I don't want to upset you" when we intend, consciously or not, to do just that.

(1982: 72)

### 3.1. A Non-Opaque Mask: Politeness

Because they belong to particular social groups, individuals tend to be careful about the ways in which they interact with others. Their behaviour is regulated by social principles. Keeping the right distance is one key to one's sovereignty over one's territories. Politeness is considered an important means for keeping this balance. It has itself to be calibrated so that neither too much nor too little of it is administered: the risk being to verge on subservience or on aggression when the balance is disturbed. Lack of politeness being somehow similar to intruding or treading on other people's territories, it is considered a form of aggression and social insensitivity. Leech, Brown and Levinson, and R. Lakoff are probably the most quoted scholars on politeness. Paradoxically, in their accounts, irony which is a form of aggression and a practice with a "potential face threat posed by the critical content" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 263), is shown to be warranted by politeness. The latter is used successfully as a cover for conveying irony.

#### Politeness Principle and Irony Principle

Leech (1983: 81) defines the Politeness Principle (PP) by means of two

formulations with stress particularly falling on the first one:

"Minimize (other things being equal ) the expression of impolite beliefs"

"Maximize (other things being equal ) the expression of polite beliefs."

Adherence to this principle, Leech asserts, helps

maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place.

(1983: 82)

Following these terms, if a speaker finds it "necessary" to utter some remark or statement that is offensive or unfavourable, then it is best if it is done in a way that is compatible with the PP. This might not be adhered to in practice, but at least the possibility exists. The ideal situation would be perhaps to fuse the rude and the polite in irony. The hearer will have to do some mental work and draw implicatures to perceive the real nature of the utterance. Indeed, using exaggerated politeness in a particular situation can easily call into question its appropriateness and make the hearer wonder about the reason behind its presence. Just like lack of politeness, its exaggerated or inappropriate use can equally be perceived as distancing and insulting (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In accordance with this, Leech has coined an Irony Principle which he describes as a "second order principle" which enables "the speaker to be impolite while still seeming to be polite; it does so by superficially breaking the CP, but ultimately upholding it" (1983: 142). This operation can be explained in terms of the exploitation of the PP. The latter is based on six different principles, which have to be observed at the expense of the maxims of the CP. The maxims are described in terms of the Speech Acts with which they are associated and are spelled out in inverse sub-principles. They can be enumerated as follows:

TACT MAXIM (in impositives and commissives)

a- Minimize cost to other [b/ Maximize benefit to other]

GENEROSITY MAXIM (in impositives and commissives)

a- Minimize benefit to self [b/ Maximize cost to self]

APPROBATION MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)

a- Minimize dispraise of other [b/ Maximize praise of other]

MODESTY MAXIM (in expressives and assertives)

a- Minimize praise to self [b/ Maximize dispraise of self]

AGREEMENT MAXIM (in assertives)

a- Minimize disagreement between self and other [b/ Maximize agreement between self and other.

(Leech 1983: 132)

Observing the maxims contributes to making a hearer feel comfortable while in fact politeness is affected and purely formal, covering some underlying hostility and controlled aggression. Because of these characteristics, irony becomes rather difficult to answer in the same mode; it acquires a force of attack as Leech claims (1983: 144) "with an apparent innocence which is a form of defence." An utterance like

"Don't mind me (will you?)"

said to someone who has just "barged into the speaker," Leech suggests (1983: 143), breaks the felicity conditions for the imperative, by conflicting blatantly with the actual physical situation in which the command (something to be complied with in the future) is already an action in the past. This allows its recognition as a case of echoic interpretation in Sperber and Wilson's terms. The words used are far from being attributable to the speaker and given the context, they can be seen as conveying an unflattering remark on the hearer's behaviour. Irony, in this example, comes from the intentional emphasis on the inappropriateness of the utterance in the context and consequently from the speaker's dissociating himself from it. The Generosity and Sympathy maxims are activated here but are obviously superfluous and gratuitous as the person is already performing what he or she is being invited to do.

#### Politeness Maxim

Robin Lakoff (1973) likewise, talks about conflicts between the clarity maxim and the politeness maxim resulting in the triumph of the latter in the form of irony. Her politeness maxim comprehends three elements:

1. Don't impose
2. Give options
3. Make your hearer feel good and friendly.

It is through seemingly being polite to someone while in fact one is being rude and critical that irony operates in the case identified in rhetoric as "blame-by-praise." According to Lakoff this is bound to be a successful ironical form because only two maxims are in conflict (clarity and politeness with the latter superseding as expected). In the case of "praise-by-blame" however, both maxims are flouted (the speaker is neither polite nor clear), leading the speech act to misfire even among friends. Hence, by being the "protégée" of politeness, irony can freely thrive pragmatically, that is carry its utterer's point of view on the situation and achieve the wanted effects while observing the sensitivity of its users towards open verbal confrontation and keeping the balance of sociability safe.

### 3.2. A Goal-Oriented Type of Communication: the Interpersonal Dimension of Irony

Socially licensed in this way, irony can then be seen to fulfill several rhetorical functions that are, it might be argued, primary to its very existence. They are, at the same time, highly intertwined and circular in the way that each one of them seems to logically cause the others and simultaneously result from them. Irony is essentially an affective, goal-oriented type of communication. It is used to communicate a certain attitude and its purpose remains to produce an effect on the audience. Kaufer (1981: 503) describes the psycho-rhetorical process involved in irony as bearing on specific information about:

- 1- the ironist's attitude or knowledge of the message
- 2- the understander's attitude or knowledge of the message
- 3- the ironist's evaluative assessment of 1 and 2
- 4- the ironist's assessment of the impact of the message on his or her relationship with the interlocutor.

Considering the first three elements might be necessary to the comprehension of irony itself and act as a preparation for the last element which bears on the interpersonal effect of irony. The third element, moreover, seems to have the most value in shaping

the irony and determining the relationship that the ironist is going to have with the addressee. Depending on whether the addressee shares with the ironist the same attitude to the message or not, this addressee might become the ironist's victim or ally. This interpersonal impact of irony has been described as being either associative or dissociative (Kaufer, 1981, 1985), inclusive or exclusive (Myers, 1977). Irony is thus in a position to allow the ironist to victimise some audiences while building strong relations with others, whether simultaneously or on separate occasions. These are the two main primary interpersonal functions or effects of ironic communication. They seem to mutually presuppose each other as the one is nearly always dependent on the existence of the other, as will be demonstrated below. They are, moreover, closely linked to a third element that reinforces them and seems to emanate from as well as cause them. This element is related to the manipulative power of irony or rather its capacity as a tool of persuasion.

Because of its polite, covert nature, irony has proved to be a powerful tool of intellectual manipulation and persuasion. As moral satires like those of Swift and Defoe and the Palestinian Emile Habibi in modern Israel witness, irony can serve a serious civilisational purpose by being *the* mode of expression *par excellence* every time social and/or political oppression are in operation. It can be argued that, while not making an audience feel attacked and ready to be on the defensive, an ironist is capable of discussing controversial issues and leading the audience to accept his or her undeclared goals if not agree with them. An ironist can thus make the interlocutors adopt his or her perspective on things without offending them or seeming to force them into accepting it. The mask of irony thus allows the ironist to infiltrate through the addressees' defences by indirectly exposing the undesirable nature of some state of affairs from which he or she intends to show distance and implicitly invites them to do likewise. This might not always be the case and hence, the support that the ironist can seek needs to be elicited from neutral or non-committed third parties.

At the same time, irony can also save members of the audience humiliation if

they turn out to be supporters of the object of irony. It invites them to join the ironist in his or her high position, at least apparently, while allowing them to perform a private introspection through which they can reconsider their points of view and perhaps amend them under the new light. An ironist like Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar*, for instance, gradually drives his audience to do a *volte face* in their way of perceiving the situation. He leads them to accept what first seemed to them to be descriptively used as in fact a case of echoic interpretation, obviously inappropriate in the new light shed on it by the speaker's careful manipulation of the situation to fit his ultimate goals.

It might be argued, in accordance with Booth (1974: 41), that being invited to arrive at the ironic meaning by using their own mental capacities, members of an audience are more likely to feel that the meaning is theirs and therefore be more ready to adopt it. Hence, the forceful impact that an ironic utterance can have compared to its more explicit counterpart which, because clearly spelled out, might necessitate no participation from the audience. It might instead make them feel it is being imposed on them and consequently elicit a negative reaction on their part. Consider for instance an utterance like:

"Anyone who thinks Joe's a genius is crazy."

Such an utterance is certainly deprived of the ironic constituent that would exist were the judgement pronounced covertly (Carston 1981: 30). This statement expressed so explicitly is somehow crude; it is an insult although it is indirect because of the vague reference (it does not name anybody in particular but is simply addressed to whoever satisfies the description it provides). The statement blatantly breaks the maxims of Approbation, Agreement, and Sympathy by aiming at minimising, on the one hand, this Joe, whom the speaker believes to be anything but a genius, and in the same vein everybody who supports the idea of Joe being a genius. Consequently, the speaker is alienating himself or herself on the one hand from Joe, who is indirectly judged as being anything but a genius, and on the other, from all the people who might have entertained the idea. By insulting them openly, the speaker will get only

resentment and opposition from these people as they will feel obliged to defend, not only Joe, but themselves, in the first place, against this attack.

The speaker could have remained somehow on good terms with these people by saying an utterance like

"Of course, Joe is a genius."

supplying it with some kinetic clues or counting on other already available contextual clues, guaranteeing its interpretation in an ironical manner. Such an utterance still deprives Joe of the quality ascribed to him but because of its covert nature, heavily exploiting the PP, it indirectly flatters the intelligence of the hearers and seeks their complicity. It allows them to perceive the meaning by themselves, without insulting them and could finally get them to reconsider, secretly, their own position towards the validity of such an assertion. One can readily agree with Green who asserts the importance of the audience participation in irony. He declares that

The ironist leaves much for the audience to do; they must make his truth their own by reacting against what he appears to mean, so that his purpose in saying something other than what he means is not to deceive with a lie, but to awaken to a truth.

(1979: 8)

The secrecy and implicitness characteristic of irony betray a minimum degree of alliance between the ironist and the audience whenever communication is successfully carried on. This alliance springs from the capacity of the latter to recover what is left unsaid by the former, that is, the ability to recognise the existence of both an attributed opinion or thought and a dissociative attitude towards it. It is in this way that irony brings the participants together in a "secret communion" in Booth's (1974) terms. However, while this process might lead to the creation of a feeling of solidarity between the ironist and the audience, a sense of exclusion can be generated towards the marginalised party which constitutes the subject of irony. The means by which these associative/inclusive and dissociative/exclusive properties of irony (Kaufer 1977, 1981; Myers 1977) operate are discussed in the following sections. The question of intimacy that Cooper (1985) examines in relation to metaphor proves equally insightful

for the description of the reason underlying the use of irony. It will be discussed in connection with the associative/inclusive function of irony.

### 3.2.1. A Dissociative/Exclusive Practice

The second main component in Sperber and Wilson's definition of irony after attribution is that of dissociation. They ascribe it to all ironic utterances and consider it a major purpose for communicating ironically. This point, however, needs to be balanced by the acknowledgement of the equally important associative property of irony that is considered essential to its existence here. The dissociative character of irony has also been discussed by several other scholars (Kaufer 1977, 1981, 1985; Myers 1977; Booth 1974) and seems to operate at two levels. The first is a dissociation from an originator, possible or actual, to whom the utterance is to be attributed and this constitutes the basic way in which irony can be dissociative. The second concerns the members of an audience who because they fail to recognise that irony is at work - or for any of the reasons mentioned below by Muecke (1969) - can turn into victims or third parties from whom the ironist is seeking distance and dissociation.

Irony is thus capable of polarising participants who are led astray by the ironist and/or are themselves the subject of irony. An exemplification of such practices is provided in Mc Kee (1974) who bases his study of irony in the Augustan novel on the existence of three presences in the ironical situation: that of an ironist, that of an observer, and that of a victim. He makes it clear, moreover, that it is "not the presence of an ironist or that of an observer which is essential to irony, but that of a victim" (1974: 102). Although this statement might be arguable, since in intended verbal irony the ironist remains the initiator of the operation as a whole and the victim is only turned into one by the ironist, it is worth recognising the centrality of the presence of an object against which the irony is to be directed. Focusing on literary irony, Mc Kee stretches the meaning of victim to include "those whose only protection from discomfiture is ignorance of the way in which their perspectives are or will be invalidated" (1974: 103). It is against this victim that the ironist works and will attempt to gain the

audience's support and constitute an "observer-ironist confederacy" by manipulating the reader into a lack of sympathy with the victim. At times, however, it is the observer (the audience) itself who will be victimised. "The victimisation of the reader ... is finally intended as a way of bringing the reader closer to the truth about himself" (1974: 2). McKee shows that this can be achieved in two ways: either through the manipulation of the information presented to the reader (information-withholding), or through the interference with the reader's capacity to recode the presented information (context-withholding). A great deal of effort is required of the reader to avoid the traps prepared for him or her by the writer as the narrative proceeds. Alertness and experience are necessary for the reader but not sufficient to guarantee him or her a complete confederacy with the ironist. In the same way, Wayne Booth states that

Successful reading of irony depends on reserves of tact and experience and even wisdom that are likely at any moment to prove lacking in any of us, and yet irony offers special temptations to our weaknesses, especially our pride.

(1974: 44)

Missing irony whether it is written or spoken therefore separates the person from the ironist and causes him or her to be seen as a victim of the irony. Within Muecke's (1969) classification of victims, this constitutes only one way in which one can fall victim to irony. His typology is more complex and involves "passive" victims as it were. It comes as follows: there are

I-Those who, strictly speaking, are objects of irony:

a-those to whom one speaks ironically

b-those of whom one speaks ironically

II-Those who are in an ironic situation without knowing it:

a- those unable to recognize they have been ironically addressed

b-those unable to recognize irony not directed against them

c-those unable to recognize that they are victims of circumstances or intrigue

d-those unable to recognize that their own words betray them.

III- People who know they are in an ironic situation.

(1969: 35-39)

Falling into any of the second type of situations constitutes the continual risk one runs in communication. One can turn into a victim of irony not because he or she holds a particular view that the ironist is undermining or ridiculing but simply because one fails to identify that irony is at work. Wrong context selection or failure to perceive something within a larger context leads to the wrong choice of interpretation. It might consequently cause one to become a victim of irony, *by default* as it were, as opposed to one that is victimised from the outset by getting his or her opinions or stances implicitly echoed by the ironist. The victimisation of this marginalised type of audience springs from the fact that its "attitude and knowledge of the message" (Kaufer 1981: 503) is closer to that of the original victim than it is to that of the ironist. This of course explains why it fails to see the irony as anything but a case of use or description: it is either ignorant of the possible inadequacy and therefore relativity of the utterance or it simply subscribes to its validity. To be aware of the echoic character assigned to it by the ironist would have required that this audience share at least some of the assumptions inherent in his or her cognitive environment. This would have allowed it to trace the ironist's steps and actively participate in re-creating the ironic meaning. Failure to do so indicates some incompatibility between the two participants. It might even be a serious indication of their differences, if not because they belong to different social or cultural groups at least because they hold different views on the subject of the irony. Perceiving irony, however, is not always a proof of the opposite situation, that is that the addressee agrees on the evaluation or comment proposed by the ironist. It can merely show, as will be pointed out below, that the addressee shares with the ironist enough common ground or cognitive environment in order to recognise the duplicity of the utterance.

### 3.2.2. An Associative/Inclusive Practice

The dissociative aspect of irony is usually accompanied by an associative one that brings the ironist and some members of the audience together. This element which complements Sperber and Wilson's account of irony is important for ironic

communication and to a large extent warrants its dissociative capacity. Irony can unite participants and reinforce their sense of group adherence through relying on the distancing from another group. It might thus be seen as activating and nurturing the potential for the "us against them" tendency that can contribute to the continual formation and dissolution of social groups. Hence, perhaps, the proclaimed elitism of irony observed by Booth (1974).

It has already been argued above that expressing unfavourable attitudes through irony can spare embarrassment to the hearers if they are supporters of what is being criticised and might lead them to re-evaluate their own attitudes. They might be drawn to the ironist's position in response to the "faith" that he or she places in them by "confiding" in them, recognising their intelligence and similar values, and indirectly criticising other parties in their presence. It is thus that irony can generate a sense of solidarity and camaraderie between the ironist and the audience. By understanding the ironist's message, the audience proves the existence of a complicity reflecting a certain common background and knowledge binding them together around the covert communication. Hence, by addressing people in order to make comments about others, the ironist assumes or presupposes their alliance and entente (Kaufer, 1981, 1977; Myers, 1977). This might be an indication of and an incitement towards the activation of a feeling of inclusiveness and solidarity between them.

It may, moreover be the case that the silent acquiescence of an ironist's addressees can serve as a safe cover against shifting roles with the victim of the irony in case they are supporters of the object of ridicule. It can allow them to avoid (openly) admitting their ignorance or allegiance to a stance that is being proved inferior and open to criticism. In a way, this shows tact on the part of the ironist since he or she saves their faces and spares them the discomfort resulting from an open confrontation or a statement criticising their position.

It is noticeable that the covert nature of irony can have the virtue of saving embarrassment and even persecution for the utterer of an attitude or a judgement in

cases where not everybody is in accord with the content of the irony. Because of its duplicitous nature, that is, the fact that any sentence can be ironical while adhering to the Politeness Principle and still retaining the same vocabulary and syntax as when it is straightforward, irony can serve as a safeguard to its utterer as doubt can easily be cast on its meaning if necessary. Suppose, therefore, that Joe is the boss of the speaker. If he accidentally overhears "Of course, Joe is a genius," his reaction, if he detects the irony, will certainly not be very advantageous to the speaker's career. He might remember him at the time of the next promotion or might do his best to get him sacked. But, in case the boss decides to ask the speaker for an explanation, then the latter can simply deny the allocation of any extra meaning to his utterance. He could hold to the same words he uttered and still be safe and could even start accusing other people of trying to spoil his relationship with the boss by misquoting him, or putting words in his mouth and so on. In this example, the suspicion of irony is of course not instigated by the contents of the message itself (alone). It rather reflects an already existing discordance or animosity between the two men allowing the hearer to question the value of what is being said about him. This questioning becomes even more acute if the hearer is in doubt about himself or if the utterance he overhears sounds too exaggerated in the situation.

As was pointed out in Part A (3.5.2.) above, the alliance generated between the ironist and some of the members of the audience over sharing the understanding of the irony is however not always complete. For it is possible for an audience to understand irony and thus show cooperation and a common background with the ironist, and yet not agree with it (Kaufer 1981). A racist joke, for instance, is a type of ironic message that can be successfully processed but not necessarily appreciated or subscribed to by the audience. In such cases, the associative function of irony is only apparently at work. In this case, it might perhaps be more accurate to talk about a *rapport* rather than an association or inclusiveness since the effect on the audience could be totally contradictory. Contempt or resentment could override the merely ephemeral and

superficial sense of communion resulting from the act of comprehension. The sharing is thus by no means conditional of agreement and irony can eventually elicit dissociation instead of association from its audience.

Irony can, however, be seen as associative and inclusive in a more basic and overwhelming way. In fact, these interpersonal properties which can equally be described in terms of intimacy in Cooper's (1986) words, can be regarded as the *raison d'être* of a lot of irony. They are present, it might be argued, when every other function of irony is absent. That is, irony achieves this function or effect as a natural result of its use and as a basic primary outcome of it. This can be compared to what is commonly described as "phatic communion" expressions. The same phenomenon can be seen at work in the use of irony at a bus stop when a speaker utters "Beautiful day!" on a rainy day as in the allusion to Tolstoy's opening of *Anna Karénina* in Joan Didion's article examined in Ch. III. Both basically intend to establish some ties with their addressees at the expense of other parties who are indirectly evoked and ridiculed through the irony. The sense of intimacy in such cases is at its minimum since it brings the interlocutors together only over a minute common point residing in their agreeing on a particular fact and their exclusion of another party who does not. This relationship might more accurately be described in terms of *rapport* rather than *intimacy*, where the word "rapport" reflects and emphasises the ability to understand each other, and what that symbolises in social terms, without further commitment to what is to ensue from this act of understanding.

### 3.3. Summary

To sum up then, despite all measures of cautiousness, this "audience bifurcation" as Kaufer (1977) calls it, with its inclusive/exclusive, associative/dissociative functions, remains a significant outcome as well as a risk accompanying the use of irony. The ambivalence and uncertainty which are essential to the nature of irony are to a great extent responsible for encouraging the subjectivity of the interpreter to operate, possibly leading him or her into unequivocal fallacious

interpretations: instead of standing above the irony, the interpreter is led astray and falls victim to it. The line separating what qualifies for irony and what does not is not unequivocal: it is simply a thin one if it exists at all. Muecke (1969) illustrates the potential resemblance identified between ironist and victim (alluding it seems to the *Mona Lisa*) by pointing to

the curious fact that a portrait of someone smiling, but not smiling at anything presented in or implied by the portrait, may be interpreted either as a portrait of someone smiling ironically or as an ironical portrait of someone smiling with foolish self-satisfaction.

(1969: 229)

The only "corrective" for engaging in misinterpretation of written ironies, says Furst (1984: 20), resides in "constant attention to the text itself." Alertness and attentiveness to what is uttered as well as its interaction with all the contextual clues present (whether of the internal or external type) are factors that are capable of exempting an interpreter from being led astray by irony and allowing him or her to enjoy the privileged status of being the ironist's "confederate."

#### 4. Conclusion

Irony, this intricate form of covert communication that relies on what is left unsaid has been approached by Sperber and Wilson in a way that reflects concerns and emphases different from those of the more traditional semantic and pragmatic approaches to the subject. While these approaches focus mainly on the oppositeness and contradiction relationships existing between what is said and what is meant by an ironical utterance, Sperber and Wilson consider the focus of irony to be the attitude which is maintained by an addresser towards the utterance at hand - an attitude that emphasises the addresser's detachment from what is uttered and therefore the fact that what is uttered is to be attributable to someone else. Determining whether irony is at work remains to be done in accordance with the principle of relevance, which, in turn, is measured in terms of effort expenditure as it relates to the contextual effects achieved by a given utterance. Among the advantages of this approach is that it corrects the scope of what falls under the category irony by excluding other phenomena which were

encompassed by some of the previous approaches and including others that were marginalised by restrictive definitions. This approach, thus, establishes irony as a form of communication which is governed by the same principles as other forms of communication that are not readily recognisable as "figures of speech" (e.g., report of speech) as well as with others which are (e.g., parody, allusion, pastiche). This helps both to demythologise it and to treat it as a normal rather than a deviant form of communication which is substitutable and paraphrasable. This change in focus equally helps establish closer links with phenomena from which it was traditionally separated (e.g., intertextuality) while detaching it from others to which it was readily linked (e.g., metaphor).

It has also been argued in this chapter that this explanation of the workings of irony, that is the "what" and "how" of irony, need to be complemented by a consideration of its socio-pragmatics, that is of its "why" question. In a study of irony in discourse, it is necessary to go beyond the recognition stage and examine the possible effects generated by its use. A pragmatics of irony as put forward here needs not only to explain what irony is and how it works but also what its effects are. Stopping at the level of definition is excluding and ignoring elements that are essential for coming to terms with this type of communication. The notion of politeness in particular stands out as a necessary cover to irony as demonstrated by the various studies of this phenomenon. Irony, furthermore, can be seen to involve the question of power as the attitude of an ironist towards the ironised opinion and the person and group of persons it represents is always, to a certain extent, one of superiority if only in the sense of being capable of appropriating someone else's discourse in order to supersede it. The ironic utterance, therefore, reflects, by its very existence, the manipulation which it has undergone in order to satisfy the ironist's purpose from the interaction (e.g., criticism, humour).

As a consequence of the use of irony, the interpersonal relations of the participants in the interaction both absent or present, can be affected in one of two

ways. The ironist ties an associative/inclusive relationship with the participants who are to be considered his or her confederates and who agree with or at least understand the irony. At the same time, a dissociative/exclusive relationship is established with the participants who are the object of the irony or those who fail to perceive it. This aspect which is related to the economical form of communication that it is, constitutes to a large extent the *raison d'être* of irony itself and might explain the reasons for choosing it over more direct forms of conveying the same meaning.

The factors concerning the communication of irony outlined above are readily applicable to simple one-to-one discourse situations. If irony is to be considered in the context of literary discourse, these factors, although still applicable in principle and in simple exchanges, will have to be modified or at least adjusted in order to satisfy the extra requirements dictated by the more complex communicative situation. The component of the definition which is related to the echoic, duplicitous aspect of utterances can be treated in relation to intertextuality and the very stratified nature of literary discourse itself as will be demonstrated in the next three chapters. This component will still be investigated further in the rest of this study, but particularly as it relates to the covert communication of the evaluative attitude in narrative fiction. The manipulation of the structure of the narrative, both in its report of events and report of speech in order to communicate irony, is a rich art of discreet comment. This manipulation serves to shape other aspects of the narrative namely its theme and characterisation, as will be argued in the last two chapters. Characterisation, particularly shows the way in which the inclusive/exclusive and associative/dissociative aspects of irony can be put to use among the participants of the fictional world.

The theme of the next two chapters, intertextuality, plays a double role in connection with this study of irony. First, it warrants the very notion of irony itself by providing the theoretical background which explains the potential for its existence as a category based on echoic interpretation, both at the utterance level and on the wider discourse level.

Second, it helps situate it among other linguistic forms of communication and explains and legitimises the way in which it functions again both at the level of the utterance and the level of discourse in general. Various other issues like the functions of comment and metatextuality, the notions of recontextualisation and re-attribution, and the attempt to answer the question concerning the different types of ironic intertext, judged relevant at this stage, are also explored in the following two chapters.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Irony and Intertextuality**

#### **1. Introduction**

An important insight of Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony is the potential it provides for reclassifying this phenomenon among concepts like parody, allusion, burlesque and other practices whose intertextual character has been more readily recognised. Assuming that irony consists of the echoing of real or possible thoughts or utterances implicates an a priori real or possible existence of these thoughts or utterances. This, in turn, can legitimise the treatment of irony in terms of intertextuality, although the question of intertextuality itself constitutes one of the richest and most complex phenomena, attracting a large amount of research from various fields.

Accordingly, this chapter will consist of two main sections. It will first include a review of the main approaches and types of intertextuality identified and devised by different scholars in various disciplines, in an attempt to pinpoint the common argument that underlies their preoccupation with this aspect of language. Second, it will argue in favour of the possibility of a rapprochement between irony as Sperber and Wilson present it, and these approaches, with a short reference to its analogy to and difference from other types of intertextuality, especially parody. The aim of this second part will be, furthermore, to situate and legitimise the echoic approach to irony within the intertextuality framework as a background and within a larger view of discourse.

#### **2. Intertextuality**

The recognition of the importance of various contextual dimensions in the interpretation of literary (and other) texts has undermined the importance previously granted to their assumed autonomous, non-referential properties. The inclusion of context into the scene, through pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistic and political approaches to literature, has made way for the recognition of several factors

which were totally ignored in the other approaches that emphasise the insulated nature of texts. Hence, the re-treatment of historical and generic considerations on the one hand, and the emphasis on the role of the reader on the other, as essential components in the contextualisation of a text - which is itself a major step towards its interpretation - have allowed bringing to the fore the intertextual qualities of texts. That is, the recognition that texts do not exist in isolation from each other or beyond the potential available for the manipulation of the language.

The recognised relationship a text has to others of a similar tradition or genre and to an already existing body of knowledge thus comes to threaten the valued assumptions of authenticity and originality traditionally granted to literary texts. Such assumptions are in fact undermined through the recognition of the influence of other previously existing texts or bodies of knowledge in shaping any particular new text. The question of authenticity and originality of a work of art are no longer the only valid criteria for its evaluation. They are to be seen as no more than illusions and idealisations nourished by people striving for transcendence over what is established and already there. These illusions of idiosyncrasy are damaged in an age where standardisation and massive communication have the strongest grip on a major part of what constitutes creativity. Judging literary works as unique, self-contained wholes, that is, disregarding the components that they incorporate and that indicate their awareness of other works, of the conventions and traditions in which they occur etc., can lead to interpretations that are misinformed and restricted to say the least. As Michel Foucault points out,

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

(cited in Hutcheon, 1988: 127)

The concept of intertextuality, a relatively recent coinage in literary studies, equally preoccupies a variety of related disciplines. Some of the main and most relevant treatments of intertextuality are presented and discussed in the next section.

### 3. Types of Intertextuality

Establishing the rule of intertextuality in the treatment of literary texts has taken at least two main directions: the first considers intertextuality a property of texts and the second considers it as a property of the interpreter. The latter approach advocated by David Birch (1989) believes intertextuality to be a reading process. It rejects the notions of autonomy of texts and the primacy of their writers and emphasises, instead, the "struggle of readers, to produce dynamic meanings" (1989: 261). The readers should rather be seen as relating the text to their "own experience of language and reality by actually constructing the text through and with" their "own intertextual experiences" (1989: 260). Insightful as it might be, this approach, by entirely confining the notion of intertextuality to the experiences of the readers, disregards the essential textual basis of this phenomenon - the view that has been emphasised by the first direction mentioned above. The multiple facets of this view which have been treated from various perspectives by various scholars and disciplines are examined immediately below.

#### 3.1. The Question of Influence

The question of influence discussed by Harold Bloom stresses the shortcomings of an approach to literature that disregards context and highlights the importance of earlier poetic texts in the formation of new ones. He says in *Poetry and Repression* that

Few notions are more difficult to dispel than the "commonsensical" one that a poetic text is self-contained, that it has an ascertainable meaning or meanings without reference to other poetic texts ... Unfortunately, poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and those words refer to still other words, and so on into the densely populated world of literary language. Any poem is an inter-poem, and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading.

(1976: 2-3)

Hence, influence for Bloom constitutes a form of family relationship between the new poem and its predecessors. He says in *The Anxiety of Influence* that "Every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem. A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety" (1973: 94). A shift from texts to persons starts to be noticeable at

this stage as the anxiety to which Bloom refers is that of the poets in their struggle to overcome their predecessors. He says that "True poetic history is the story of how poets as poets have suffered other poets" (1973: 94). He adds elsewhere that

A poetic "text," as I interpret it, is not a gathering of signs on a page, but is a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the victory worth winning, the divinatory triumph over oblivion.  
(1976: 2)

This focus on the author and his struggle for assertion in the tradition and the tracing back of everything new to some powerful precursor seems to fall outside the textual boundaries of intertextuality proper and rather tends towards research devoted to the identification of origins - a task that might be possible in certain cases but one that is easily frustrated when the origins are not readily identifiable.

### 3.2. Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes

The vagueness of the notion of influence and its shortcomings can be compared to the definition of intertextuality proposed by the French (post) structuralists and semioticians who go to the opposite extreme by claiming the absolute interpenetrability of discourses and asserting the textual basis of intertextuality. Barthes (1971: 229, cited in Culler 1981) asserts that "the quotations of which a text is made are anonymous, untraceable, and nevertheless already read [déjà lu]." They are seen as something that "has already been read, seen, done, experienced" (Barthes, 1974: 20).

This citational quality Barthes assigns to discourse and that Derrida throughout his work proclaims to rule all language is also adopted by Julia Kristeva. Considered the coiner of the concept, she talks of discourse as "a mosaic of quotations ... citations and echoes" (Kristeva, 1980: 66) and asserts that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts" (Kristeva, 1969: 146). In her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva defines intertextuality as "this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (1984: 159-60). She objects, however, to the use of the word intertextuality and says that

since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources," we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation

of the thetic - of enunciative and denotative positionality.

(1984: 60)

She then emphasises the plurality of language and adds that

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way, polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence - an adherence to different sign systems.

(1984: 60)

It is worth noting that Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is a reworked, synthesised version of Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia developed in the thirties but appearing in English translation only within the last two decades.

### 3.3. Dialogism: Polyphony, Heteroglossia and Hybridisation

Kristeva's singling out of this plurality and the blending of at least two signifying systems as characteristics of all signification can be traced back to the assumption of dialogism and polyphony that Bakhtin assigns to all discourse but to that of the novel in particular. He says that

language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others.

(1981: 294)

He traces the dialogic nature of language down to the word asserting that "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (1981: 279). What is present thus evokes, in one way or another, what is absent: that to which it is related or which it builds on. Prose discourse, in all its forms (quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly), Bakhtin asserts,

cannot fail to be oriented toward the "already uttered," the "already known," the "common opinion" and so forth. The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse. It is the natural orientation of *any* living discourse.

(1981: 279)

He further claims that

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist - or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about

it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents.

(1981: 276)

Other notions pointed out by Bakhtin in his study of the discourse of the novel which emphasise this interplay between several elements present or evoked in one utterance correspond to what he calls polyphony (plurality of voice), heteroglossia (intermingling of language varieties) and hybridisation. The latter notion in particular consists of the co-existence of different discourses in one utterance. Bakhtin describes it as

a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of one utterance, between two linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.

(1981: 258)

He claims that these properties are most favoured by the discourse of the novel as opposed to poetic discourse which tends towards what he calls monologism. A writer, according to him, has to be aware of the multiplicity of voices that exist in his environment so that he can play them against each other and mingle them with his own voice in creating the world of his novel. The comic novels and satires, especially, provide an ultimate exemplification of this type of writing in which a story is to be reconstructed and where evaluations and values are not given but need to be constantly extracted and reassessed. A writer has the privilege of indirect speech, Bakhtin claims. With all the freedom of language manipulation that a writer enjoys, it becomes clear why Bakhtin considers the novel the dialogic genre *par excellence*. The best instantiation of this property can be found in the construction he describes as "hybrid" and which seems to resemble to a large degree what has come to be known as Free Indirect Discourse (FID). He says that

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems. We repeat there is no formal-compositional and syntactic-boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems, the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence.

(1981: 205)

Although FID may be recognisable from its formal components, it is often the case that its identification is reached through other means (cf. Pascal 1977), which qualifies it for falling under Bakhtin's more general category of hybrid constructions. This dialogic aspect of language that he singles out, moreover, offers a view of language that reinforces its social properties. Confining this aspect to the discourse of the novel however is rather restrictive. Poetry, as will be demonstrated below through the analysis of Roger Mc Gough's "The Jogger's Song," can also be highly dialogic.

#### 3.4. Gérard Genette: Transtextuality

The relations existing between these different voices and elements in the discourse of the novel have been explored more globally and within a larger scope by Gérard Genette in his *Palimpsestes* (1982) where he undertakes to identify the relations that might exist between a text and other texts. He labels this phenomenon transtextuality or textual transcendence of a text and defines it roughly as "tout ce qui le [le texte] met en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes." (1982: 7) While focusing in this study on "hypertextuality," which is the type of relationship in which a text B is grafted on a text A for purposes other than commenting on it (1982: 11-12), Genette singles out four other types of transtextuality.

The first type corresponds to what is generally recognised as intertextuality which he defines in terms of an (effective) co-presence relation between two or several texts (1982: 8). He further refers to Michael Riffaterre's treatment of intertextuality and points out the width of its scope and its proximity to what he (Genette) calls transtextuality.

The second type encompasses the relationship a text has with what Genette calls its "paratexte," which consists of the title, the subtitle, prefaces, epigraphs, illustrations, etc. or all the elements that form an environment for and sometimes a commentary on the text itself (1982: 9).

The third type is what Genette labels "architextualité." It consists of a relation that is "tout à fait muette" expressed at most by a taxonomic classification through either

the title (e.g. *Essays*) or the identification accompanying the title (e.g. Novel, Poems) on the cover page (1982: 10).

The fourth type of transtextuality which is called "metatextualité" often consists of a relationship of commentary between two texts, in which one speaks of the other without necessarily quoting or referring to it. This metatextual relation can be considered essentially of a critical nature. It can be argued that a great majority of postmodernist and metafictional fiction writing possess this property which, in turn, grants them their ironic character. A great deal of their meaning is concerned with undermining a number of fiction writing conventions like linear temporal organisation, for instance (as in works like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*).

Despite this distinction between these five types of transtextuality, Genette insists on their textual character and on the fact that they are highly interwoven. He says that

Leurs relations sont au contraire nombreuses, et souvent décisives. Par exemple, l'architextualité générique se constitue presque toujours, historiquement, par voie d'imitation (Virgile imite Homère ...) et donc d'hypertextualité; l'appartenance architextuelle d'une oeuvre est souvent déclarée par voie d'indices paratextuels; ces indices eux-mêmes sont des amorces de métatexte ("ce livre est un roman"), et le paratexte, préfaciel ou autre, contient bien d'autres formes de commentaire..."

(1982: 14)

Genette's position thus offers a more global and yet detailed perspective on inter-textuality, in the sense of the possible relationships that a text might maintain with others, which allows for a more systematic and more orderly investigation of the various categories it delineates.

### 3.5. Discourse Studies Perspective

The above varied approaches to intertextuality have been paralleled by a number of approaches undertaken in the field of discourse studies. The ones considered here are presented mainly by Lemke (1985), Hatim and Mason (1990), and de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). Several aspects of intertextuality have been highlighted by these approaches. Emphasis has especially been placed on the corpus of knowledge and

belief systems that need to be referred to in the text itself. This field approximates to a large degree what Genette has called "architextualité" and consists in establishing some rules and criteria according to which every text can be classified in relation to a certain category of texts which it recalls and with which it shares some textual or functional characteristics.

What is recognised as "text," which comes closest to Genette's architextuality category, thus consists of the relation a text has with the genre to which it is attributed - a relation that is implicit and generally determined by the audience of the text and not by the text itself (Genette, 1982: 11).

Knowledge of these characteristics is important both for the production and the reception or interpretation of any given text because of the expectations of understanding it arouses in the participants in the interaction. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 182) suggest that the application of this knowledge can be described, in its varying degrees, in terms of "mediation." They thus define mediation as "the extent to which one feeds one's current beliefs and goals into the model of the communicative situation." Activating knowledge of other texts in the process of production or interpretation of a given text might, however, be of varying degrees. Mediation, they argue, is greater when the temporal distance and the "processing activities" between the text at hand and the previously encountered texts are great. The result of this kind of mediation is usually noticeable in the identification of a variety of text types or genres "expected to have certain traits for certain purposes." When quotes or references are made to particularly well-known texts, as in the case of literary works, lesser mediation is believed to be at work. The slightest mediation is encountered, however, in "activities such as replying, refuting, reporting, summarising, or evaluating other texts, as we find them especially in CONVERSATION" (1981: 182).

These degrees of mediation have been treated differently by Hatim and Mason (1990: 124) under the category "active-passive intertextuality." Whenever an intertextual reference encompassing knowledge and belief systems beyond the text itself is made, active intertextuality is at work. Intertextuality may be passive, however, they

further argue, when it amounts "to little more than the basic requirement that texts be internally coherent (i.e., intelligible)." The reiteration of items in a text, for instance, cannot therefore be disregarded as random and insignificant. It should, instead, be considered as motivated and thus fulfilling some function in the shaping of the general effect of the text.

Another approach that treats the different types of intertextuality has been undertaken by Lemke (1985). He establishes two types of intertextual relationship which, while being similar to the active-passive distinction, go beyond it and also touch on Beaugrande and Dressler's three types of mediation. Lemke first recognises the importance of intertextuality and defines it in a general manner.

*Intertextuality* is an important characteristic of the use of language in communities. The meanings we make through texts, and the ways we make them, always depend on the currency in our communities of other texts we recognise as having certain definite kinds of relationship with them: generic, thematic, structural, and functional. Every text, the discourse of every occasion, makes sense in part through implicit and explicit relationships of particular kinds to other texts, to the discourse of other occasions.

(1985: 275)

Lemke proceeds to draw a distinction between two types of intertextual relationship. First, one that holds between distinct texts, and second, one that holds between the components of one particular text. He, however, suggests that both types can be considered as being governed by the same principles. He says,

When yesterday's argument is resumed today, we are inclined to speak in terms of the relationship of two discourses, two texts; but when the argument of ten minutes ago is renewed, we may talk in terms of two episodes of a single discourse. It may well be that the same kinds of relationships exist both across stretches of "a" text and between "distinct" texts.

(1985: 276)

Lemke further suggests that this view of intertextuality has implications for the study of discourse and its functions in relation to other discourses, as well as the study of

its contribution to systems of discourse relationships (and non-relationships) that may sustain significant social ideologies, and its use of text-forming devices that can be characterised in general terms that unite them with the ways we tie texts with one another.

(1985: 276)

#### 4. Intertextual Reference and the Link with Irony

The different approaches to intertextuality outlined above seem to share a common emphasis on and concern for going beyond the actual text and referring to external belief systems and to knowledge of other previously encountered texts in the process of interpretation. This property of discourse has thus attracted attention from various disciplines which have attempted each from its own perspective to provide some explanation and account of its workings. Intertextuality, transposition, transtextuality, mediation, dialogism, heteroglossia, and polyphony are highly comparable notions that designate approximately the same phenomenon as it is perceived by semioticians, linguists and poeticsians. Whether it is to be measured or defined in terms of mediation, or in terms of activity or passivity, or intertextual versus intratextual relationships, the concern for the study of intertextuality reflects a common ground linking these disciplines in their disposition towards the nature of discourse. They all recognise its placement within a network of other discourses on which it heavily relies both for its construction and no less for its interpretation. At a more restricted level, every single utterance is thus expected to contain a duplicity or a multiplicity of voices blended within it. Voices to which it points out and should lead to in the search for meaning. The recovery of the relationship each voice maintains with the others on or with which it is grafted, however, is of a crucial importance for reaching an adequate interpretation. Recognising the type of attitude that the communicator is willing to transmit with the intertextual reference is crucial for the perception of its role or function in the text. It consequently outlines its overall contribution to the meaning of the text.

It is the recognition of the openness of the text and, furthermore, its multilayered external reference which provide an ideal ground for the definition Sperber and Wilson propose of irony; these characteristics legitimise its treatment in terms of intertextuality. The duplicitous property of ironic utterances and their echoic nature readily qualifies them for classification among the intertextual practices and helps their analysis in those terms. Besides, the emphasis on the body of knowledge (whether

linguistic, textual, social, literary, or historical etc.) that the reader brings to the text and draws upon in his or her attempt towards reaching a plausible interpretation, which is assumed to constitute to a large degree the functions of intertextuality, is equally essential for irony. On the other hand, the text ( or the verbal stimulus in Sperber and Wilson's terms) and its interaction with the reader's and the communicator's shared cognitive environment crucial for the interpretation of irony seems to fall in line with the interaction between the textual and cognitive elements required in intertextuality. In this way, as Hutcheon observes:

intertextuality replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself. A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its readers. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance.

(1988: 126)

It is this notion of a prior existence of all discourse that legitimises the treatment of irony as a sub-category of intertextuality. The recognition of the link tying all discourse to other discourses that have already occurred gives more credibility to the treatment of irony in terms of echoic interpretation. In fact, my argument here is that the echoic element which has raised most of the criticism against this approach can be better explained in the light of this intertextual view of discourse. Perceiving the echoic component of irony in terms other than identical repetition of what has been uttered previously can be a first significant outcome of this perspective on discourse. What makes the ironic echo is the possible implicit attribution of the thought or utterance it holds to some actual or potential person or group of people or something as general as a cultural norm, as Sperber and Wilson claim. It "can range," as Dell Hymes (1987: 296) points out, "from response to something just said to response to, or evocation of something more remote, including an imputed thought or an implicit norm." Only a recognition of the intricate network that links past, present and future discourses can warrant such a view of irony. No utterance is to be examined in isolation from the host of others that have come before it and the infinity of others that are to follow it and to which it can claim some form of parenthood. Each utterance is triggered and is capable

of triggering a number of others each time it is used. Hymes (1987: 300) further explores the notion of "echoic" in accordance with this particular framework: he goes to the extent of claiming that the echoic "ingredient" "may be an implicit comparison of perspectives, a comparison of a present situation to another possibility in which what is said might be said, a possibility perhaps in the future."

It is only through the expansion of the concept "echoic" within a context that recognises the importance of intertextuality in all communication that the approach to irony as treated by Sperber and Wilson can claim validity. The essentially indexical character of discourse, its continuous pointing towards others and its constant dialogue with them is what allows phenomena like verbal irony to exist. It is nourished by this constant reference to a comparison among discourses, each building on the other, appropriating it and thus manipulating it in order to produce a different effect. Its feeding and building on other texts or utterances is therefore what gives ground for the creativity and newness of all discourse and what accounts at the same time for its eventual interpretability. The textual basis of a lot of what is transmitted as knowledge is thus emphasised and brought to the surface through this recognition of intertextuality. As Hutcheon (1988) points out, talking about historiographic metafiction,

The reader is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of the inescapably discursive form of that knowledge.

(1988: 127)

It might be argued at this stage that this rapprochement between intertextuality and irony can have a variety of other implications for both phenomena. The highly economical nature of ironical utterances consisting in meaning much more than what is said, and proceeding from what is known to communicate more by means of it can, for instance, be considered generally true of all intertextual utterances as well. For by concentrating a variety of codes of signification within a single utterance, a greater number of contextual implications can be achieved. This processing effort thus becomes comparatively limited. Hence, both factors contribute to satisfying the

principle of relevance. Therefore, by evoking one or more absent texts without necessarily quoting them directly in the host text, intertextuality as a superordinate practice, proves to be a highly economical and effective manner of communication in much the same way as its subcategory, irony, is.

Three questions arise at this point as a result of this rapprochement. The first is concerned with what is to be considered a relevant intertext in a particular interaction and what is to be discarded as irrelevant, yielding no satisfactory contextual implications. The second question examines the types of relation that exist between the intertexts and the effects of the new environment on the intertextual reference, with particular emphasis on ironic intertexts. Finally, the third considers what role incongruity can play in the recognition of intertextuality and that of irony in particular. These three issues are tackled in the rest of this chapter.

#### 4.1. Relevant and Irrelevant Intertexts

Going back to Kristeva, it is clear that she assumes that the non-originality of texts is caused by their necessary implicit or explicit reliance on or transformation of previously experienced texts. An infinite number of intertexts might be postulated as contributing to their production and interpretation. If this is to be accepted, a problem arises concerning which of the intertexts involved is to contribute more effectively to the creation of meaning in the newly constructed text. Lemke (1985) points out that a key word or its synonym might be a relevant intertext linking the text at hand with the other texts in which it occurs. He claims that

Key words or their synonyms are likely to turn up in titles, summaries, abstracts, and classifications for information-retrieval purposes. Two texts that shared not just the same few key words, but the same title, or summary sentence or abstract might be even more likely to be relevant intertexts.  
(1985: 280)

He goes on to suggest a point that recalls the specifications of the echoes (the thought of a certain kind of person, of people in general or of a cultural norm) that Sperber and Wilson present of ironic utterances. He points out the elusiveness of the relevance of particular texts and claims that thematic fields running through a certain

number of texts might be a common enough link to constitute a background which participants can draw upon in interpreting a given text. He says,

But such a characterisation of texts must be relatively subtle, subtle enough to recognise shared themes even across the stylistic and metaphoric transformation of different genres, media, and role relationships of participants. For very often it is not a specific text or set of texts that is relevant, in the sense that these would be identifiable by participants, but an abstract thematic field or system of thematic relationships, which may be encountered in many texts, any sufficient subset of which enables participants, each with a different textual experience, to share meanings in terms of such a common thematic system.

(1985: 280)

Lemke further points out that the existence of similarities between texts permitting their classification under the same "abstract paradigmatic system," as well as the existence of any differences that assign them to different "roles in some syntagmatic structure, either of language or of social action generally, *may* be the basis for an intertextual relation between them" (1985: 281).

The problem remains, however, with the choice of which stretches of discourse are to be considered more important in the creation of meaning as well as how they can relate in order to create that meaning. According to Lemke, the greater the number of connections that can possibly be established between a text and other stretches of text, while effectively contributing to the creation of a coherent meaning, the more they can be considered to be related.

As for the types of relation that contribute to meaning creation for the participants, he first requires that the meanings support each other. Second, that they become more useful by leading to other important relationships with other stretches of text. In Lemke's parlance,

An isolated, *possible* relationship between stretches of text will be termed a *weak* relation, and the passages weakly related, until we find either, and hopefully both, that there are other relationships between the passages that support a coherent or stable meaning relation between them, making them *strongly* related, and/or that this same kind of relationship recurs between other passages in the text(s), so that we can consider it a strong or *foregrounded* kind of relationship in/between the text(s).

(1985: 282)

Determining the way these intertexts are formed is a question which derives from this possibility of choice of what is to be considered as relevant intertext. This point will be examined in the next chapter.

#### 4.2. The Relations and Functions of Intertexts

It is worth noting at this stage that the metaphor of palimpsests used to describe intertextual practices (Genette 1982, for instance) might be an illuminating start in the search for the way intertextuality, and consequently, in this case, irony function. The co-existence of more than one meaning in a single utterance, the one transparent enough to show the other(s) through and yet superseding it somehow, is what warrants the use of this metaphor. John Tittler (1984) investigating narrative irony in the Spanish American novel describes it in complementary terms. He says that

The single meaning of the ironical utterance has a forked, ramified quality. The literal meaning is not totally rejected or negated but rather partially effaced, leaving both literal and figurative senses to co-exist in suspension ... The significance of an ironical utterance, moreover, must always include the motives for being ironical in the first place. Like much of postmodern literature, irony underlines language's opacity and compels one to dwell at least as much on the signifier as on the signified, and on the enunciation as well as the enunciated.

(1984: 21-22)

A treatment of irony, and of intertextuality in general, should not stop, however, at this stage of the recognition of this duplicity. Intertextual references should be explored instead in terms of the contribution they make to their new environment as Hatim and Mason (1990) claim as well as in terms of the changes they undergo in the process of meaning creation.

According to Hatim and Mason, intertextual references are not arbitrary or gratuitous. They, on the contrary, must contribute to the "text function or the overall communicative purpose" (1990: 128). Every intertextual reference is to be modelled by its new context and to adopt new values which will, in turn, transform that context itself.

A propos of citation, Hatim and Mason (1990: 129) say that "Each intrusion of a citation in the text is the culmination of a process in which a sign travels from one text (source) to another (destination)." They call "intertextual space" the area in between the

two texts and claim that "It is in this space that sets of values attaching to the sign are modified. That is, the semiotic value of the source of the citation undergoes transformation in order to adjust to its new environment and, in the process, act upon it."

It might be possible, proceeding from this point not only to recognise the affinities this view has with Sperber and Wilson's treatment of irony in terms of echoic interpretation, but also possibly to generalise this view to the description of all intertextual practices. One intertext can accordingly be considered assimilated, whether implicitly or explicitly within another text and can consequently be subsumed by it. The actual existence or absence of quotation marks around the intertextual reference should not affect its "foreignness" to the text at hand. The fact that it echoes or refers to its source text, whether this source has existed in the form of an actual text or in the form of a latent opinion or a cultural norm, might be considered enough indication of its "intrusion" into a given text. While adapting to this text, the intertextual reference can perform the function for which it has been summoned. That can be one that is supportive of the text (backing it and helping with its credibility). It can be one that is discrediting to the intertext (pointing to its inappropriateness or superfluity in the new context and consequently ridiculing and rejecting it).

If these assumptions are true of intertextuality, irony in Sperber and Wilson's approach can be treated as one of its categories. For one result of this rapprochement is that it also draws on the textual basis for intertextuality and tends to assign it to irony as well. In fact, following the definition, a variety of intertexts are created for irony where the textual basis of the echo can be categorised into one actual type and one that is assumed (or imagined, or presupposed). Their scope might, as will be discussed below (C. III), range from lexical to textual components of a narrative.

Borrowing an utterance or a thought from another context and introducing it into a new one is thus not arbitrary or gratuitous for Sperber and Wilson either. It is instead pursued for the sake of expressing the speaker or writer's attitude towards that evoked thought or utterance. "In travelling from source to host text," moreover, as

Hatim and Mason (1990: 129) claim, "the intertextual sign undergoes substantial modification of its code of signification." It, in fact, becomes coloured by the new context onto which it is grafted and can start serving a host of attitudes towards it or towards itself. The attitudes expressed towards the intertext(s) might range from complete backing, support and approval to disapproval, scorn or mere ridicule.

Now proceeding in the opposite direction, that is from irony towards intertextuality, it is possible to argue that the inherently evaluative character of irony (Kaufer, 1981: 503) can be generalised to encompass the other intertextual practices as well. The detection of the type of attitude communicated towards the intertext or through its use might, however, be essential in (re-)creating its meaning. As Sperber and Wilson state,

From the pragmatic point of view, what is important is that a speaker can use an echoic utterance to convey a whole range of attitudes and emotions, ranging from outright acceptance and approval to outright rejection and disapproval, and that the recognition of these attitudes and emotions may be crucial to the interpretation process.

(1986: 240)

It is noticeable that the difference in the type of attitude expressed towards the intertext is one major difference between irony and parody, two intertextual practices sometimes referred to interchangeably. While in parody positive (e.g., Beerbohm of James) as well as negative attitudes can be communicated (Hutcheon 1985, Nash 1985), in irony, there is, almost always, even in comic uses of it, a negative, dissociative touch towards the intertext (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1986, 1989). For in irony, the intertext is automatically victimised through its very evocation in the new context. While the stance towards a parodic intertext might not be clear, that towards an ironic utterance is often predetermined. An ironic utterance is usually made to comment negatively on itself through its very presence in a context that makes it seem "false," "inappropriate," or "irrelevant" (Sperber and Wilson, 1981). The discourse of the speaker or writer, or their "sign system" in Kristeva's terms, is thus made to supersede the imputed one. It exerts its power over the intertext by domesticating it for its own purposes and accordingly modifying its meaning. The evoked discourse is

thus embedded in that of the utterer. It becomes a form of second-degree interpretation in Sperber and Wilson's terms and is used to serve the purposes of the utterer of the newly created text. Defining second-degree interpretation, Sperber and Wilson (1986: 238) say that

an utterance used as an interpretation of someone else's thought is always, in the first place, an interpretation of one's understanding of that other person's thought ... these interpretations, achieve relevance by informing the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what so-and-so said, and has a certain attitude to it: the speaker's interpretation of so-and-so's thought is relevant in itself. When interpretations achieve relevance in this way, we will say that they are *echoic* ...

(1986: 238)

As already pointed out above, the communication of the speaker's dissociation from the opinion echoed (intertext) and using it instead to show some degree of disapproval or disagreement is an inherent function of ironic utterances (Anne Cutler, 1974: 118; Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 236). It might accordingly be argued that the other intertextual practices satisfying the definition of second-degree interpretation utterances, are also used to express an evaluation or a judgement or some attitude of their utterer. The evocation of another text and grafting it on the one at hand cannot be a gratuitous act, as some extra cognitive effort is expected to be spent on its selection as well as on its recovery. It has to perform a certain function in the new context on which it is grafted to serve the purposes of the utterer in the interaction. Whether the intertext is praised or ridiculed or is discreetly and silently assimilated depends on the type of intertextuality adopted. It might therefore be eventually argued that intertextual practices in general can be subsumed under Sperber and Wilson's category of second-degree interpretation utterances since they display the same characteristics and functions that these utterances possess.

#### 4.3. Comment and Metatextuality

One of the important relationships existing between intertexts is that of comment, both for positive and negative functions. An intertext can play a metatextual role (cf. Genette's metatextuality mentioned above) by providing some approving or disapproving impression of a given text. Hence, irony is seen by Stewart (1978: 20)

as a form of meta-communication, "a communication that bears a message about the nature of communication." Some types of intertextuality can communicate both a negative as well as a positive message about discourse. A lot of parodies, contrary to the usually critical role assigned to the practice, are in fact composed to show admiration for a predecessor. As Nash states, "not all parody is hostile; many acts of literary caricature and burlesque show affectionate familiarity with the things they imitate, and are a form of positive criticism, of stylistic analysis, and ultimately of tribute" (1985: 82).

Allusion to previous works can establish a background against which writers can, apart from showing their learning and knowledge of a certain heritage or tradition, compare and relate their own present works to some preceding ones. They might seek support from them (since they have the advantage of temporal priority and credibility) or use them to show their own superiority. Tristram Shandy, for instance, to cite a classic example, alludes in Book I, Chapter X to Don Quixote ("the peerless knight de La Mancha") to whom he compares one of the characters he is describing in relation to his horse. Despite his apparent positive reference to the qualities the character has in common with Cervantes', the writer does not fail, however, to silently summon all the ridiculous aspects associated with the figure of the errant knight and his horse and transfer them through this comparison to his own character. More light is of course shed on Tristram's personality through his open praise (not excluding the possibility of an ironic hint) of Don Quixote. Another allusion is also made in Book I, chapter IX to Voltaire's *Candide* :

Bright Goddess [the moon],

If thou art not too busy with CANDID and Miss CUNEGUND's affairs, - take Tristram Shandy's under thy protection also.

Once again, this is a clear and simple allusion evoking a preceding literary work that is known for its wit and ironical quality. By comparing its characters with his own, the narrator creates a parallel between them. He consequently establishes the tone of his own narrative, on the one hand, and on the other, he directs the way its

interpretation should follow. He is of course once again excluding any readers who, because of their ignorance of the intertextual reference, fail to perceive the implications of such an open request on the manner in which the narrative (or rather anti-narrative) is to evolve and is accordingly to be interpreted.

Writers might also refer to elements in their own or others' previous writing. It might be to reinforce the illusion of fiction and eventually question it as when one of Gabriel García Márquez's characters from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is encountered again in *Love in the Time of Cholera* or when a character of Carlos Fuentes (Artemio Cruz) is recalled as a "companion of arms" to his own character Colonel Lorenzo Galiván (Kathleen McNerney, 1989: 44-45). It might also be used in an attempt to destroy the fiction/reality distinction so essential to narrative writing, as when one of his minor characters is identified with Joseph Conrad's real name: Konrad Korzeniowski.

An intertextual reference might also be used as part of a linguistic game of intermingled, distorted voices that recall more natural and established ones as when James Joyce produces a disguised version of the opening sentence of *A Portrait in Finnegans Wake*: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow ..." becomes "Eins within a space and a weary wide space it wast ere wohned a Mookse." This, of course, is an extreme case as voices can be mingled successfully while retaining their original forms. The distorted intertextual version in this instance occurs in what seems to be a blending of registers and voices in a passage that is apparently a caricature of a classroom session where a simple method of teaching (story-telling) is adopted to "facilitate" understanding.

Metatextual references with a negative comment, however, can perform an ironic function. The choice of the title *Ulysses* by Joyce, for instance, plays this role for the Odyssey of the modern hero by means of this simple "paratextual" allusion as Genette would describe it. Barthelme's *Snow White* and "Eugénie Grandet," for their part, are a concatenation of borrowed voices, authentic and distorted passages, clichés of realistic and popular American writing, attracting irony to their discourses by their

very existence as texts bearing those titles. The paratextual means accompanying them (titles, subtitles, illustrations etc.) reinforce the ridiculing purpose of the intertextual references.

In metatextual reference, it might not be clear whether the comment is directed toward an evoked text as such, that is the opinions it purports to have, or the change to which it has been subjected because of the passage of time and the change in values. In the latter case, its clichéd nature is what might lend it its more vulgarised form and use and that opens up its liability for ridicule. In the case of *Snow White*, the ideal relation in the woods between the young girl and the seven dwarfs is dislocated and reset in a twentieth century American flat. The story is saturated with clichés remaining from the fairy tale (e.g. the girl's "long ebony hair" and her "skin white as snow") dismantled and surrounded with clichés from modern American life and mass culture.

It might be argued that the ironic comment in this case is not directed against the constituent narrative techniques and "universal" themes of love versus hatred, good versus evil alone. These have been deconstructed and reassembled into a form that not only ridicules their very existence but occasionally robs them of meaning and highlights their absurdity in the present state of humanity (the American one in this case). This ironic comment might be seen to work, moreover, on a second level, touching on the clichés and stereotypes evoked and collaged to form a new guise. The weight of an awareness of a whole European and American cultural heritage (of a psychological, linguistic, sociological kind; the various techniques of various literary genres) is felt in the narrative (or rather the anti-narrative). An impatience and an irritation with this heritage are communicated through the alienating foregrounded manner in which they are incorporated and mixed with the constituents of the fairy tale. This impatience and weariness seem to constitute an important part of the theme of *Snow White*. They are summed up in a (frequently quoted) scene from part I of the novel where the woman declares openly her irritation with the over digested words and her longing for innovation and variation.

"OH I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear!" Snow White exclaimed loudly. We regarded each other sitting around the breakfast table with its big card-board boxes of "Fear," "Chix," and "Rats." Words in the world that were not the words she always heard? What words could those be? ... "Injunctions!" Bill said, and when he said that we were glad he was still our leader, although some of us had been wondering about him lately. "Murder and create!" Henry said, and that was weak, but we applauded, and Snow White said, "That is one I've never heard before ever," and that gave us courage, and we all began to say things, things that were more or less satisfactory, or at least adequate, to serve the purpose, for the time being.

The men's despairing attempts at creativity are ironically juxtaposed and consequently lost in the muddle of the vagueness of the flow of set expressions and dead metaphors of the narrator's discourse. This discourse also reflects the way the men are actually thinking (narrator included) since he uses the plural pronoun "we." That constitutes the discourse against which Snow White the character and the novel are protesting. The apparent, feeble success they achieve in creating something new is pathetically subsumed by the monopolising grip that standardised well-trodden ways of expression and thinking have on their minds. Their meagre efforts at innovation are ironically portrayed. They crash against their quintessentially clichéd, dull and empty linguistic habits ("Murder and create!" vs. "... more or less satisfactory, or at least adequate, to serve the purpose, for the time being ...") and the parodic language of commercialised products that populate and reflect their environment ("Fear," "Chix," and "Rats").

In the rest of the narrative, utterances from all registers and provenances are blended together into a piece that attracts attention to its verbal nature and by that token, silently and ironically comments upon itself. The intertextual universe constituting the novel is thus infinitely interwoven constantly reflecting on itself and on the multiple other intertexts to which it points.

#### 4.4. Incongruity and the Recognition of Intertextuality and Irony

Appropriateness seems to be a question that is tightly related to intertextuality not only in terms of its production alone but also in terms of its recognition. Being aware of what is appropriate and what is not might be enlarged to encompass all the

levels of discourse. At the lexical level as well as at the syntactic, textual and generic levels, expectations are formed about what is to be regarded as appropriate according to the knowledge available of the category or the level at hand. The various elements that form the context of an utterance constitute the ground on which that utterance is tested for appropriateness. The detection of a mismatch between a text and its context might be a result of a sense of inappropriateness but might also signal the use of the utterance for other purposes than it is expected.

Because of the grafting of one sign system on another, or one voice on another in intertextuality, the existence of some form of incongruity between the two, betraying their separate origins, cannot be avoided. Except in intertextual practices like literary allusion and plagiarism where assimilation between the text and the intertext is emphasised (Tan: 1988), incongruity and conflict seem to be inherent features of intertextuality. Stewart (1978: 20) points out that irony can be linked to "other parodies, satires, and burlesques of the everyday world; the specific taking in and taking over of one text by another." She further adds that "These genres show the possibility that intertextual relationships can be not only harmonious, but also in conflict." The role of incongruity and conflict, besides, extends beyond the description of the construction of the phenomenon itself to prove to be of great importance in its recognition. For it is the sense of inappropriateness indicated by some form of incongruity in discourse that directs the hearer or reader towards the assumption that an intertext is being evoked. The incongruity might consist in a simple clash between what is uttered and the physical context it describes, as in "Beautiful weather " uttered on a stormy day. Or it might come in subtler forms of clash between what constitutes valid values for the addresser and the established code of values which the addressee is supposed to be aware of, for instance. A racist comment made by a character can conflict with the oblique addressee's (or the reader's) view of the matter and result in an irony to be attributed to the oblique addresser (the writer). Missing the incongruity signals is not unavoidable, however, and might have serious repercussions on the direction reading takes. It can be responsible for misreadings based on taking *prima*

*facie*, that is as simple, single voiced, and autonomous what is in fact complex, "heteroglossic," and "polyphonic."

The notions of incongruity, conflict and mismatch that are expected to generate a sense of inappropriateness and therefore activate intertextual interpretations of a given text might thus be missed because of the inability of the reader to refer to the necessary larger body of knowledge that could highlight the boundaries between the text at hand and its intertext(s). In extremely context-bound practices like irony, or ones in which knowledge of the source text (or intertext) is essential as in parody or burlesque, drawing on this body of knowledge crucial for interpretation, might take different forms and can presuppose, therefore, a particular awareness or competence on the part of the reader. It is this property which has led some critics to consider a number of intertextual practices elitist and indicative of group membership. Nash makes this point in relation to citations. He observes that they

often have a function that goes beyond the mere decoration of a conversational exchange. They are a kind of test, proving the credentials of the initiated, baffling the outsider.

(1985: 75)

Kaufer (1977, 1981) and Myers (1977) further indicate, in their investigation of the sociolinguistic interpersonal effects of irony, its "inclusive-exclusive" and "associative-dissociative" functions. The first properties result basically from the drawing together of the ironist and the participants who understand the irony. The second occurs in relation to the original victim of the irony and those who by virtue of their failure to recognise the irony fail to join the ironist's "confederates," and therefore, become victims as well (Kaufer, 1977; Muecke, 1969).

To a large extent, the strength of irony and its power as a verbal manipulative tool, as mentioned in Chapter I, is contingent upon its covert nature. Its ability to be disguised as the communicator's own language and opinions grants it the double-edged potential of a chameleon. Depending on the identity and knowledge of the reader, it can either be recognised or missed and mistaken for a straightforward assertion or interrogative attributable to its speaker or writer. The ability of the ironist to avoid

censorship (whether social or political; Scholes, 1982) comes basically from the fact that irony relies on the question of attribution. As Green (1985) and Sperber and Wilson (1989) claim, every sentence is potentially ironical and that depends precisely on whether the addressee is going to interpret it as expressing the speaker or writer's opinions or as being embedded in the latter's discourse and therefore attributable to someone else. In this case, the attitude of the communicator is to be checked on the scale of positive, supportive ones on the one hand, and the disapproving ridiculing ones on the other. The failure of an addressee to discern the borderline that separates what is attributable to the communicator and what is to be seen as if in quotation marks is more than a mere failure to perceive an ironical joke for instance. It, moreover, (cf. Ch. I) indicates the existence of problems at the interpersonal level: mainly the absence of what is called a common background knowledge and a common frame of reference to link the participants. For if, as Sperber and Wilson (1982) claim, understanding is the proof for the existence of mutual knowledge, pragmatic failure can consequently be considered a signal of a lack of this knowledge. However vague this notion of knowledge might be, it can still be expected to surface in all the actual circumstances in which one is called upon to communicate.

This question has been treated by Gabriel García Márquez in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in connection with the themes of writing and the reconstruction of history faced by the risks of oblivion and distortion resulting from the passage of time. Mistaking what is already known, discovered and established for something new because of the remoteness of that discovery in time and the decay of human collective memory is a strong theme in the novel. Things which are most common and whose existence has been taken for granted in former times move into the foreground on several occasions in the story because of the disintegration of the capacity of the townspeople to register information, and therefore, maintain or improve knowledge. On each of these occasions, they are reduced to an alarming state of ignorance and therefore of decay.

There is an instance in this novel that can be perceived as a parody of the collection and sharing of knowledge, both in its importance for human survival and its fragility. This is the period of the insomnia plague that strikes the town and eventually leads to the loss of memory which, in turn, leads to the loss of identity of some of the townspeople. To combat this threat, the people under the direction of the creative members of the Buendia family start labelling the things that surround them in an attempt to avoid forgetting their names and functions. But as their forgetfulness grows, people feel the need to label more and more things whose identity and use were taken for granted until then. Some come to the point where they do not recognise the members of their families and eventually forget who they themselves are. The Indian Visitación, whose people's history was being erased by the Spaniards, and who is made to escape the symbolic insomnia plague that struck her village to seek refuge as a servant despite her royal blood, describes the symptoms of this illness. She states that a person suffering from this disease

became used to this state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sunk into a kind of idiocy that had no past.

In this case, the effect of the degeneration of knowledge can be felt not only at the level of individuals in their relation to their identities and in their communication with each other. It can also affect the preservation of history and culture and the development of civilisation.

In a parallel manner, the loss of previously existing backgrounds or intertexts is bound to lead to a loss of the material necessary for creativity. Hence, being cognisant of the latest joke, film, book, political scandal etc. is as important for communication as knowing the names of things or institutions and their functions. Lacking information that is available to others can place an addressee in a disadvantageous position when that information is presupposed or referred to as given. The addressee's need to fill in that gap and reconstruct what he or she perceives as new from the rest of the discourse might easily be frustrated if the communicator fails to perceive that need or intentionally

ignores it by not taking account of it and being more explicit. In this case, and especially in cases like irony where implicitness is essential for the pragmatic effect of an utterance, lack of mutual knowledge can prove to be both a handicap for the success of that particular interaction and a failure to reach the point of solidarity that is supposed to tie an ironist to the audience as a result of understanding (Kaufer, 1977, 1981).

Failure to distinguish between the discourse that is to be attributed to the communicator and what is embedded in it and is implicitly attributable to others can indicate a lack of familiarity with the discourse of the communicator and what constitutes valid and invalid opinions and values for him or her. This might prove to be a serious hindrance to communication. For it is from an initial impression of incompatibility or incongruity at a given level of the discourse of the ironist that a hearer or a reader is to question its attribution. The question "Who says so?" about any discourse or part of it is the first step towards dismantling its different constituent voices and searching for their contribution to meaning.

The mismatch that is bound to be detected between the intertext and the text to which it is grafted can occur at various levels regardless of whether the intertext actually exists as in parody, or is a mere echo of an opinion attributed to a (certain type of person) as in irony. Because of the assumption spelled out by Wolff (1985) that the world consists of a wide array of objects and states of affairs whose classes are "tacitly specified," it can be considered part of the reader's process of interpretation of any text to be able to recognise the elements which fail to satisfy the requirements of their class membership. These elements will stand as if in quotation marks calling into question their membership and betraying the speaker or writer's attitude towards them, be it a negative, a positive, or a neutral attitude.

Hence, intertextuality can be suspected to be at work whenever a mismatch is detected whether at the lexical level or over longer stretches of discourse; because of register inappropriateness for the particular situation, for instance.

Various points of view seem to agree that the notions of clash or discrepancy might be essential for the detection of irony. According to Booth (1974), four clues to

an ironic reading of a text are based on these notions. When there is a misfit between what the story is about and the readers' knowledge of the world, when facts conflict within the story, when styles clash, or when a clash is felt between the values and belief systems presented with those assumed to be the implied author's, irony might be suspected to be at work. These clues cannot be seen as operating in total isolation from each other, however. In some cases, they can be grouped together under what is more commonly identified as register or collocational clashes. In this general category, it is easy to perceive the potential for irony whenever there is a failure at the collocational level to supply the right lexical item(s) dictated by the particular context. Although this might not account for subtler manifestations of irony and cases where it runs over a major part of a text, the main elements that should raise suspicion towards its existence are present in clashes of register: it is first apparent at the level of the lexical choice, this choice is bound to signal a mismatch between the narrator or character's voice and that of the implied author (and consequently between their values and belief systems). The clash might operate in the other direction as well where it is the clash in values which points to the boundaries of the clash at the linguistic level.

The lexical choice might also raise questions about the world represented in the text in its relation to the knowledge of the world that the reader draws upon in its interpretation. An illustration of the way irony might draw upon this clash at this variety of levels can be sought in the simple collocational clash operating in Pope's line describing the contents of Belinda's dressing table:

Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.

The word "bibles" belonging to the religious register is mingled with words belonging to the register of cosmetics and beauty devices. The lexical juxtaposition which is supposed to reflect and emphasise the juxtaposition of the contents of the dressing table, reduces the bibles to the level of the accessories with which it is listed carelessly. Coming in the voice of the poet, the line functions as a kind of second-degree interpretation of the character's attitude and opinions: there is a clash between the situation described and the order expected to be associated with these matters in the

actual world. The reader is immediately brought to notice this mismatch which in turn is to draw attention to the possible existence of a clash between the poet's beliefs and values and those of the woman.

Following the description, letting the sacred lie with the profane, in such a casual manner, the character indirectly betrays her lack of concern for keeping a barrier between the two. In fact, a parallelism is created between them because of the juxtaposition. It is emphasised by the plural form, "bibles," whose effect is not merely to rhyme with the plural form of the other words but to belittle their value and stress the random manner in which they are lying about. They are put on the same scale with the objects with which they are mingling, that is, they have become no more than accessories serving to maintain an acceptable social appearance. Through this collocational or register clash, therefore, a silent comment has been imposed on what is apparently a mere description of the woman's dressing table. The odd lexical choice can be taken to reflect the state of mind of the character and is used by the poet for ridiculing purposes. The register clash thus points towards the clashes in values, to which the poet wants to attract the readers' attention and for which he has created the gap and the conflict in points of view that generate irony. There is of course no reason why a reader might not take this line as revealing more about Pope than about his intended victim. If so, then a double irony can be at work, turning the ironist into a victim to his own irony.

Another example in which clashes at several levels might function as signals for irony can be found in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Ch. XXXII):

"We been expecting you a couple of days and more. What 's kep' you? - boat get aground?"

"Yes'm - [but] it warn't the grounding - that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."

"Good gracious! anybody hurt?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."

The irony of course is centered around the denial of humanity to the black man by reporting the absence of human casualties in the incident. The basic clash occurs at the level of values: both interlocutors seem to agree and reinforce each other's beliefs

that the death of the black man does not correspond to what constitutes for them the category "anybody hurt." A silent comment is passed on both men through this direct report of their exchange as it is embedded in that of the narrator. Their last three utterances are of the second-degree interpretation type. They are reproduced verbatim and are made to crash against the narrator's values which are assumed to correspond to common knowledge about what falls under the "human being" category and what does not. The whole racist attitudes and order for which the two men stand are thus implicitly and economically ridiculed through a simple interaction that betrays their distorted value systems.

Another important concept in intertextuality is that of genre. It can play an important role for creating and signalling irony through a careful manipulation of the readers as a result of the activation of their generic expectations. Since the identification of a genre means the recognition of a number of the properties that characterise it, announcing that genre to the readers (through Genette's paratextual means) can arouse their expectations about what they are going to encounter. They will, therefore, look for the given properties and interpret the text in terms of their knowledge of them. Recognising which conventions have been appropriately used and which have been abused or discarded becomes part of the interpretative process. Detecting an incongruity or misfit between the claimed genre and the actual properties of the text might be an indicator of the presence of irony. The expectations about a particular genre reading are elicited whenever the genre of a text is identified or advertised. They are, however, to be defeated or to backfire if the message is ironic. The form and characteristics of the text are thus merely evoked for ironic purposes. They are used to deceive the receiver into mistaking them for what they advertise themselves to be. Through the activation of the readers' knowledge about the intertexts, that is, their knowledge of similar texts previously encountered, interpretation can be misled while a good source for echo is supplied.

This intertextual trick can function in two ways. First, some generic properties can be borrowed and misapplied so as to draw attention to their clichéd nature, their

inadequacy to deal with matters contemporary to the writer. In any case, the properties of the genre are inappropriately used by the writer and therefore are only apparently evoked so that they can be ridiculed within the context in which they feature.

Second, while a particular genre of writing is feigned, the readers can be confronted with a content that deceives them into activating the wrong generic expectations and consequently choosing the wrong interpretation strategies. A genre that is often exploited in this manner for ironic purposes, for instance, is the journal or review type of article. Swift's *A Modest Proposal* gains a great deal of its success as a satirical piece from its assuming the guise of a serious rational and well argued and documented essay scientifically discussing actual social and economic problems. It is only through the conflicts that start occurring between the facts reported and the (worse) alternatives proposed for them, what counts as valid and non-valid values, and the moral priorities established by the writer as opposed to what is commonly accepted, that doubts about the degree of adherence to the requirements of the proclaimed genre are raised. The document is not performing the informative function that the genre it claims is normally assigned. Instead, the generic properties are evoked to perform a ridiculing, critical role. Genre, in this case, is used as a form of camouflage whose incongruity with the content is bound to be discovered at some point as the text proceeds. When the reader realises that the attribution of the text in part or in whole is to be shifted from the writer to someone else, it becomes clear that the irony is directed towards this other stand point. This form of incongruity (between the voice of the ironist and the voice that is echoed) is characteristic of ironic communication in a more basic and general manner as will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the attempt to validate Sperber and Wilson's approach within a larger view of discourse has sought backing from the framework of intertextuality that is claimed to characterise linguistic communication in general. With such a background, irony thus described, finds its place as an intertextual category sharing with other categories elements responsible for its creation and recognition.

The element in this definition concerned with the echoic character of irony is thus satisfactorily legitimised through the recognition of the intertextual property of all discourse. Another result of this rapprochement between irony and intertextuality consists in the reclassification of the latter under the same category of second-degree interpretation phenomena to which the former belongs - given their shared reliance both on the question of re-attribution or incongruity in voice and on the questions of evaluation and comment.

The following chapter will undertake, building on this one, to investigate the role two major elements play for the creation of irony: first, recontextualisation and, second, the different types of intertext creation responsible for facilitating the explanation of the echoic account.

## CHAPTER III

### Recontextualisation, the Actualisation of Irony and the Different Types of Intertext Evocation

#### 1. Introduction

In this discussion of irony within a dialogic or intertextual view of discourse, it might be useful to try to discern the different types of intertext which contribute to the generation of irony. A major categorisation of intertexts seems possible at a general level in accordance with the definition of irony provided by Sperber and Wilson. A preliminary division of intertexts can be postulated depending on the existence or absence of a textual basis of intertexts. Intertexts thus can be actual textual ones, on the one hand, and assumed ones, that is with no actual textual basis, on the other, although the boundaries between the two are not readily definable. These categories can further be subdivided following Sperber and Wilson's division of interpretations of attributed thoughts or utterances into literal and non-literal ones, another division whose boundaries are also fuzzy. In their article "On Verbal Irony" (1989), Sperber and Wilson propose to modify and widen their earlier account of irony in terms of echoic mention (or quotation). Instead, they suggest to treat it as a variety of the category of utterances they define as echoic interpretations of an attributed thought or utterance. Hence, they propose to

analyse indirect speech reports, echoic utterances and irony not as literal interpretations (i.e. mentions) of an attributed thought or utterance, but simply as interpretations, literal or non-literal, of an attributed thought or utterance. (1989: 107)

The distinction between literal and non-literal interpretations, they argue, springs from the fact that in reporting speech, a speaker does not always preserve the original content. Various changes can possibly occur in the process depending on the reporter's focus. Sperber and Wilson explain that

Reports of speech are not always identical reproductions of the content of the original: they may be paraphrases or summaries; they may be elaborations, spelling out some assumptions or implications that the original

speaker took for granted, or that struck the hearer as particularly relevant. In such cases, the content of the indirect speech report resembles the content of the original without, however, being an identical reproduction of it ...  
(1989: 106)

Sperber and Wilson exploit this notion of similarity between an original utterance and its reported counterpart and single out what they identify as "interpretive resemblance" (cf. 2.3.2. in Ch. I, Part B). The resemblance here is assumed to link the propositional content of the utterances or thoughts to each other as in direct quotations, paraphrases or summaries for instance. Whenever a representation that has a propositional form (especially an utterance) is used to represent another representation that also has a propositional form (e.g. a thought) because of some resemblance between their propositional forms, the first is considered an interpretation of the second (1989: 106). Hence, literalness is considered one case of interpretive resemblance in which between two propositions sharing all their implications, one is used interpretively to represent the other (e.g. direct quotations). When two representations only have some implications in common, however, the one can only be said to interpretively resemble the other (e.g. indirect reports of speech, echoic utterances) (1989: 106-7). Sperber and Wilson cite the following example to illustrate this point. Mary says,

- a. I met an agent last night.    b. He can make me rich and famous.

This utterance can be interpreted in one of two ways:

1. He can make me famous, I believe.
2. He can make me famous, he says.

While interpretation 1 is a straightforward assertion, 2 is either a report of speech or an echoic utterance. 2 must therefore bear some resemblance to the agent's utterance. If what he said is "I can make you rich and famous," then 2 is a literal interpretation of it. If he said "I can do for you what Michael Caine's agent did for him," however, then Mary's utterance is not a mention of the agent's original proposition. Given the common knowledge that may be available to the hearer (the information that Michael Caine's agent has made him extremely rich and famous), the

propositions expressed by 2 and b will have implications in common. In this case, 2 will contextually imply b and can be seen to interpretively resemble it.

It might be argued, thus, that in literary discourse, as in language in general, an *a priori* distinction can be established between two types of intertext that are used in the generation of irony: actual intertexts and non-actual (or assumed) intertexts. In the actual intertexts, a previously enunciated text is reproduced or recontextualised (literally or non-literally) within the newly constructed one. In the assumed intertexts, however, a text might not have actually existed before but is evoked within the new text as if it did. In a number of cases, this kind of intertext is effectively created through presupposition because of the capacity it offers for the manipulation of information presentation. Before examining the way these different intertexts function, it might first be necessary to consider the role that recontextualisation (or transcontextualisation) plays in the realisation of intertextuality and irony in particular. Recontextualisation, I would like to argue, is an essential factor explaining the question of attribution and the creation of intertexts. The role it can play in the creation of irony in literary discourse is examined and illustrated through the analysis of Borges's "Pierre Menard" and Barthelme's "Eugénie Grandet."

## 2. Recontextualisation

Context plays a crucial role for the actualisation of irony and other intertextual practices like parody and allusion. Recontextualisation thus becomes equally crucial as it allows for the relativisation of what is taken for granted and a questioning of its validity by seeing it in the light of a different context and therefore a different point of view. The elucidation of this concept has preoccupied scholars from various fields such as philosophy, linguistics, and discourse and literary studies. What Richard Rorty (1989) calls the power of "re-description," for instance, is another version of what recontextualisation stands for. He claims that the ironists' awareness of this power of language explains their reservations against "the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies," and also

puts them in the position which Sartre called "meta-stable": never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.  
(1989: 73-74)

Patricia Waugh (1984) also examines recontextualisation in her consideration of the role play and games have in metafiction. She points out the necessity for change in meaning resulting from the recontextualisation of utterances from particular contexts into others of a different type. She says that

A phrase uttered in a real-life context and referring to objects actually present can be transferred to many different contexts: everyday, literary, journalistic, philosophical, scientific. The actual relationship of the signs within the phrase will remain the same, but, because their relationship to signs outside themselves has shifted, the meaning of the phrase will also shift. Thus the language of fiction may appear to imitate the languages of the everyday world, but its "meaning" will necessarily be different.  
(1984: 35-36)

Waugh further explains that in fiction as in play, the passage from one context to another needs to be explained by "meta" levels that can "set up a hierarchy of contexts and meanings" (1984: 36). But since the relation between fiction and reality is a major concern of metafictional writing, it is usually the case that the transition from the context of the one to that of the other is emphasised. Waugh suggests that

In metafiction this level is foregrounded to a considerable extent because the main concern of metafiction is precisely the implications of the shift from the context of "reality" to that of "fiction" and the complicated interpenetration of the two.  
(1984: 36)

Recontextualisation is also essential to the working of language in a more basic manner that goes hand in hand with, and is probably only another facet of, intertextuality. Any discourse that is recontextualised, superposed in a new context, is bound to interact with that context and is eventually bound to change meaning. Emphasising the social and intertextual aspects of language, Bakhtin points out that

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.  
(1981: 276)

In her attempt to demonstrate this in relation to what is commonly known as "reported speech," Tannen (1989: 101) points out that "the term is grossly misleading in suggesting that one can speak another's words and have them remain primarily the other's words." She (1989: 100-101) quotes Bakhtin as saying

that the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is - no matter how accurately transmitted - always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted.

(1981: 340)

Tannen's main arguments for this claim continue as follows. First, part of what is designated as "reported speech" in discourse "was never uttered by anyone else in any form" (1989: 101). Second, utterances change meaning with the change of context. She says that

if dialogue is used to represent utterances that were spoken by someone else, when an utterance is repeated by a current speaker, it exists primarily, if not only, as an element of the reporting context, although its meaning resonates with association with its reported context, in keeping with Bakhtin's sense of polyphony.

(1989: 101)

The relevance of the notion of recontextualisation to the question of meaning creation can further be linked to Sperber and Wilson's treatment of irony. The echoic account (as mentioned in Ch. I) presupposes the existence of a text that is attributable to an actual or imaginary originator. The process of generating irony first involves a "borrowing" of that text (whether utterance or thought) from an original context in which it is used descriptively - that is, a context in which it communicates something about a given state of affairs. Second, it involves the superposition of that text in a new context in which it is used interpretively - that is, a context in which it communicates something about the propositional content of the utterance or thought it represents.

This recontextualisation is usually bound to result in a transformation exerted on the text by its new context; it might start to sound absurd, "false," "inappropriate," or "irrelevant" (Sperber and Wilson 1981). Some form of incongruity is likely to arise in any case, indicating the duplicitous character of the text and dictating a change in its

meaning. The text is made to appropriate itself to the new context and be coloured by its properties, at the same time, affecting and being affected by it. As it stands, the text is made to comment on itself and to communicate more or less manifestly its utterer's attitude towards it (a disapproving or ridiculing one in the case of irony). This function is effected through the concatenation of several factors.

First, as the intertext is evoked in the text on which it is grafted, at least some of its original contextual implications are evoked with it. Some traces of them might subsist in the new context and attract attention to themselves through this form of defamiliarisation or estrangement. In fact, the apparent presence of these contextual effects residual of the context in which it was previously used might serve to emphasise their absence or inappropriateness in the context at hand. This can, consequently, contribute to undermining the echoed text by pointing towards its inadequacy or shortcomings in the new context.

Second, as the intertext gets undermined, it might operate in one or, sometimes, two simultaneous directions. The intertext might proceed with the undermining function by tracing the reference back to the originator of the text and making clear the ironist's negative attitude towards the evoked stance. It might, furthermore, highlight the ironist's dissatisfaction with the context of situation in which the text itself is incorporated. Simple examples of irony like saying "Beautiful weather!" when the natural conditions indicate that it is otherwise can illustrate these points. The utterance which is expressing a positive evaluation of a state of affairs is used interpretively to express the speaker's dissatisfaction with the weather. The context in which the utterance is used blatantly shows its falsity and inappropriateness. Yet the utterance is evoked, together with the context in which it is appropriate, to emphasise the absence of the latter from the situation described and the speaker's critical attitude to anybody who could have entertained that thought in such a situation. The recontextualisation of the utterance transforms it from a descriptive utterance into an interpretive one that is used echoically to express its utterer's negative evaluation of what it represents. This is

the way, it might be argued, that recontextualisation functions in a general manner and the way it governs the direction interpretation takes in intertextual instances like irony.

Within the more specific case of metafictional or postmodernist writing, recontextualisation plays an essential role in supplying this type of writing with its characteristic ironic property. This process consists mainly in assembling a number of fragments of discourse of various provenances to create a whole whose polyphonic and associated multifunctional properties constitute a major part of what it communicates. The collaged fragments are highlighted because of this recontextualisation independently of where they have originated. In the first place, however, clichés as well as stretches of discourse from any point on the spectrum of dialects, registers or styles can be subject to recontextualisation as soon as they feature in a discourse that is recognised as literary. Their embedding in this discourse and possible juxtaposition with others constitute another type or rather degree of recontextualisation according to which they are expected to start behaving under the influence of their new immediate contexts. Their function might shift from carrying information about some state of affairs into silently commenting on themselves as they feature in contexts governed by different rules.

One of the numerous grounds on which recontextualisation functions in narrative can be found in paratextual elements like titles (titles and other paratextual elements will be discussed in more detail in Ch.V). Because they are introductory elements presenting and commenting upon a written piece, they become of primary importance in guiding interpretation. A number of contemporary writers choose to give intertextual titles for their works. Titles that are for instance borrowed from mythology (e.g. Joyce's *Ulysses*), from popular culture (e.g. fairy tales as in Barthelme's *Snow White*) or established types of writing (e.g. Barthelme's "Eugénie Grandet" or Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"). The mere setting up of the action of the evoked story within the confines of a different spatio-temporal and possibly cultural context serves as a primary step towards attracting attention to its commenting quality.

The paratextual clue (title in this case) elicits an infinite number of ideas and connotations or pieces of information latent in a reader's memory about the original work, story or character. This information, made available in this way, activates expectations about the contemporary written piece, expectations that are to be influenced by the very fact that the story is being appropriated by, and therefore attributed to, somebody else at a different point in time and space. The product can be compared with the original and can show some affiliation with it but in no way can it be expected to be identical with it, if only because of the embedding resulting from the recontextualisation. A parallel can legitimately be drawn at this juncture between recontextualised narrative and reported speech because of this element of recontextualisation. One can assume that what Tannen claims in relation to reported speech is also applicable to recontextualised narrative. According to her, it

reflects the dual nature of language, like all human behaviour, as repetitive and novel, fixed and free, transforming rather than transmitting what comes its way. Moreover, and perhaps paradoxically, it is supremely a social act: by appropriating each others' utterances, speakers are bound together in a community of words ... The creation of voices occasions the imagination of alternative, distant, and others' worlds by linking them to the sounds and scenes of one's own familiar world.

(1989: 133)

The way this voice appropriation operates in narrative because of recontextualisation is illustrated below in relation to two contemporary short stories. Both tend to lay bare the process of recontextualisation and discuss its repercussions on interpretation at varying degrees of self-reflexiveness. Although it might be incorrect to claim that recontextualisation is as pervasive in literary writing as it is in these stories or that it plays the same role as it does in them, it is nonetheless only plausible to recognise its importance and give it its due attention.

### 2.1. Recontextualisation and Interpretation: The Case of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"

An extreme example of the important role recontextualisation plays in transforming and enriching the interpretation of a text can be sought in Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." As the title suggests, the story seems to be more

about the writer than about the book he creates. The strategies he adopts in his ploy for reaching the *Quixote* are emphasised and taken to qualify him for authority over the book. A French writer of the twentieth century, Pierre Menard is influenced by one work that is concerned with the reader's total identification with the writer and another that treats the resetting of earlier stories or heroes in anachronous settings. He decides in response to these two works to compose *Don Quixote*. He does not intend to compose a modern version of it, though, but to compose *the Quixote* itself. To reach his goal, he decides to learn the Spanish of the seventeenth century, to forget about the history of Europe during the preceding centuries, to "recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors or the Turk ... *be* Miguel de Cervantes." This enterprise soon proves non-profitable and superfluous, however, as Menard realises that learning the language is too easy and being an author of the seventeenth century undermining. He decides that it is more challenging and probably richer to write the book while keeping his own identity. The narrator says that "To be, in some way Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him - and, consequently, less interesting - than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard." This new decision puts Menard at a disadvantage compared to his predecessor. While he undertakes the reconstruction of an already existing book out of recollections "simplified by forgetfulness and indifference," Cervantes has enjoyed the spontaneity granted to him by "the collaboration of chance: he composed his immortal work somewhat *à la diable*, carried along by the inertias of language and invention." It soon becomes clear to him that composing an identical work is thus hard or rather impossible if only because of the historical gap: "To compose the *Quixote* at the beginning of the seventeenth century was a reasonable undertaking, necessary and perhaps even unavoidable; at the beginning of the twentieth, it is almost impossible. It is not in vain that the three hundred years have gone by, filled with exceedingly complex events. Among them, to mention only one, is the *Quixote* itself," argues Menard.

But fragmentary and identical to the original as it is, Menard's version is all the more subtle and interesting, precisely, it might be argued, because of the temporal distance between the two. The narrator, persuaded by his friend's determination, starts reading the entire book as if it were written by Menard. He thus starts finding traces of his friend's thoughts and echoes of their earlier discussions of other works in the book: "Some nights past," the narrator admits,

while leafing through chapter XXVI - never essayed by him - I recognized our friend's style and something of his voice in this exceptional phrase: "the river nymphs and the dolourous and humid Echo." This happy conjunction of a spiritual and a physical adjective brought to my mind a verse by Shakespeare which we discussed one afternoon:

Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk ...

This confession sums up what might be considered the main point of Borges's short story. The narrator activates his intertextual knowledge wrongly here to interpret a stretch of the text that did not necessitate such an effort. His reading of the book is undertaken in view of its re-attribution to Pierre Menard. Hence, he cannot refrain from using knowledge that is available to him about the author's style and voice gathered from earlier discursive interactions with him. Thus recontextualised (i.e. re-attributed within a different spatio-temporal context), the meaning of the book becomes liable to influences dictated by its new context.

It is possible to analyse as ironic the narrator-reader's over-generalisation of that feature and his overreading. For he demonstrates with his zealous behaviour readers' avidity for more singular, relevant, and exceptional meanings, their readiness to exploit every possible clue or external reference to enrich their understanding of a particular work. He betrays their readiness to forget that they are indulging in a pleasure that perhaps was not designed for them by the writer (and to whom they attribute it). This is not to say that the interpretation of a work is to be confined to what is thought to be the writer's intention. It is simply meant to draw a line between interpreting Menard while keeping information external to the work in mind, and reading Cervantes's *Quixote* and detecting traces of Menard's style and opinions in it. The narrator's

confession can be taken as an open ironical critical wink from the implied author who is pointing towards the reader's exaggerated hunts for meaning.

The strategy that the narrator as reader adopts, however, is essential for reading. It is only by connecting a particular text to the context(s) and intertexts to which it points that a reader can approximate a full view of its meaning. Thus recontextualised, the *Quixote* amalgamates a host of elements from its new historical, spatial and cultural contexts that contribute to operate a radical transformation of the direction its interpretation takes. The narrator asserts that "Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes's" and adds that "Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer." The narrator's conclusions eliminate the possibility that Menard's text is a mere copy of the original. The belief in the intentionality behind its (re-)writing and its re-attribution grant it its range of new meanings. The narrator compares elements from the original text and its new version and singles out the factors that contribute in lending the latter its richness. He just reads the work in its own context and relates it to contemporary or previous works and thinkers that have or could have affected it. The argument seems to be that Menard's exposure to intellectual movements in all the fields and his very contemporaneousness with them makes the interpretation of his work within the confines and in the light of this intellectual and cultural context inescapable. His work has to be related to the network of pre-existing texts and trends of thinking. That is what gives the impression or illusion that what the work contains is there because of an intentional choice; the writer has weighed it against all the preceding intellectual bulk and has selected it to carry the meanings he wants to communicate. The richer intertextual connections associated with Menard's *Quixote* are of course denied to Cervantes who wrote the same text three centuries in advance because his view was more restricted and so consequently was his choice of intertextual references. It is hard however to overlook the circularity of this argument since what it actually proves is that

it is the reader who brings in the intertextual scene to the act of reading. The selection of what are judged intertexts is to a great extent the responsibility of the reader.

To illustrate his point, the narrator undertakes to analyse two passages which are formally identical but holding diverging meanings because they are respectively attributed to Cervantes and to Menard.

It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes's. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise to history. Menard, on the other, writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases - *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor* - are brazenly pragmatic.

Following the same argument, the narrator proceeds to compare the very language used by both authors and interprets each in the light of its historical context.

The balance, nonetheless, still keeps falling on Menard's side:

The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard - quite foreign, after all - suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time.

This opening of the horizons of interpretation might however lead to the problem of multiplicity or abuse of the intertextual links. The narrator cites three interpretations for the decisions taken by Don Quixote in Chapter XXXVIII preferring the "debate against letters in favour of arms." While the "verdict is understandable" for Cervantes who was a soldier, it is inconceivable coming from Menard's Quixote who is "a contemporary of *La trahison des clercs* and Bertrand Russell." The first interpretation attributes this choice to "an admirable and typical subordination on the part of the author to the hero's psychology." The second denounces the passage as a

mere "*transcription of the Quixote*," while the third perceives in it the influence of Nietzsche.

The narrator, playing the role of a better informed reader, draws on his knowledge of Menard' earlier work and formulates a tentative and probably equally plausible interpretation. He hence attributes Quixote's choice to some ironical or resigned impulse that drives Menard to advertise ideas opposite to what he really believes, as he has done in an earlier paper on Paul Valéry.

These multiple instances of interpretation can be analysed as an ironical critical wink from the implied author directed against the subjectivity of interpretation. Each one of the positions described clearly reflects the interests and information available from the perspective of its holder. Their striking differences indicate the extent to which they can differ by virtue of the intertexts selected for their elucidation.

In the final paragraph, the narrator comments on Menard's work and judges it as a contribution to the "art of reading." He observes that Menard has promoted a new technique that consists in "the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution," in other terms, authorial and spatio-temporal recontextualisation. This technique mainly combats what Bakhtin would designate as a monological approach to discourse. Instead, it promotes its treatment in terms of relations established with and answers to preceding as well as following discourses. Discourse is to be evaluated and re-evaluated constantly in the perspective dictated by these other discourses, in continuous dialogue with them.

## 2.2. Recontextualisation as Collage and Parody: The Case of "Eugénie Grandet"

### 2.2.1. Introduction

Other factors apart from the title might draw attention to and contribute to the re-evaluation of a recontextualised story. As in Menard's *Quixote*, some of the characters and the events might bear resemblances to the original. Their previous roles are, however, distorted to varying degrees because of the dislocation. In the case of

Menard's *Quixote*, three centuries of intellectual endeavour and cultural change could not have been disregarded in its interpretation. The recontextualisation of the story's characters and events might emphasise their incompatibility with or absurdity in the new context and therefore transform them into targets for irony. They might further spread the irony on the new context as well thus letting it be perceived from the perspective of the evoked text. While Barthelme's *Snow White* encompasses both categories, his "Eugénie Grandet" falls under the first category where the evoked text is made to attract irony on itself. It obviously displays parodic characteristics since it refers to and transforms an already existing actual text. A major role of Barthelme's story is to denigrate and ridicule realistic writing (through Balzac's) without resorting to any openly negative comments.

Recontextualisation occurs here at two levels: a general one and an intra-textual one. First, a narrative that belongs to the French realistic genre of the nineteenth century is appropriated by an American postmodernist writer of the second half of the twentieth century. It is reduced from a whole novel into two pages of a magazine (*The New Yorker*) bearing the same title. Hence, the discourse of a previous writer is subsumed by or rather embedded in that of another. The question that arises from this case is "What is the function of this evoked discourse?" or, in other words, "What does Barthelme have to say about this discourse (since he is evoking it)?"

### 2.2.2. Intra-textual Organisation and Recontextualisation

An answer can be sought in the organisation of the text itself and the role recontextualisation plays in meaning creation. That is the second level (intra-textual) at which recontextualisation functions. The first noticeable thing about the text is that it consists of an amalgamation of paragraphs and illustrations. The latter are accompanied by titles that reinforce their superfluity as well as their absurdity ("Eugénie Grandet's hand," "Eugénie Grandet with ball" and "Photograph of Charles in the Indies"). These pictures do not figure in the original. Their presence in Barthelme's text can be interpreted as an echoing of Balzac's aspiration towards drawing an accurate reflection

of reality through language. This aspiration is thus evoked through the concretised counterpart of the realistic descriptions (pictures) to which they are supposed to bear a great resemblance if they do not substitute them completely. These pictures, economical as they are in verbal terms, provide only a sketchy representation of the subjects they treat. The first two especially are so ridiculously simple and general that they could be taken to represent anybody's hand and any girl with turn of the century clothes. It might be argued that they, furthermore, have qualities proper for clichés given the vagueness that allows them to be applicable to a variety of situations. Besides, their presence in the text does not seem to add a lot to the development or impact of the story. They are instead made to look absurd and superfluous. Considered in retrospect, Barthelme's echoing of this trait of Balzac's writing can be seen as an ironic comment on the realist writer's belief in showing or, in other words, in the capacity of language to reproduce reality in an accurate manner. For even the most realistic representations of all, the pictures, the argument seems to point out, can also fail to achieve that. At best, they only provide a sketchy fixed view of what they try to represent.

This criticism falls in line with the metafictional writer's distrust of the relation that the realists have established between language, reality and fiction. Waugh spells out this dissatisfaction with this order of things claiming that

Metafiction suggests not only that writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language to form a world model, but that history itself is invested, like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interact independently of human design.

(1984: 48-49)

She quotes Barthes (1972: 138) as saying "These facts of language were not perceptible ... as long as literature was "realistic"" and explains the implications that it has on the relationship between language, fiction and reality:

By "these facts," of course, he means the extent to which language *constructs* rather than merely *reflects* everyday life: the extent to which meaning resides in the relations between signs *within* a literary fictional text, rather than in their reference to objects *outside* that text.

(1984: 53)

This same point is reiterated in Barthelme's "short story" in the paragraphs as well. One paragraph that consists uniquely of the word "butter" repeated over nineteen lines seems to comment on the extensive use of the descriptive pause and stretch techniques often found in realistic writing (cf. Ch. VII).

Furthermore, the "narrative" consists of a concatenation of paragraphs, some no longer than one sentence, others consisting of unfinished stretches of discourse or with missing parts and others yet consisting of the contents of conversations or letters. Their physical separation seems to mark their boundaries but is accompanied by a lack of continuity between them. The fragmented character of the text can arguably be taken as an indication of its parodic function: as its purpose is essentially to shake and dismantle the basis on which Balzac's and perhaps all realistic writing is held, the text tends to deconstruct the constituents of the original and assemble them again in a manner that foregrounds their acquired humour or absurdity. A number of parodic ironic anecdotes are thus created and distributed among the "original" stretches of discourse acting as a basis for their recontextualisation and thus influencing their interpretation.

These paragraphs are displayed in a manner that does not leave a clear cut line between what is quoted directly from the original and what is created by Barthelme. Both, however, seem to undermine themselves and each other if only through their juxtaposition on the two pages. The succession of the paragraphs, on the other hand, is not always based on any kinds of link between them. On the contrary, it seems that the succession in the story is purely visual as in films. This seems to constitute the only element that creates or helps create some bridge between the unrelated, sometimes unfinished paragraphs. The events and the characters evoked, together with the summary epigraph from the original text contribute to form a general line for a story. Their recontextualisation, however, makes them reveal more about themselves than about the elements of the story. Their very presence, regardless of the content in the context of the dismembered "narrative," thus aligned with each other, draws attention to

the duplicity of voice governing them. The narrator discloses information, events and conversations in a discourse that seems attributable to somebody else. A multiplicity of other voices are equally embedded in the discourse, some of which are attributed (e.g. direct reports of speech) and others which are only implicitly so or not at all. In most cases, the recontextualised, collaged stretches of discourse are not simple reports of speech whether of the characters or of Balzac's narrator, or discourse attributable to either but rather seem to display an echoic character. Their main role in the text is to bring to the fore the writer's or rather his silent narrator's critical ridiculing view of it. The conversation that takes place between the painter and the person from Eugénie's house who receives him (it is not clear whether it is the father or somebody else) is rich in implications in this direction. As pointed out by Scholes (1982), the interaction itself involves a number of unusual exchanges like the painter's knowledge of his dates ("My dates are 1881-1961."). He cites them as if they were an essential part of his identity as a painter because of the sense of official recognition with which they provide him. He, thus, expects them to be sufficient to grant him credibility and competence - which they humorously seem to do since the immediate answer of the host comes as a recognition of that conventionally accepted signal and a readiness to draw the conclusions inspired by its mere mention ("Well, you have an air of confidence"). The juxtaposition of the two utterances results in a silent ironic comment on the host who is manipulated by the painter into believing in his competence simply by providing him with what seem to be his officially recognised dates. His assumed fame is thus what dictates an immediate (anticipated) naïve appreciation from the host and becomes the butt of the irony of the narrator.

The same way of thinking is mocked again as the host takes the amount of money that the painter is supposed to receive as a criterion for the evaluation of the quality of his work: ("But I'm sure you will do a first-class job. We're paying you enough"). Taking the second utterance as a sufficient explanation for (or implicature from) the first is not only foolish but pretentious as it suggests that it is the economic

value of things which determines their aesthetic value and not the other way around. Besides, it classifies the speaker within the category of people who belong to the consumer class and believe that you are what you buy, therefore, if you pay enough money then what you buy must be good.

The idea is further ridiculed when the painter turns out to change all his subjects into cross-eyed people. This first contradicts the host's earlier assumptions and therefore ironically echoes them in a retrospective manner. Second, it has several other contextual implications concerned with more general issues. A possible implication might concern the relation between reality and its aesthetic representation. The artist here is taking the liberty to distort a trait in all his works regardless of whether it corresponds to reality or not, and despite the restrictions normally exerted on the amount of freedom a painter is allowed when it comes to portraits. One of the reasons he gives for operating the distortions seems to warrant itself simply by its frequent occurrence in nature: "I don't see anything wrong with that. It often occurs in nature." The painter seems to think that as long as he likes a trait and that it is natural, he is free to adopt it regardless of whether it exists in the object to be represented or not. Humour is generated, however, because he picks up an infrequent and undesired trait, which is in fact negatively perceived, and adopts it in all his paintings simply because it is a natural phenomenon and therefore, he cannot be held responsible for it.

If a parallel is to be drawn between this activity of portrait distortion and its literary counterpart, realistic writing, it becomes possible to draw the implicature that the latter is as much of a failure at representing reality as the former. It is eventually only a writer's choices and preferences that determine the outcome of his work and not any, or despite any, claims to realism. One can argue with Scholes (1982) at this juncture, that a question is posed here concerning a tempting further implicature as to whether all Balzac's works are equally metaphorically cross-eyed. The answer is probably positive if the expression is to be taken in the sense outlined above and which discusses the belying of the relation posited by the realists between reality and its

representation in art. An artist might thus aspire to identity in representation or mimesis and yet end up with unavoidable transformations which reflect personal choices and perspectives more than they do the original state of affairs being described.

Another contextual implication that can possibly be drawn from this interaction concerns the nationality of the painter in the story. That he is American and not French and that he produces works that display the same characteristic is perhaps not accidental. For it recalls the phenomenon of standardisation that is associated with and seen as bearing such an imprint on the cultural and economic American life. While the French host is shocked and appalled at the repetition of the feature ("But *every one* is ..."), the American painter finds it normal and is not bothered in the least by its recurrence. While the straightforwardness and simplicity of the reasons given for the choice might be typical of an artist, its standardisation can be considered stereo-typical of only an American one. Seen in this context, the artist's utterances can become the butt of the narrator's irony because of the simplicity and perhaps simple-mindedness associated with this attitude.

#### 2.2.2.1. Destroying the Reality/Fiction Boundary

Another instance of recontextualisation in Waugh's sense (1984), that is in terms of a "shift from the context of "reality" to that of "fiction," can be found in the paragraph following the one discussed above. A non-attributed conversation is reported. Its topic revolves around whether certain characters have been sufficiently fondled in their childhood or not. The situation is analogous to a case of eavesdropping since neither (or none) of the participants' identities is unfolded. However, they are certainly extradiegetic since they discuss both the characters and Balzac himself, at the same time. They are possibly, though by no means necessarily, female since their conversation is concerned with fondling children and finishes with an open negative judgement: "Men are fools."

The excessive repetition of the verb "fondle" (six times out of the ten turns forming the exchange without counting the lexical variations ("patting") and the

elliptical cases) might be seen to give the conversation an exaggerated, pseudo-scientific character. It occurs in complete sentences where children feature as psychologically close to the speaker ("these children") and as helpless creatures ("these poor children"). The contrasting styles in which the topic is carried out reinforces this impression. On the one hand, the "survey" wants to be exhaustive and therefore enumerates the characters consecutively, going to discuss the behaviour of one of them at length. On the other hand, it betrays a complete lack of "scientificity": as one of the speakers makes a statement that betrays total involvement and bias against the character discussed (Judge de Bonfons) based on what seems to be a personal disposition against him ("Who could bring himself to fondle Judge de Bonfons?").

The way the interlocutors treat the characters basically collapses the levels of narration and puts created and creator, the fictional and the real on the same scale. Balzac himself becomes a character discussed on an equal footing with his own characters in this discourse. The normal distinction between the context within the narrative and the context of reality outside it is hence destroyed through this form of *mise en abyme*.

Several factors in this paragraph contribute, moreover, to the generation of irony at the expense of Balzac and realistic writing in general. First, the form in which the paragraph is presented corresponds to what is known as scene, a technique according to which the nearest equivalence between the time taken by the events of a story to happen and the time spent in their narration is achieved. Because it reduces the degree of narratorial interference to the minimum of mere reporting of conversation, this technique is generally favoured in realist writing. In this context, however, that is within the context of the reset story where absurdities and contradictions abound, its role does not remain neutral and merely functional: reporting that a conversation has taken place. It is, instead, used echoically recalling its former value in realist writing and undermining it.

Scene is thus used to report a discussion which, despite the ridiculous nature of its subject matter, is treated in a manner that suggests that it might have psychological or sociological consequences. When Charles Grandet's turn comes, a (pseudo-) scientific formal register is adopted: "His history in this regard is not known. But it has been observed that ... This implies-----" This, of course, stands in contrast with the previous interaction concerning Judge of Bonfons. An openly biased, evaluative, non-scientific statement is made in the form of a rhetorical question: "Who could bring himself to fondle Judge of Bonfons?" after which, the issue is judged sufficiently investigated and is accordingly closed. The turn of the next character satisfactorily comes.

The report concerning Charles Grandet is followed by what seems to be an important discovery or deduction that has the resonance of a desperate appeal: "These children need fondling!" That its utterer has decided to interrupt the previous one's utterance, suggests that the conclusion is so important, logical and obvious, that both participants in their convergence of minds reached it at the same moment. The interruption serves as a reinforcement of this understanding between the interlocutors. First it is an indication of the satisfaction accompanying the tracing back of the problem to its roots, and second, expressing a conclusion that sums up the whole situation in an effective and economical way. It further displays the resonance of an official declaration by virtue of its conciseness and the sense of urgency it communicates. This is automatically provided with an answer by the other interlocutor: "The state should fondle these children." But practical and ideal as it would have seemed for other social and psychological problems, this answer is simply absurd in this case. It functions more as a comment on its way of thinking. It occurs more in the form of a clichéd attitude in which it is assumed that all problems have to be handled by the state. That this is the wrong problem for the state to be involved in solving makes the discussion even more ridiculous: the answer seems to come more out of habit than any deep reflection on or examination of the issue.

In this conversation, inappropriate registers are used to discuss arbitrary matters provided with equally arbitrary solutions by participants who take themselves too seriously. The whole scene can be interpreted as an ironic comment on the use of the technique in realistic writing to convey trivial non-consequential issues. The conversation consists in utterances of the second-degree interpretation type in which the narrator echoes a manner of writing while emphasising its ridiculous nature.

Another comment is passed silently when the conventional division between the fictional and real contexts is further breached through the reference to Balzac, the creator of the fiction himself. The ultimate borderline between what constitutes fiction and reality collapses as the real author is discussed alongside the characters he has written about. In fact, a paradoxical process is in operation at this point as it is implicated through the way discourse proceeds that the characters are the ones who lead to their creator. They are responsible for attracting attention to him as if he depends on them and not the other way round. On the other hand, however, another contradictory implicature can be derived: if "Balzac himself wasn't fondled enough!" then how could he be expected to create characters who are. Again the total separation between reality and fiction is questioned here. First because an indirect logical link is established between an author's childhood experiences and those of his characters, and second, because what is being said about the author, who is real, is being taken for granted only within the fictional context in which it features. The author himself is fictionalised and reduced to the level of a character in this new context. He is no longer the creator outside the story and is turned instead into an active participant in it and one whose ontological status is dependent on it.

This play with the fiction/reality distinction, the different narrative levels and the scene technique realised through recontextualisation, contributes therefore in raising questions about their role in realist writing. Through the mere choice of technique (scene, *mise en abyme*) and topic conversation, Barthelme silently passes a number of ironic denigrating comments about Balzac and the realist genre of writing in general.

### 2.3. Conclusion

In both narratives discussed above, recontextualisation has been employed at two levels. The first level has involved the re-attribution of an already existing text to someone who comes temporally later, and is spatially and culturally different from the original writer. This re-attribution plays the important role of evoking intertextual elements that were absent from the original work and hence enriching its meaning in directions unavailable to or unimaginable for the first writer. Various extra historical and intellectual factors are called upon to intervene in the interpretation of the later works. The newer writers are expected to be cognisant of them. They are, furthermore, expected to have made choices in the light of these factors as opposed to their predecessors who could not have had access to these later intertextual connections. The body of knowledge they were able to draw upon was different and more restricted if not poorer.

The second level of recontextualisation functions at a more textual level, that is at the level of the organisation of the text itself. In "Eugénie Grandet," in particular, stretches of discourse acquire different meanings by virtue of featuring in the new context in which they are allocated. Their juxtaposition or rather collage with other stretches of discourse dictates a further change in their significance that might lend them their ironic commenting property. A similar instance in which recontextualisation operates in slow motion is to be found in Mark Antony's speech in *Julius Caesar* discussed in Ch. I above. The change of status of the utterance "Brutus is an honourable man" from a descriptive into an echoic interpretive one can be progressively observed as the speech proceeds. While the first mention of Brutus's honour is taken at face value by Antony's audience, the seven that follow seem to lose more of their credibility with every mention of Brutus. Each one of them comes sandwiched in and juxtaposed with other utterances that undermine its validity. Every instance of recontextualisation thus contributes to robbing the utterance of more of its descriptive role until its ironic use becomes clear. The utterance under the influence of the various

contexts in which it occurs becomes devoid of its original meaning and starts instead to fulfill a disapproving commenting function against itself and whoever is still ready to endorse it.

Recontextualisation can hence basically be seen to activate intertextuality and therefore to influence the direction the interpretation a given discourse takes. The transfer from the original context to another cannot but effect a transformation of the meaning of an utterance, a transformation that is dictated by the type of relationship that it maintains with this context. Irony can result if that context is meant to undermine or denigrate that utterance and communicate its utterer's distance from and disapproval of it.

### **3. Ironic Intertexts**

#### **3.1. Actual Intertexts, Literal and Non-literal**

It is worth remembering at this stage that one effect of recontextualisation is the creation of intertexts. A text that is recontextualised becomes intertextually connected with the one used in the previous context. As argued at the beginning of this chapter, intertexts can be either actual or non-actual. When they are actual they can display either literal or non-literal resemblance to the original. It has been suggested that what distinguishes irony from parody, two practices that rely with varying degrees on some "original" text, is that while the latter relies extensively and exclusively on that original text, the former functions at a wider and more selective level (cf. Tan 1989: Ch. IV). The same is believed to be true of allusion, as it is expected to activate, uniquely, some restricted part of the text. Irony can be seen at work hand in hand with parody or allusion when a text is evoked in order to be ridiculed or disapprovingly but silently commented upon. But it can be at work by itself when an already uttered text is echoed literally or not in order to express its utterer's dissatisfaction with what it contains.

In Sperber and Wilson (1989: 102), an utterance identified as ironical can be considered to satisfy the categorisation "actual literal" intertext; a type which seems to be rather common when irony is communicated. Peter, reassuring Mary about Bill's

trustworthiness when she wonders whether the latter will keep his word and return the following day the money she has lent him, says

"Bill is an officer and a gentleman"

The following day, Mary tells Peter about Bill's failure to meet his promise and ironically echoes to him his reassurance that has turned out to be false and inappropriate, by saying,

"An officer and a gentleman, indeed."

An actual text, hence, functions here as the intertext on whose evocation the irony is constructed. The evocation is nearly literal, besides, as the original sentence is reproduced with a slight distortion consisting in the elided subject and verb which are recoverable from the context, on the one hand, and the added adverbial "indeed" that carries the element of emphasis, on the other.

It is in cases of this kind that irony approximates parody: an actual text is literally or near-literally evoked in order to be commented upon. The difference, as mentioned above, is one of scope: irony is believed to have a much more restricted textual scope while parody can encompass longer stretches of discourse.

It is worth noting, moreover, following Sperber and Wilson (1989: 102), that "because the code of an officer and a gentleman is widely held up to admiration, a failure to live up to it is always open to ironical comment," and therefore, Mary's utterance can still be ironical even in the absence of Peter's prior reassurance. The echoed intertext, in this instance, is thus not based on an actual pre-existing text but on a latent pre-existing cultural norm that the speaker has taken the liberty to recreate.

An example, based on an actual text, that can be classified under the non-literal type, is also cited in Sperber and Wilson (1989: 105-106) from Jane Austen's *Emma*. Mr Knightley comments as Emma plays with her sister's child:

If you were as much guided by nature in your estimate of men and women, and as little under the power of fancy and whim in your dealings with them, as you are where these children are concerned, we might always think alike.

Emma's reply comes as follows:

To be sure - our discordances must always arise from my being in the wrong.

Sperber and Wilson observe that "What Emma ironically echoes back to Mr Knightley is a caricature of the opinions he has just expressed" (1989: 106). In this case, thus, the text is actual and its originator is one of the interlocutors in the exchange. The irony, however, is not a literal reproduction of that speaker's discourse. Instead, it comes as a reformulation of the same idea he has expressed plus an element of exaggeration ("To be sure ... must always ...") that classifies it as a non-literal interpretation of Knightley's utterance.

A recognised type of non-literal or near-literal interpretation of utterance is allusion which, as mentioned above, can also be used to fulfill ironical purposes. In ironic allusion, an original text can be echoed to ridicule or show disapproval of a particular state of affairs. The echoing is achieved in a non-literal manner, however, since some distortion of the original is always bound to take place. Moreover, some knowledge of the original text and its context might be necessary for the interpretation of the irony, although, it will be argued, that might not always be the case. As Nunberg claims,

knowledge of the circumstances of the original utterance contributes to its being cited in circumstances when the speaker wants to recall the original context to the hearer, usually in order to suggest a parallel between the original context and the context of the utterance, or some other situation under discussion.

(1981: 210)

The interaction between the text at hand and the allusion is highly significant for its interpretation. The passage from what is explicit to what is merely hinted at and vice versa enriches the meaning of a text with the presence of all that is left out.

The process undergone by Marlowe's verses about a shepherd's invitation to his beloved can serve as an ultimate illustration of the way a text can be ironised and criticised through a series of allusive transformations - cited in de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 187-8). The original elements are recontextualised on several occasions and are distorted to convey the wanted meanings. The last version is an ironic one where the object of irony involves more than the contents of the plea. It

starts to encompass the conventions underlying Marlowe's pastoral poem and the values it stands for as opposed to those of the later poet's and the conditions dictated by the economic situation of his time on characters like his.

While the prior text is actual, its interpretations are non-literal and variably distorted with recontextualisation. In 1600, Christopher Marlowe writes:

Come live with me and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields  
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

The shepherd, in the pastoral tradition, proposes to the woman he loves that she join him and promises her happiness in the midst of the, for him, caring and generous nature.

Sir Walter Raleigh provides a reply to the shepherd the same year adopting a variety of elements from the original:

If all the world and love were young,  
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,  
These pretty pleasures might me move  
To live with thee and be thy love.

The intertextual link is tangible both in the form and the content of the reply. The direct reference to the shepherd as the originator of the earlier poem, the repetition of lexical items from the original ("love," "pleasures," "live") as well as the rhyme and rhythm recall the characteristic topic of Marlowe's poem and constitute an answer to it that reflects an obvious familiarity with the conventions of its composition.

Marlowe's verses are later borrowed by John Donne, 1612, to write a similar proposal spoken by a fisherman this time and where the intertextual reference pointing to the original is obvious because of the near literal repetition of the first two lines:

Come live with me, and be my love,  
And we will some new pleasures prove,  
Of golden sands, and crystal brooks:  
With silken lines, and silver hooks.

It is noticeable here again that the concern is still with the shepherd's proposals which are being adapted to fit the fisherman's situation. Nature still performs for the

latter the role of the benevolent guardian that provides the luxurious setting for his love: "golden sands and crystal brooks."

The same verses are taken as a starting point again by Cecil Day Lewis in 1935 but their content is spoken this time by a modern unskilled worker. He, like his predecessors, builds on the original text. His version, however, is ironical.

Come, live with me and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
Of peace and plenty, bed and board,  
That chance employment may afford.

I'll handle dainties on the docks  
And thou shalt read of summer frocks:  
At evening by the sour canals  
We'll hope to hear some madrigals.

Marlowe's original pastoral bliss, evoked by the first two lines, is replaced by a world in which the poorer classes cannot afford the celebrated, sublimatory and idealised life upon which his poem is based. Nature does not have the same blessing, positive role that it had in his time. The whole basis of the prior poem is criticised through its inconsistency with the deprived economic situation of the twentieth century worker. Modern dismal prospects of reality and an awareness of the falsity of the hopes replace and sharply contrast with the evoked predecessors' dreams and optimism and with it the whole tradition of pastoral poetry writing. As de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) observe,

The force of this text is its opposition to the very principles and conventions underlying Marlowe's original: the view that the lives of shepherds or other working classes are spent in ornate dalliance and merriment, with nature as a purveyor of luxurious toys and trinkets.

(1981: 188)

Irony is achieved in this final version of Marlowe's verses, simultaneously, through the evocation of the original poem and its recontextualisation. The recognition of the intertextual reference is essential here for the appreciation of the irony. The literary conventions governing Marlowe's poem evoked through the direct quote of the first two lines establish the basis on which the modern poem is built. The expectations they raise about "all the pleasures" to come are contrasted with the modest,

unpromising proposals of the unskilled worker. These proposals fail to fit the glorious pattern established by the original poem and simply evoke it to let it hang in contrast with the more realistic view of life adopted in the newer version. The vast natural space, the flowers and the beautiful summer clothes promised by the shepherd are directly or indirectly evoked in the modern poem. They are, however, made to contrast with the new context in which they feature: the lady can only read about the clothes in modern fashion magazines, the valleys and rivers are replaced by "sour canals" etc.

This kind of intertextual reference does not only operate across literary texts. It can also link literary and non-literary ones as well. When it is used ironically, the degree of covertness of the communication is increased given the need for the reader to be versatile in more than one domain in order to fully appreciate the irony. In all cases of allusion, there is an implicit reference to a previously existing text through varying degrees of literalness in its evocation. Although this might be arguable, it is possible to expect that literary allusion, that is allusion occurring across literary texts, is restrictive by its very nature in terms of audience. That is, since the readership is already restricted among literature readers, it is more likely that they would be more familiar with allusions made to other literary texts or traditions. When the audience is wider, as in journalistic writing for instance, the interpretation of allusions to literary texts - a domain or field of discourse with its own rules and conventions - might be more problematic. The reader might still perceive an irony carried by an allusive remark for instance, while failing to recognise the allusion in the first place. One main result of this process is the splitting of the audience into those who perceive the irony because they recognise the source of the intertextual reference and those who perceive an irony derived from the recognition of a duplicity in voice but cannot attribute the echo to any particular source. It might be legitimate to talk here about degrees of irony paralleled by degrees of inclusion, association or intimacy between the ironist and the audience. Consider the following example from Joan Didion's article "In the Islands" from *The White Album* :

We breakfast on the terrace, and gray-haired women smile benevolently at us. I smile back. Happy families are all alike on the terrace of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu.

(1972: 135)

The last sentence is an allusion to the opening of Tolstoy's *Anna Karénina*: "All happy families resemble one another, every unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion." It serves to comment ironically on the situation in which the narrator finds herself during her stay at the hotel. It is clear that the sentence is echoic both in the stricter sense of reporting someone else's utterance through its allusive quality and in the wider sense in that it is used by the narrator but is implicitly attributable to somebody else. Information about the unstable state of her marriage is provided at various points in the preceding paragraphs: e.g.: "I am sitting in a high-ceilinged room in the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu ... trying to put my life back together" and "We spend, my husband and I and the baby, a restorative week in paradise. We are each other's model of consideration, tact, restraint at the very edge of the precipice" (1972: 133, 135).

The irony carried by the allusion emerges as a reaction against the old women's approving behaviour based on the deceptive appearance of the couple and the child. This appearance seems to be coloured by their very presence at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and to emanate from it - a fact which, as the narrator explains later, is symptomatic of a sense of social belonging or class membership ("the Royal's roped beach is an enclave of apparent strangers ever on the verge of discovering that their nieces roomed in Lagunita at Stanford the same year, or that their best friends lunched together during the last Crosby" (1972: 137)). This sense of conformity or "inclusivity," as the narrator calls it, seems to dictate the attitude of the old women to the narrator's family and the role she automatically but falsely assumes by smiling back at them. This role, however, the one of the happy wife and mother enjoying her holiday in "paradise" is far from applicable to the highly self-conscious woman who is trying to "restore" her life. Whether it is clear to the reader that the narrator has appropriated Tolstoy's sentence or not, therefore, does not affect the fact that irony is at

play. What differs in either case is the reason(s) for seeing the sentence as ironical and the effect that it is bound to have on the interpersonal relationship between the ironist and the reader. Readers in possession of the knowledge concerning the intertextual reference will have more reasons to find the utterance ironical since that knowledge will allow them into the evoked context of the source text and therefore more background comparison with the situation at hand. In the same vein, this will bring them closer to the position of the ironist since their exact recovering of the irony signifies a shared understanding that is lacking with readers who remain blind to that other perspective provided by the implicit intertextual reference. Although a relationship of association, inclusiveness or intimacy is identifiable as soon as the irony is perceived, this relation is increased or enhanced and made more prominent when the readers are cognisant of the further echoic dimension of the utterance. The fact that they need further knowledge to savour the various aspects of the ironic allusion puts them in an even more restricted category of readers than the one which groups the perceivers of the irony as a whole. The degree of intimacy they are bound to achieve with the ironist is comparatively higher because of the common frame of reference established between them.

It is worth noting, however, that perceiving more irony is not always accompanied by an increase in intimacy between the ironist and the reader. This would be the case for instance if the same Tolstoy sentence were one that the grandmother of a reader has always repeated in disapproval of the neighbours. The sentence which has acquired the status of a family joke at the expense of the grandmother would therefore cause this reader to perceive another, more private irony, against his own grandmother's nosiness, old fashioned ideas or whatever. Another intertext is thus brought into play creating another source of irony for the reader but one for which the writer is not responsible. No intimacy between them is therefore expected to obtain. On the contrary, the reader might be seen to transcend the position or level of the original partner in the interaction or communication (the writer) in order to create his or her own irony and therefore independently assume the role of ironist in his or her own

right. The reader/ironist is now in a position to share this irony and therefore achieve intimacy with another group of people (the members of the family, for instance) who would draw the same effects from reading the passage from Didion's essay. This situation might be close to but still distinguishable from that of unintended irony. The main difference, it might be argued, lies in the fact that Didion's narrator is already responsible for the generation of irony with that sentence. What changes in the situation described is the degree of irony added through the involvement of another intertext and the emergence of the reader as a creator of the irony by having access to that intertext. The circle of the participants is, furthermore, widened given this reference to the other source (grandmother) and the context that that might evoke for the reader and the members of his family.

This is not only characteristic of allusive utterances, however. It is possible to reach the same result with any kind of "public" discourse, that is one that can be echoed in a literal or non-literal way to comment on another situation or make a point. Allusion and popular wisdoms and sayings etc. tend to lend themselves easily to this kind of manipulation that allows them to acquire various meanings to various people.

### 3.2. Non-actual Intertexts: Re-creation and Presupposition

#### 3.2.1. Aspects of Intertextuality and the Echoic Account of Irony

The second type of intertext discerned above that might be used in the actualisation of irony consists of utterances or texts which have not existed previously but are only assumed or give the impression to have done so. This type seems to constitute the more common way of generating irony. The intertexts are vaguer as they are more difficult to trace back to an origin. In fact, this type constitutes a prominent part in the controversy that surrounds the echoic account of irony. This account contains two assumptions which might at first seem disputable. The first is concerned with the necessity of the existence of a prior discourse to be echoed and the second involves defining the degree of identity with that original discourse. This account is certainly untenable if it is to restrict the meaning of "echoic" to what has actually been

textually or verbally stated at a stage prior to the ironic utterance at hand. To accept that an utterance is echoic only if it (literally) re-states an already existing one is to equate echo with simple identity. The echoic property is instead to be taken to indicate a variable degree of distortion of an original that is not necessarily readily identifiable.

This difficulty of identification might hamper correct interpretation since it might lead to mistakingly attributing the discourse to its utterer. This does not, however, affect the effectiveness with which echoic utterances are used for both ironic and non-ironic purposes. The assumed "déjà vu" and "déjà lu" character of discourse in general is bound to offer a fertile field to exploit in the communication of phenomena like irony. The echoic character of irony allows, on the other hand, for intertexts which do not need to coincide with a prior original.

It might be worth noting at this stage that the notions of intertextuality, polyphony and dialogism explored in the previous chapter which seem to offer a sound ground for the echoic account of irony are realised in discourse through a number of discrete identifiable devices. As Tannen (1989) points out, there is a large amount of properties of language that kindle the struggle between the views concerning the fixity and the novelty tendencies of language. Paradoxically, the struggle contributes to legitimise the notion of creativity reconciling the two drives. In her concern for demonstrating and illustrating the fact that the strategies conveying involvement in literary discourse are equally used in conversation, she singles out repetition as a major involvement strategy that is characteristic of all language. Seeking support for her study in the work of scholars like Becker (1984), Bolinger (1976), Fillmore (1982), Coulmas (1981) and Bakhtin (1981), Tannen (1989), furthermore, believes that repetition is a pervasive characteristic of language and a crucial factor illuminating the way language production is to be perceived. She claims that

In short, it suggests that language is less freely generated, more prepatterned, than most current linguistic theory acknowledges. This is not, however, to say that speakers are automatons, cranking out language by rote. Rather, patterning (or idiomaticity, or formulaicity) is a resource for creativity. It is the play between fixity and novelty that makes possible the

creation of meaning.

(1989: 37)

She refers to Becker's work (1984) on Javanese and his conclusions about the role of repetition in language structure and says that

Becker sees such discourse strategies as constituting the grammar of a language: not abstract patterns but actual bits of texts which are remembered, more or less, and then retrieved to be reshaped to new contexts.

(1989: 37)

In her consideration of the interaction between images, dialogue and repetition in the creation of meaning, Tannen further suggests that

Images combine with dialogue to create scenes. Dialogue combines with repetition to create rhythm. Dialogue is liminal between repetition and images: like repetitions, it is strongly sonorous. It is, moreover, a form of repetition: repeating words that purportedly were said by others at another time. But even when the words were not actually said, casting ideas as dialogue echoes the form of dialogue, the speaking of words, by others at other times in other contexts. It is the familiarity of that form that makes the dialogue "ring true" - gives it resonance and meaning.

(1989: 29)

Treating language as "more or less prepatterned" rather than as "either prepatterned or novel" (1989: 38) is Tannen's next step towards considering pre patterning in a sense that is broad enough to encompass the variety of features which she classifies under this category. Situational formulas, proverbs, idioms, fixed expressions and collocations are enumerated by Tannen (1989: 38-43) as constituting the more obvious ways in which pre patterning is detected in language. She points out, however, that there is a less obvious and more essential as well as general manner in which pre patterning prevails:

Another type of pre patterning, perhaps the most disquieting to some, is what to say. People feel, when they speak, that they are expressing personal opinions, experiences, and feelings in their own way. But there is a wide cultural and subcultural diversity in what seems self-evidently appropriate to say, indeed, to think, feel, or opine.

(1989: 43-44)

This aspect of repetition in discourse might be linked to parallel phenomena identified in language use as frames and scripts. These phenomena constitute a more general manner in which linguistic use is pre patterned in relation to context. They represent some of the ways in which knowledge has been classified, ready for retrieval

when the occasion arises. As defined by Brown and Yule (1983: 239, 243), "a frame is characteristically a fixed representation of knowledge about the world," while a script involves a stereotyped version of a sequence of events describing a situation. Understanding an utterance or reacting to one can be highly governed by one's perception and expectations of what is required in the situation in which one is interacting.

Another parallel can further be drawn between these views of communication and studies undertaken on register. In this field where linguistic choice is controlled and characterised by context, a high degree of pre patterning or formulaicity is to be detected. As Halliday points out in Halliday and Hasan (1985),

A register is a semantic concept. It can be defined as a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor.  
(1985: 38-39)

Expectations about the way a piece of discourse proceeds can be set as soon as the type of the situation is determined. As Halliday observes, although in a slightly exaggerated manner since there are cases in which that is hard to achieve,

Any piece of text, long or short, spoken or written, will carry with it indications of its context. We only have to hear or read a section of it to know where it comes from.  
(1985: 38-39)

In their distinct ways, the approaches delineated above represent some of the various aspects in which language is intertextual and confirm the pervasive amount of pre patterning that underlies its structure and use. The fixity of this patterning, as Tannen goes on to suggest, is however a matter of degree: "some instances of language are more fixed than others" (1989: 44). Hence, repetition may take several forms, to be discerned following these lines (1989: 54): a repetition can be either of oneself or of others. It can be measured on a fixity scale holding between exact repetition and paraphrase. Repetition with variation includes transformations at the syntactic, lexical and rhythmic levels and is classified as most common and holding a midway position on the scale. Repetition can further be measured on a temporal scale that ranges from

immediate to delayed repetition, where delay occurs either within discourse or in terms of the time span.

Some difficulty might arise, however, where a decision needs to be made as to whether repetition is or is not at work (1989: 55). In any case, nevertheless, repetition remains an important instrument for meaning creation that contributes efficiently in binding interlocutors together as they interact through language. Tannen points out in a sentence that echoes Bakhtin, that

Through pre patterning, the individual speaks through the group, and the group speaks through the individual.  
(1989: 96)

Moreover, following Labov (1972) who considers it a form of evaluation, Tannen describes repetition as

a resource by which conversationalists together create a discourse, a relationship, and a world. It is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement.  
(1989: 97)

This interpersonal involvement can be reflected in a number of ways. These, in turn, indicate the functions repetition is capable of assuming in certain situations and discourses. Tannen (1989: 59-71) identifies some of these functions as follows: repetition as participatory listenership, ratifying listenership, humour, savoring, stalling, expanding, repetition as participation, evaluation through patterned rhythm, and bounding episodes. Although these functions are cited to illustrate examples from conversation, that is their repetition is rather of the immediate type, they can arguably be used to describe the functions of repetition of the delayed type like reported speech for instance, regardless of the degree of preservation of the original discourse. This can be seen to correspond to Sperber and Wilson's general claim that

By representing someone's utterance, or the opinions of a certain type of person, or popular wisdom, in a manifestly sceptical, amused, surprised, triumphant, approving or reproving way, the speaker can express her own attitude to the thought echoed, and the relevance of her utterance might depend largely on this expression of attitude.  
(1986: 239)

Given this background concerning the nature of discourse in general, and taking repetition as metaphorical or representative of what occurs at the intertextual level (cf. comparison in terms of mechanisms governing the two by Lemke (1985)), it is possible to explain and base the echoic account of irony on a firmer ground. The apparent paradox that exists in recognising that an ironical utterance is novel and creative on the one hand, and yet echoic all the same, on the other, can be resolved if one keeps in mind the intertextual, dialogic properties of language. The presence of latent cultural norms, values and expectations which are evoked without explanation is one way to consolidate this assumed shared background that ironists exploit. The existence of these assumptions legitimises the treatment of irony in echoic terms and offers a rich ground for the subtlety and implicitness of an irony. As Amante suggests,

Cultural expectations might be viewed as a loose and flexible hierarchy of values which can shift from one generation to the next ... Cultural expectations can derive from almost any source: religion, history, psychology and philosophy are some of the main sources. No matter what their source is, cultural expectations of all kinds can be the locus of irony.  
(1979: 50)

He further claims that

the cultural assumptions against which an ironist reacts need never exist in society since the author can simply assume they exist. His irony then is based upon the assumed cultural norms ...  
(1979: 50)

The evocation of these cultural values, of others' and one's own (former) values and opinions can result in irony once a split in voice resulting from the utterer's having a different perspective on the matter is detected. This split in voice brings about the treatment of the given utterance as belonging to someone other than that utterer. Nunberg (1981: ff 210-211) discussing citations, borrowings, irony and sarcasm as instances of quotation or mention, points out the space they open for distancing oneself from what is presented. He says that

All of these cases are related to the classic semantic problem of quotation contexts ("Galileo said S") in that all of them involve occasion for dissociating oneself from the content of one's utterance.  
(1981: 211)

In the absence of a clearly identifiable source for an utterance that is used ironically, the created intertext can be seen as resulting to a large extent from the manipulation of the question of attribution and information presentation. These factors are to be discussed in the following section.

### 3.2.2. Attribution, Evaluation and the Echoic Account

The element of covertness characteristic of the communication of irony is essential for it to succeed in "saying one thing and meaning another." The existence of a form of incongruity or discrepancy between what is said and is apparently to be taken for granted, and what is actually communicated and mainly consists in questioning to varying degrees that which is said, can be at the basis of the detection of irony.

As mentioned in Chapter I, any sentence is potentially ironical (Sperber and Wilson; Furst, 1984). It is context, or (implicit) recontextualisation which can grant it an ironic property. When the question of attribution, that is the question "Who said this?" or "Who thinks this?" is raised, two answers might be possible, following Sperber and Wilson (1989: 110). The first consists simply in attributing the discourse to its speaker. In the absence of any overt indication to the opposite, an utterance is more likely to be attributed to its current speaker by the hearer. As Ellen Prince claims,

Hearers follow a series of strategies for drawing inferences about to whom a given SA [Stated Assumption] is to be *attributed*, largely on the basis of overt linguistic markers which function as instructions to the hearer. In the absence of such markers, SAs are attributed by the hearer to the speaker (among others, perhaps).

(1978: 364-5)

When the answer becomes, instead, "Someone else thinks or has said that," the status of an utterance changes from a descriptive into an interpretive echoic one where identifying the kind of attitude towards the utterance largely determines the knowledge and awareness of what it communicates.

A main problem for the receiver of verbal irony consists in recognising that the utterance is not to be attributed to the speaker in the first place. In subtler instances especially, camouflage is used to dissimulate the echoic character of the discourse. The large degree of freedom allowed to an ironist in (re-)formulating the idea or belief to be

ridiculed contributes further to rendering the question of attribution more problematic. By presenting an ironic statement in the form of a straightforward assertion, for instance, the ironist makes the process of interpretation difficult and more demanding in terms of processing effort. Reaching the correct interpretation is only achieved through discerning the dissociative element that is to characterise the ironist's attitude towards the implicitly attributed utterance. This, in turn, has to be inferred from the textual and/or contextual clues that the addressee needs to consider in the process of interpretation. It is worth noting that again at this stage this echoic property associated with ironic utterances does not so much spring from their having been previously uttered as it does from their treatment as such by the ironist. It is the ironist who in the attempt to dissociate himself or herself from the utterance at hand and to point out his or her distance from what it contains manages to automatically implicate that the utterance or the opinion it communicates belongs to somebody else and/or is consequently at least not adhered to by the speaker. As Hymes observes, the echoic character of an ironical utterance does not necessarily nor uniquely emanate from its being previously uttered. He describes it as possibly resulting from

an implicit comparison of perspectives, a comparison of a present situation to another possibility in which what is said might be said, a possibility perhaps in the future.

(1987: 300)

In Sperber and Wilson's terms, the echo is equally vague and not necessarily perceptible:

The thought being echoed may not have been expressed in an utterance; it may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely to a type of person, or people in general; it may be merely a cultural aspiration or norm.

(1989: 102)

These statements have the effect of explaining the way the notion of echoic interpretation is to be considered, and consequently widening the scope of the discourse from which ironical utterances can be retrieved. This, on the other hand, has another effect which consists in bringing to the fore the difficulty of coming to terms with the question of attribution, the necessary measure towards grasping ironic

communication. Since irony undertakes to question matters which it apparently presents as definite and taken for granted, it is not always straightforward whether the basis and values underlying the presented utterance are to be attributed to the utterer or whether they are being stated in order to be indirectly questioned.

As argued in Ch. I, all language can to varying degrees be evaluative and expressive of its speaker's attitude. Every utterance is open to irony because whatever definiteness it presents can be open to relativisation and doubt when placed in a different context. Whenever something is presented as definite and given, it inherently and paradoxically carries within it the potential for being questioned for its membership in the category to which it purports to belong. As Jankélévitch points out,

L'ironie remet sans cesse en question les prémisses soi-disant sacro-saintes; par ses interrogations indiscrètes elle ruine toute définition, ravive inlassablement le problème en toute solution, dérange à tout moment la pointifiante pédanterie prête à s'installer dans une déduction satisfaite.  
(1964: 195)

This questioning or relativisation might affect single words as much as sentences, interactions or long stretches of discourse. What matters is that while the ironised part is presented in fullfledged form, it is simultaneously made open to the challenge of relativisation. The very appropriateness of its use is put in question. By being presented as a given, as having led a prior existence in a former discourse, however vague that allusion might be, it, moreover, like all interpretive utterances, opens the way for judgement or questioning by its current utterer. It does not communicate something with its contents, but rather something about them, mainly the utterer's dissociative attitude towards, or opinion of, them.

The echoic account of irony can thus be seen as particularly governed by two major intertwined factors: that of attribution and that of dissociative evaluation. The echo can be considered to spring from the more or less implicit process of attribution of an utterance by its utterer. This leads to the postulate of the presence of at least two distinct points of view coexisting in the same utterance. That of the utterer is in the powerful position as it domesticates the other in order to communicate by means of it.

The imputed thought or opinion to be ironised carries with it the values or perspective of its implicit originator. Its occurrence in the utterer's discourse can result in its distortion if not destruction. As Jankélévitch observes,

... l'ironie, mimant les fausses vérités, les oblige à se déployer, à s'approfondir, à détailler leur bagage, à révéler des tares qui, sans elle, passeraient inaperçues; elle fait éclater leur non-sens, elle induit l'absurdité en auto-réfutation, c'est-à-dire qu'elle charge l'absurde d'administrer lui-même la preuve de son impossibilité; elle fait faire par l'absurde tout ce que l'absurde peut faire lui-même. Est-ce ironie ou machiavélisme?

(1964: 107)

The appropriation of an utterance by another utterer can also lead to the detection of some discordance. This discordance can either be signalled through the use of salient linguistic features like overstatement or understatement, for instance, or through the breaking of one or more of Grice's maxims. It can also be left silent to be inferred from the assumptions of what makes valid values and judgements to the speaker, as they are gathered from the context or from mutual or shared knowledge, and from the purpose of the interaction.

It might be argued then that it is the choice of an ironist to convey distance from an utterance that grants it its echoic property in the first place. That it is uttered for the first time in that form does not make it less so, for it is to be treated as embedded in the ironist's discourse. This "higher" position that the ironist holds or builds in relation to the victim usually implies some failure on the part of the last in terms of behaviour or attitude. The butt of irony, the originator of the ironised utterance or thought, does not have to be personally identifiable. The ironised utterance, moreover, does not need to have been uttered previously. It suffices that the ironist, by apparently presenting it as given, uses it to draw attention to its failure to reach his or her standards. In a text, the scope of what might carry the irony ranges from single words or phrases to long stretches of discourse. In all cases, the ironist creates these intertexts in order to evaluate or question them.

It is important to note that in a more basic manner, the evaluation characteristic of irony can dwell in distinct linguistic components like modifiers, intensifiers, or

adverbials, which explicitly convey the utterer's attitude towards the contents of the utterance. It might, however, be possible in a broader sense to convey the judgmental, evaluative element in the particular use of any other component of the sentence, regardless of whether it is an NP, a VP or a particle. The essential emphasis of this view is on the implicitness of the evaluation, as compared to the explicitness of the attributes or qualifiers. Its concern is more basic as it is oriented towards the nature of what those elements stand for in the first place. The evaluation of the adequacy of the linguistic representation of particular states of affairs is called upon and is conveyed in the way language is used.

A relevant approach developed in philosophy which might shed some light on this point is advanced by Putnam (1975: 150) who presents the notion of stereotype to describe "the kind of information that one conveys when one conveys the meaning of a word." He claims that "in the case of a "natural kind" word one conveys the associated *stereotype*: the associated idea of the characteristics of a normal member of the kind." Although the stereotype might contain information that might be incorrect, "Most stereotypes do in fact capture features possessed by paradigmatic members of the class in question" (1975: 250). Tigers, for instance, Putnam suggests, stereotypically have stripes but if they lose their stripes they will not stop being tigers. He points out that

Even where stereotypes go wrong, the way in which they go wrong sheds light on the contribution normally made by stereotypes in communication.  
(1975: 250)

If this is to be accepted even in a vague sense, it might have significance in the communication of irony in relation to the way it has been presented in this study. When a word is used ironically, it does not necessarily convey its opposite. It may simply indicate that the word has failed, as it is applied by a particular person or by people in general, to satisfy, to a more or less grave degree, some of the features of what it purports to describe, whether that is an entity, a process or a state. The word, with the original connotations that accompany it still evokes its own appropriate context. It is, nonetheless, used to communicate irony when it falls short of fulfilling

the requirements associated with the stereotype to which it is usually applied. As pointed out above, explicitly evaluative elements in a sentence (adjectives, for example) are more likely to be subject to such an application since they explicitly convey the addresser's assessment of a given situation and his or her disposition towards it. Evaluation can, however, reside in other linguistic elements that are apparently more objectively used. That is the elements which do not depend on, or spring from the communicator's subjectivity, nouns representing entities in the "real world" for instance. When used by an ironist, a change in meaning occurs. These elements start to reflect a sensed failure on their part to comply with the entities or processes to which they are made to refer by others in previous discourses. While such words or verbal stimuli, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, are used descriptively by others (or by the speaker's former self), they are used interpretively by the ironist who echoes them in order to ridicule or criticise their inadequacy in fitting the "stereotyped" standards. In other words, irony might result simply from misapplying a word. That is, from using it to convey some misfit between what it is normally and therefore previously used to mean and its application in the discourse of the ironist to describe or refer to something that is a distorted, non-accurate version of that recognised entity or process.

In Levinson's (1983: 109) example for instance where a person B answers "Oh come now, Britain rules the seas!" to a person A's query or hypothesis "What if the USSR blockades the Gulf and all the oil?" the locus of the irony is the verb "to rule." The situation that the verb is used to describe is of course far from being true anymore. The verb, thus used, however, incorporates within it a prior use that was accurate at some time in the past, when Britain literally had a large and powerful navy and therefore, ruled the world to a certain extent. The change in the situation has not apparently changed the idea some people have of the balance of power in the world. They still fail to perceive that "to rule" is not quite the correct word to link Britain to "the seas" anymore. The verb is thus used in an echoic rather than a descriptive manner. Its speaker has emphasised its inaccuracy, and the ridicule associated with the

attitude of the people who believe in its accuracy, by misapplying it in order to describe a situation that does not fit the standards and requirements tied to its stereotyped meaning. Considerations of context and non-verbal knowledge, however, are essential here for reaching any interpretation concerning the use of this verb and are certainly essential to the disambiguation of any other sentence component.

This property delineated above, concerning the existence of some incongruity between the use of a word in a general way by others and its use by the ironist to refer to a false, inaccurate or distorted version of an original prior situation is basic to ironic communication. Although this is anchored in linguistic elements, its impact has repercussions on other levels of discourse. At the pragmatic level, something can be asserted in order to draw attention to its inappropriateness to the actual situation at hand. The ironic comment in this case springs from the evocation of a state of affairs represented in the utterance in order to emphasise its absence and discordance with the actual situation. It might be suggested at this point that two pragmatic notions in particular, presupposition and implicature, have been domesticated, separately and in conjunction with each other to convey irony. Their reliance on notions like shared knowledge, and therefore their ability to play on what is to be said openly and what is to be assumed to be the case, makes them adequate candidates for the generation of irony. They, moreover, offer an important resource for the retrieval of intertexts of the non-actual kind because of the distance between what a person says or does and the interpretation of it that a speaker can use to construct irony. In the following section, the two notions are to be examined for their potential in the creation of ironic intertexts.

### 3.2.3. Presupposition, Implicature and Non-actual Intertexts

It is worth noting that presupposition is not a concept that is readily definable.

As Levinson observes,

there is more literature on presupposition than on almost any other topic ..., and while much of this is of a technical and complex kind, a great deal is also obsolete and sterile.

(1983: 167)

To start with, a main distinction has been set between what is identified as logical or semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition. (From Frege (1892), and Russell (1905), to Strawson (1952), Keenan (1971), Karttunen (1973), Stalnaker (1974), Wilson (1975), Kempson (1975), Prince (1978) and Gazdar (1979)). Presupposition has progressively evolved towards a view that favours a pragmatic account of the subject. A recognised type of inference, presupposition has come to be perceived as "the relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context" (Levinson, 1983: 177). In the same vein, semantic theories of presupposition have been discarded as inadequate. Attempting to establish the relationship between one utterance and another on the basis that one presupposes the other if the second survives the defeasibility test ("A sentence S logically presupposes a sentence S' just in case S' and the negation of S,  $\sim$ S, also logically implies S'" (Keenan, 1971: 45 cited in Brown and Yule, 1983: 29) has been judged too problematic. Instead, presupposition has come to be treated in terms of the speaker: the speaker, not the utterance, is the one that presupposes. Givon (1979: 50 cited in Brown and Yule, 1983: 29) points out that presupposition is "defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge." Stalnaker (1978: 231 cited in Brown and Yule, 1983: 29) supports the same point claiming that "Presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation."

Through the operation of this shift of interest towards the addresser's decision about what is to be assumed and what is to be presented as Given, presupposition can be perceived as reflecting this addresser's disposition towards what the discourse is about. It can, moreover, be seen as an economical means of communication since it avoids asserting what is thought to be (or expected to be) already available to the addressee. By condensing knowledge that is assumed to be shared, an addresser treats it as background information as compared to the information that is foregrounded through assertion. Sperber and Wilson (1986: 202) give the following examples to illustrate these points. In the first,

"Bill's twin sister lives in Berlin"

the information that Bill has a twin sister is presupposed or presented as Given.

In the second,

"Bill has a twin sister who lives in Berlin"

it is asserted and treated as New. According to Sperber and Wilson, it derives its relevance from providing an answer to the question "What does Bill have?" primarily dictated by the focal scale. It involves an assumption on the part of the speaker that Bill's having a twin sister is "neither manifest nor manifestly plausible to the hearer" (1986: 202). The relevance of the information about Bill's having a sister emanates from its economical way of making "immediately accessible an existing conceptual address for this twin sister" (1986: 202). If this assumption is rejected, the first utterance is to be considered more defective than the second one.

Presupposition can be used in addition to that and in a more general manner "for the insinuation of information or a value system or a world-view" according to Katie Wales (1989: 376). Its capacity for knowledge and information management is considerable. It endows its utterer with an unchallengeable power for discourse manipulation in terms of the evaluation of the information presented by disclosing his or her choices concerning what facts are to be treated as known or given. This capacity allows the utterer a great amount of freedom not only in terms of information presentation, but in terms of what implications a particular choice might have on the overall meaning of an utterance. This freedom which might be restricted by factors like who the interlocutor is and what context it is going to be displayed against can still in the end be expected to reflect the utterer's purpose in the utterance or the exchange.

These characteristics of presupposition (regardless of whether it is of the logical or the pragmatic type) make it, I want to suggest, an effective means for conveying irony. Choosing to presuppose something instead of asserting it, that is choosing to treat it as Given rather than New is significant because of the "already there" or "already known" quality bestowed on it. It is this property of presupposition which allows it to

indirectly insert new information but still allow its utterer to pretend that it is shared information. In this case, the sharing of the information occurs as a result of the use of the presupposition while feigning to be a precondition of it. One can imply that the information carried by the presupposition has originated at some point in the past and is therefore open for discussion and negotiation. The created intertexts therefore, act as if they have already been uttered or perhaps as if they could be uttered by somebody else. They can acquire echoic properties which allow them to convey an ironic function. The essential characteristic of this type of utterance is that it is created by a speaker or a writer who chooses to treat it as already present in a prior discourse. This provides the ironist with room for using the presupposed part in order to distance himself or herself from it or undermine it.

Hence, presupposition assumes the givenness of an opinion or an information by treating it as something that has already existed in a prior discourse and is only retrieved because it is taken for granted. This instigates the need to determine the function presupposition performs in the new discourse and, therefore, the attitude this discourse is going to communicate towards it. As Culler (1981: 113) claims, talking about presupposition in poetry, it "opens an intertextual space which can easily become ironic." He further claims, concerning logical presupposition, that

The decision to presuppose undermines referentiality at this level by treating the fact in question as already given. In cases like this, logical presupposition is an intertextual operator which implies a discursive context and which by identifying an intertext, modifies the way in which the poem must be read.

(1981: 113)

Presupposition can thus contribute in the creation of an intertextual discourse which, in turn, offers an open ground for the communication of irony given the various possible interrelationships between the elements of that discourse. Irony can be at work when the intertext evoked through presupposition proves to be false, inappropriate, or contradictory to knowledge already available. Presupposed intertexts are evoked as if they have already existed in a prior discourse for both addresser and addressee. Their familiarity to the addressee is presumed in their presentation: they are

treated as information that is out of focus, and is mentioned only to serve another that is foregrounded and therefore introduced as unknown or new. Thus, presupposition might lead an addressee to agree on the givenness of a certain element and therefore accept what the speaker presupposes. Presupposition can, for instance, be seen at work in narratives which start in *medias res*, where a variably large amount of new information is presented as given and is assumed to be treated as such by the reader until it is elucidated at later stages of the discourse.

Perhaps when something is presented as common knowledge, it becomes difficult for an addressee to question it if there is no obvious proof against it. It might even become embarrassing to do so since that might betray ignorance on the addressee's part. As Prince (1978: 367) points out, when confronted with an utterance like

"Look at those potholes! I hope Edelson gets a flat tire on one!"

an addressee who "has some self-doubts" or is simply curious is likely to respond with "Who's Edelson?" rather than "Is there an Edelson?" The addressee is thus led to take the existence of the person referred to for granted. Because the speaker does not seem to be ready to discuss it and treats it as common ground between the two, this person is less likely to question the truth of the claim. As Prince (1978: 367) further claims, "We may find that another's assumptions are inconsistent with ours, i.e. are wrong, but we cannot deny their assumptionhood." Presupposition has accordingly proved to be a successful strategy for persuasion. Guided questions in wh-form, for instance, are a favourite means of reaching the wanted results from a questionnaire because of the presuppositions they carry. As Loftus (1975, cited in Brown and Yule, 1983: 30) has demonstrated, answers to such questions are not necessarily concerned about the truth or falsehood of the facts at hand but are instead fashioned by the presuppositions inherent in the questions.

Presuppositions can, however, reflect the choice that their speaker has made in order to comment ironically on a given state of affairs. Some form of paradox can be

identified in such cases as discourse that is created by a certain speaker or writer is simultaneously treated as if it had previously existed. This solicits a questioning of the purpose of this non-actual, non-textual intertextual reference. The communication of a dissociative or ridiculing attitude towards what is already established to be the case, the intertext evoked through presupposition, that is its use for ironic purposes, seems to be a major function of the use of this inferential practice. The echoic property will emanate mainly from the calling into question of the givenness of what is presupposed. If Sperber and Wilson's example quoted above ("Bill's twin sister ...") is uttered ironically, the presupposition it contains cannot but be considered defective. What the utterer would be assuming through the presupposition is not to be attributed to him or her. Instead, it is to be interpreted as originating from the addressee, the speaker at an earlier stage or somebody else and therefore as being implicitly attributable to one of them without it having to be necessarily the case. The presupposed intertext can thus be created by the ironist and implicitly attributed to somebody else on whom the irony will be located. In the utterance "Bill's twin sister lives in Berlin," for instance, if the presupposed "Bill has a twin sister" is to be ironically used, there should be some misfit between the "relational Noun Phrase" (Prince 1978: 369) (*a twin sister*) and what it refers to. That is the NP can only be applied to describe a relationship between Bill and the woman other than that of brother-twin sister, where the last is the one that is advertised by Bill or some other people. It could also have been a mistake on the part of the speaker on an earlier occasion. The echoic use of the NP thus presupposed is based on some failure of assessment of the actual relationship and leading to an act of re-attribution. In this case, where the assumption presented as given is untenable, the relevance of the utterance is to be derived from the comment that it makes on the evoked point of view.

To further illustrate the manner in which this kind of intertext operates, consider the following utterance, previously discussed in Ch. I, taken from Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, said by George to his wife Martha:

"We got lonely for the soft purr of your little voice."

George here presupposes qualities with which he describes the voice of his wife. These qualities are clearly belied by the previous discourse. It is obvious to the reader or the theatre audience that the qualities constituting the evoked intertext are not straightforward descriptions of his wife's voice. They are clichés or cultural standards used to qualify, positively or approvingly, female voices but that he, in fact, judges utterly absent from Martha's. He is thus describing a situation which is desirable (in which her voice would satisfy the standard desired), but that is non-available in, and blatantly clashing with the actual situation. The outcome is a comment that is unfavourable and clearly so, even to Martha (the stage direction to her move says that she decides "not to rise to it"). What is presupposed hence is used merely for the purpose of communicating irony. Its flagrant falsehood is emphasised and foregrounded through the use of the linguistic practice that imposes the assumption underlying it in the most innocent manner - innocent here because it apparently distributes the responsibility of the attribution equally among the participants and posits its truth as known. Its relevance is achieved through the multiple contextual effects that it communicates about the woman, her husband, and the situation in which they interact. The number of attributes assigned to Martha's voice (being little, having a purr that is soft ) are too many and too saliently exposed to be mere descriptions of facts, especially perhaps for a culture whose members seem to favour understatement over overstatement in revealing feelings and attitudes towards each other, especially in public. George uses them not only to point out how ridiculous they are once applied to Martha but possibly also to indicate his wishes and what he finds lacking in his wife - one aspect of his marriage which he would have preferred to be otherwise is indirectly unveiled to the audience.

It is worth pointing out at this stage that presupposition can occasionally cooperate with implicature to create non-actual intertexts that are liable for ironic use. In the exchange from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, discussed in section 4.4. in Ch.

II above, two characters agree on the result of an incident that takes it for granted that the death of a black person is not to be reported as a human casualty:

"...anybody hurt ?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."

The answer "No'm" and the elaboration "because sometimes people do get hurt" summarises the beliefs these characters hold in terms of racial matters through implicature: a black person gets killed but the men still agree that there is nobody hurt in the incident. This therefore implies that for them black people are excluded from the category of human beings. What is uttered reflects what constitutes facts and values for these men. Their views are, however, relativised and in fact called into question because they are embedded in the discourse of the narrator of the novel. The exchange, meant to be overheard, acquires an ironical character. What is made the butt of irony in this case, that is the intertext that is commented upon, is what is implicated or deduced by the reader from the exchange, not the actual words uttered in the different utterances. At the same time, this reflects the interlocutors' stand point on the matter, the presuppositions that underlie their interaction. In any case, the exchange is to be interpreted as an echoic interpretation of the characters' opinions where the narrator's attitude towards them is of a negative type, something that is perhaps not easy to determine without further knowledge of the tone established in the rest of the novel. But perhaps simply in comparison with what constitutes valid values for the (implied) reader, what the exchange implicates and presupposes is disputable and open to comment.

#### 3.2.4. Conclusion

Among the various sources generating ironic intertexts, implicature and presupposition are singled out as being of particular interest because of their capacity for indirectly communicating and manipulating information. Most of what is echoed in ironical communication cannot be traced back to an actual utterance produced at a prior time. It is usually rather vague and rarely traceable in the verbal form in which it is

presented. The speaker or writer is thus free to manipulate information in a way that makes it seem already known and therefore liable to commentary on his or her part, given the existence of a minimum of understanding with the hearer or reader. By evoking what is absent in order to stress its clash with the situation at hand, by introducing other people's discourse in a way that permits taking it as overheard and therefore as clashing with some other established value system or standard, an utterer manages to place a discourse in a light that makes it liable to negative judgement. The utterer's reaching the wanted effect will depend however on how much effort the addressee is capable of and willing to invest in the communication.

## CHAPTER IV

### Literary Discourse and the Potential for Irony

#### 1. Introduction

According to research undertaken on oral cultures, irony is present in the verbal narratives of these cultures but only in a limited manner compared to its occurrence in literate cultures. The reason for such a situation seems to have a lot to do with writing and print since the latter are responsible to a great extent for the distance created between the "person who produces an utterance" and "the person who takes in the utterance" as Walter J. Ong (1976: 13) argues in his article "From Mimesis to Irony: The Distancing of Voice." Moreover, the proximity of an audience to the story teller and the high degree of participation of the former makes it difficult for irony to thrive the way it does in the multiple layers that writing grants it by virtue of its very ability for distancing the participants. Thus, Ong claims,

Oral cultures appropriate knowledge ceremonially and formulaicly, and their verbalization remains basically conservative and in principle directly accountable to hearers. Verbal attacks in oral cultures, where such attacks are exceedingly frequent, are normally direct and ostentatiously hostile. Their standard form is the ceremonially taunting name-calling or fliting that is common, it seems, in most if not indeed absolutely all oral cultures. Of course, oral folk are no more virtuous than the literate. Unreliability there well may be in the verbal performance of many speakers in the world of primary (preliterate) orality ... Oral performance cannot readily achieve the distance from life which complex irony demands. Oral cultures want participation, not questions. It is informative that even the highly literate orality of television cannot command the irony common in much serious fiction today.

(1976: 13-14)

It is this further complication of the situation of the interaction within the literary communication which prompts not only the potential for irony but also its occurrence at different levels of discourse. Translated into Booth's words, irony becomes a kind of "secret communion" between author and reader. Such a wording reinforces the covert character of irony, its elusiveness, and associative/dissociative property, discussed in Ch. I, and raises two main questions which I will try to answer in constructing the core of this chapter.

The first question is concerned with finding out what it is that makes the communication of irony a communion (and a secret one), and how secret that communion can be. The second question addresses the participants in the interaction for whom irony is a secret communion as well as those for whom it is a secret conducted "behind their backs." Both questions aim at linking Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony and communication with features of literary discourse, in an attempt to extend the theory which is especially concerned with one-to-one situations in order to account for irony in such complicated discourse situations, with reference to the notions of effort and effect in particular.

Booth divides rhetoric within fiction into two types: one considering fiction as an act of communication in itself and the other trying to account for communication taking place within its confines. The question "Who is talking to whom" posed by Ong in respect to literary communication and its presupposition of a literary "content" to be communicated can thus be considered at more than one level of discourse, each corresponding to one type of rhetoric.

Ong suggests that the notion of "literary content" seems to consider literature as a kind of "box or other container, with something "in" it" (1976: 2) rather than literature as saying something or simply being. It tends to correspond to the prevalent propensity to reduce "verbalisation to spatial equivalents, ... sound to sight." This attitude depends, Ong further claims, on "a strong feeling for words as localised units encouraged by print and on modes of conceptualization useful for Newtonian physics."

The objectification of literature resulting from the loss of the spatio-temporal immediacy of the communicative situation, consisting especially in the loss of the proximity of the participants, is at the origin of the multiple discourse layeredness responsible for the generation of much irony in literature. Irony and its dynamics at the micro-level (bipersonal dimension) of the narrative will be the subject of this chapter. Its movement towards and comprehension by the macro-level (author/reader dimension) will further be considered in relation to Sperber and Wilson's framework.

The emphasis will lay throughout on the characteristics of written literary discourse as opposed to spoken discourse, and its intertextuality.

## **2. Written Discourse**

### 2.1. Introduction

The first step within the quest for that literary "content" around which the literary communication evolves needs to be taken through the recognition of a primary distinction that would separate literary communication and other institutionalised types of communication within the written mode. This distinction would reveal the fundamental differences between the different types of discourse while emphasising at the same time that literature is but a sub-category of written discourse retaining affinities with it.

Before trying to reach an explanation of the potential offered for the communication of irony within literary discourse, an investigation of some properties of human linguistic communication both written and spoken need to be brought to the fore in order to provide a background for this endeavour. These properties, discussed in this section, show basic ways in which literary communication adheres to the general principles of communication and yet, at the same time, distinguishes itself as a separate sub-category of it, governed by its own rules and principles of meaning.

### 2.2. Differences and False Distinctions

#### 2.2.1. Different Functions for Speech and Writing

Speech and writing certainly do differ in various aspects from each other apart from their being expressed respectively, in the graphological medium and in the phonological medium. Nystrand notes that taking "decisions to express oneself in writing rather than speech, or vice versa, is not usually free or neutral" (1986: 31). Choice between the two depends on the functions they serve on the occasions on which they are to be used. Besides, translation from one mode to the other is more difficult than it might be believed: it is not a matter of taking the choice that happens to come first to a person's mind, as a mere medium for expressing thoughts. Despite the

possibilities for overlap between the two modes, properties which keep them apart are retained. As sociolinguists and ethnomethodologists and other researchers' attempts at transcribing conversation and speech in general show, expecting one mode to express itself like the other is too demanding if not impossible; looking for a spoken counterpart for a dictionary is a clear example of the difficulty encountered because of this "division of labour."

### 2.2.2. Different Uses of Linguistic Resources

Another factor contributing to the distinction established between the written and the spoken modes concerns, as pointed out by Halliday and others, the difference in their management of the lexical, syntactic, cohesive resources. The written language tends to have greater lexical density, more paratactic constructions, and more cohesive (e.g., anaphoric and cataphoric) devices. Nystrand reconstructs a figure of oral-written mode transposition and makes two significant comments concerning their comparability. On the one hand, he claims, following Stubbs (1980: 117), that

those forms most difficult to transpose are most clearly distinguished by the medium-specific and nonoverlapping resources of each mode (e.g., intonation, pitch, stress, rhythm; paralinguistic features; and availability of physical and eye contact in speech versus spacing, layout, indentation, punctuation, typeface, capitalization, italics, graphics, margins, and availability of context in writing).

(1986: 29)

On the other hand, he notes in accordance with Gregory and Carroll (1978: 43) that

those written and spoken forms intuitively most similar (e.g., casual conversation and dramatic dialog; essays and lectures) actually differ substantially. Conversation is typically marked by apparent non sequiturs, false starts, obscure allusions, anacolutha, and digressions whereas dramatic dialog is more explicitly cohesive, with pronouns and demonstratives typically having clear intext (or endophoric) references.

(1986: 29)

Pains taken by authors like Dickens or Faulkner and dramatists like Arthur Miller, in attempting to reproduce certain spoken dialectical or idiolectal forms of a problematic nature, to portray the speech of illiterate or semi-literate characters, illustrate the difficulties met in the attempt at the representation of speech in the written mode. The effort put in the translation and transliteration of the sound and structure of

the exchanges into the possibilities of the written mode form a challenge for the creativity and sociolinguistic as well as linguistic ability of the writer. Other distinctions between speech and writing based on assigning notions of context dependence, finality, and interaction to the former and denying them to the latter are, however, negotiable. Both modes in fact share these properties, as will be shown below, though each exploiting them in its own way.

### 2.2.3. Spoken Discourse and Written Discourse: Interaction, Context and

#### Autonomy

##### 2.2.3.1. Context of eventual use

The separation of the "situation of expression" and the "context of use" in spatio-temporal terms, to use Nystrand's parlance, is the primary distinction between written and spoken discourse. The writer and the reader(s) are separated physically from the context of the interaction, unlike the case of speech where the speaker's and the hearer's exchange is generally anchored in the immediacy of their here-and-now. In the case of writing, the "writer's audience is always a fiction," notes Ong:

For addressing a person or persons not present (otherwise why write?) as though they were present (the use of real words is possible only when interlocutors are present to one another in a living here-and-now) is not a natural state of affairs, but an artificial, contrived, fictionalized arrangement.  
(1976: 6)

A text is thus written for an audience that might be either known or anonymous. Unlike spoken discourse, it is not meant for immediate processing and within an immediate exchange, but in Nystrand's terms for an "eventual or potential use." By getting read at a later (eventual) stage, a written text would have achieved its ontological purpose, a fact no less true of the grocery notes one writes to oneself as of political treatises or literary works. Whether the writer is present or absent, long deceased or alive generally becomes of no immediate consequence to what the text is about since he or she is practically already "dead" as soon as the text takes shape and becomes a physically shaped entity. Claiming that written discourse is context free can only be legitimitised in this restricted sense, since the context of eventual use, no less

than immediate context in speech, highly affects the formation of a written text and hence directs its comprehension.

### 2.2.3.2. Theories of Reading and the Distance between Writer and Reader

It is this detachability of the written text from its writer and also from its reader, its objectification and physical tactile presence that has led linguists and literary critics towards approaching it as an "autonomous," "decontextualised," "product."

The autonomy of written texts has been celebrated by the New Critics, interested in the self-contained wholes and the "words on the page" that speak for themselves regardless of the intention of their writers. Reader response theorists and Reception theory as well as other later structuralist theorists, for their part, joined in the general disregard of the writer and even that of the text in their celebration of the reader's powers of recreation. "Dans le texte," Barthes (1970: 157, cited in Fowler, 1981: 102) claims "seul parle le lecteur."

Distinction between a text that is "lisible" and another that is "scriptible" has become a common ground evaluation strategy measuring the degree of challenge confronting the reader: the more scriptible the text, the higher in the aesthetic scale it is thought to be. The process of "écriture," highly welcomed in literary criticism circles, is a witness, at the same time, to the power of the reader and to the "triumph of the signifier." Irony can probably be seen to contribute to the writerly quality of texts given the requirement it imposes on the readers and the active role it assigns to them.

### 2.2.3.3. Written Text: Autonomous, Decontextualised Product?

These theories of interpretation are based on an emphasis on the apparent one-sidedness of the written communication. The remoteness of the writer in time and space from the reader seems to legitimise the freedom to interpret and in a way to rewrite that the latter takes. Hence the motto "Every decoding is another encoding." Also, seen in relation to the traditions they could be reacting against, these approaches might seem more plausible. Within the confines of this study, however, the claim for the decontextualisation, autonomy of written texts (literary and non-literary), and their

treatment as products standing in opposition to spoken texts, which are considered as highly context-dependent processes, remains questionable if not unacceptable.

Consideration of the other participant (receiver or addressee) and of the context is as important for written texts as it is for spoken ones; they simply work differently in each case. "A written text as a whole," Halliday and Hasan assert "still has its own outer context of situation, in which the writer may refer exophorically either to himself, as *I* or *we*, or to his reader(s), as *you*, or to both. This happens in letter-writing, in first person narrative, in advertising, in official documents addressed to the public, and in notices ..." (1976: 50).

Treating spoken language as a process not only springs from the correspondence between the spatio-temporal situation of the speaker and the hearer, i.e., from their access to the here-and-now of the interaction and the potential for anchoring the conversation in the context. It also springs, as a consequence of that, from their participation in planning the direction of the interaction - or "process sharing" (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 58). According to Stubbs (1983), there is a strong tradition favouring the perception of highly edited texts as products, thus hiding or ignoring the amount of drafting and redrafting undergone by the text before a satisfactory version is reached. There is usually no way to guess the amount of processing that has taken place either. However, once this process is completed, the reader is faced with the task of reconstructing the meaning of the text following the sign-posts set up for him or her by the writer. The engagement of the reader in making sense legitimises his or her consideration as an active participant in the interaction. As Stubbs notes,

From the point of view of a reader (at least when reading a text for the first time) ... reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game (F. Smith, 1973), and the process of comprehension is similar to comprehension of spoken language.

(1983: 212)

This involvement of the reader is even more perceptible in ironical communication where much is left to the reader to work out. Another point concerning the notion of writing as a process springs from the fact that writing is not just a matter of choosing the words after the thinking has been done, or after the "ideational fact" as

Nystrand calls it. Writing itself has in fact a role in prompting thinking and serves as its very realisation. Nystrand quotes E. M. Forster saying "How do I know what I think till I see what I say?" (1986: 28).

A final neglected property of writing (considered in the next section) is concerned with its interactive aspect. Unlike what a view of written discourse as autonomous and decontextualised might contend, written texts have writers who, like speakers, have their receivers in mind. Their discourse is shaped according to the demands of the communicative situation as well as the readers' expectations. Every part of the structure of the text would stand as a witness of the meeting of the writer's purpose from the interaction with the provisions he or she made for the reader. Stubbs says that it might be possible to regard written language as non interactive only if

discourse is seen merely as the realization of sequences of propositions which could be represented in the predicate and propositional calculus: semantic content plus logical relations. However, anything else is interactive. That is, any devices for presenting the semantic content are interactive, since they design discourse for its hearers or readers.

(1983: 212)

#### 2.2.4. Summary

It is noticeable that writing and speech draw on different linguistic resources. They are used for different, sometimes non transposable purposes. They, moreover, present different discourse situation structures playing on the proximity and distance of the participants from each other and from the context of the interaction. And it is this question of proximity between participants which plays an important role in the communication of irony, which will distinguish, it will be assumed in this chapter, between the potential for irony offered by either type of discourse. The two types of discourse, nonetheless, do share several elements, which have generally been restricted to the description of spoken discourse alone. Both modes are interactive and context-bound for their production as well as their comprehension, though each in its own way. This property which is crucial to irony proves to operate equally in both types of discourse. Exactly what is meant by the interaction of written discourse, and the ways

in which this property is achieved, is to be examined in the next section, given the part it performs in laying the ground for irony and facilitating its communication.

### **3. Written Discourse: Dialogism, Reciprocity, Negotiation and Comprehension**

This section will try to demonstrate why and how written language is interactive and context-bound, especially in the light of what Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, already mentioned in Ch. II, and Nystrand's notion of reciprocity propose about discourse.

#### 3.1. The Dialogic Aspect of Written Discourse

Claiming that writing is a monologic activity does not imply that it is also monologic in its communicative structure. For every time one engages in writing, there has to be some reason or purpose for prompting the person to undertake the enterprise in the first place. There has also to be a reader (even if it is oneself as in the case of diaries or reminder notes) in the eventual context of use. The amount of knowledge and the expectations of that potential reader determine to a great extent the form and the content that the written text will eventually take. Widdowson talks about the writer's conversing, during the writing activity, with an imaginary reader. For his part, Bakhtin talks about the "internal dialogism of the word." For him, "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (1981: 279). He equally asserts that

The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile.

(1981: 276)

Bakhtin also emphasises the social character of language and the individual's propensity to "share being." In a quotation cited in Nystrand (1986: 33), he claims that

the word is always oriented toward an addressee, toward what that addressee might be ... each person's inner world, and thought has its stabilized *social audience* that comprises the environments in which reasons, motives, values,

and so on are fashioned ... the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant ... Each and every word expresses the one relation to the other. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a territory *shared* by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor.

(1973: 85-86)

Bakhtin's dialogism does not stop at the level of production, however, it also encompasses understanding and what he labels "active response". For him, the two are "dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other" (1981: 282). He notes that active responsive understanding is the only way for meaning to be realised: "The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on an alien territory, the listener's, apperceptive background" (1981: 282). Hence, for an act of communication to be successful, an acknowledgement of the need of the addressee for active responsive understanding has to be made by the addresser in relation to what he or she has to say. A failure in keeping up this balance can result in misunderstandings, ambiguity and failures of communication.

### 3.2. Reciprocity, Negotiation, and Comprehension

Building on Bakhtin's dialogism, Nystrand's view of written discourse starts from the premise that it is not only what a writer intends to say which shapes the direction his or her text takes. It is mostly, the "communicative need of writers to balance their own purposes and intentions with the expectations and needs of readers" (1986: 36) which give a discourse its final shape. In other words, it is the Reciprocity Principle which accounts for understanding and successful communication. So defined, this principle can operate only because of the presupposed existence of a "pact of discourse" or "contract," the fact that "negotiation" and the need for establishing and maintaining a "mutual frame of reference" as well as the existence of a "shared or mutual knowledge" underlying all communication. The Reciprocity Principle is assumed to govern all social acts, including verbal interaction. Clarity in communication or explicitness is not so much a matter of saying everything and in well-formed complete sentences. Given the pact of discourse aiming at understanding

between participants and linking what is to be said with their needs and expectations, explicitness is instead a matter of "striking a balance between what needs to be said and what can be assumed." Hence, Nystrand adds,

writers must initiate and sustain conditions of reciprocity between themselves and their readers if their communication is to be coherent. Texts function and are lucid to the extent that this balance is maintained; they are unclear and dysfunctional to the extent that it is not.

(1986: 72)

It is knowing what to be explicit about that counts if efficient communication is to be achieved. This is a formula that is particularly relevant to the way irony worked given the need for covertness and implicitness necessary for its communication. The respective concerns of the writer for expression and of the reader for comprehension (1986: 95) is what needs to be conciliated for a text to be explicit enough for the purposes of successful communication. "Ambiguity and clarity" are in fact "not intrinsic qualities of text but rather aspects of *agreement* on the meaning between conversants" (1986: 95). Moreover, an "explicit text is not a text whose meaning is completely embodied in the text but rather a text about which relevant contextual evidence is not in dispute" (1986: 96). Whether a text is written or spoken, whether it is about philosophy or is a piece of gossip, explicitness remains a function of the demands made on it by the participants both to express themselves and to understand each other. For instance, legal texts, for all their attempts to say everything in minute detail are not only boring for non-specialists (and probably specialists as well), but do not seem to be very intelligible either (although of course they are perfectly appropriate for their purposes). A word like *Entrance* or *Exit* above a door, on the other hand, for all its brevity and cryptic appearance is as explicit and intelligible as any person speaking the language would expect from efficient communication. Where the latter is perceived as "a matter of operating on and transforming a shared knowledge base" (1986: 41), being aware of what is known is a necessary step towards knowing what to say. An ironical text can only be comprehensible if this balance between what is known or given and what is new is observed. The risk of misfire is always in

operation in irony, however, because of the risk of miscalculation on the part of the writer of what the reader, who is absent, knows in order for the interaction to succeed.

Following Sperber and Wilson (1982), Nystrand rejects the idea of mutual knowledge as a prerequisite for comprehension and considers it instead as a result of that very process. He further contends that in their quest for making sense of what the other participant says or in their "negotiation" of meaning, people first make sure that a "mutual frame of reference" has been established between them (and failure to do so can also be meaningful and significant); a measure that serves to contextualise their expressions and establish an equal common footing on which they can start that expression. They then proceed with their contributions. But as soon as a disturbance takes shape in the course of the exchange (in the form of a new or unclear contribution), the mutual frame of reference is endangered and might not be maintained. A call for renegotiation thus has to be carried out in the form of a reestablishment of a new frame of reference and a new attempt at its maintenance. In Nystrand's terms,

discourse is not so much the encoding and transmission of what the speaker knows as it is a set of procedures whereby the conversants focus jointly on various aspects of what they know for the purpose of examining and perhaps transforming this knowledge.

(1986: 44)

In writing, where the shaping of the text is the responsibility of the writer during the monologic activity, he or she is faced with the necessity of making crucial decisions about what has to be said and what can be assumed, i.e., what can be treated as "given" and what should be "new." The eventual context of use, the further dimension to which a text has to be attuned if comprehension is to be reached, is equally taken into consideration by the writer. Nystrand notes that

skilled writers do not modify what they have to say in light of their readers' knowledge or lack thereof; what they actually write - indeed, *what they have to say* - is largely a result of this situation.

(1986: 120)

Whether a definition will have to follow the mention of the word "semiotics," for instance, and whether the issues mentioned in relation to it need to be "buttressed" within a particular text, depends to a great extent on what the writer expects the

knowledge of his or her readers to be. But it depends, moreover, on the function the text will be performing at the time of its reading. Being attuned to that context of use conditions the content of a text as well as its reading. Three tasks, in tune with their readers' comprehension strategies, have to be taken into account according to Nystrand by writers during the composition process. He thus claims that

First, they must establish a footing by identifying common ground ... In addition, they must contextualize new information - buttressing those points of text which, if not treated, would threaten the established balance of discourse between writers and their readers. And finally (though not necessarily last), they must carefully mark relevant text boundaries to indicate conceptual, narrative, and other shifts, and to break the text into manageable information units.

(1986: 101)

Reading, on the other hand, seems to be carried out through a process of elimination. The different layers of context contribute in narrowing down whatever expectations readers might have or develop about the meaning of a given text. The process of elimination continues during the reading process itself, Nystrand (1986: 57) argues, answering the readers' questions "What sort of text" (Genre), "What sort of topic" (What the text is about), and "What sort of comment" (What the writer wants to say about that topic). This top-to-bottom approach (from genre to topic to comment) constrains and progressively narrows down the range of possible meanings to be expected within the following level. When the writer's organisation of a given text follows these steps, many of the difficulties encountered in reconstructing the meaning of the interaction are eliminated. Although there is no failsafe guarantee for the successful communication of intricate cases like irony, following this procedure might be positively rewarded.

### 3.3. Summary

To sum up then, a writer charges a text with meanings that are fashioned in accordance with his or her primary need for expression, the purpose of that expression, and conformity to the reciprocity principle. These "potential" meanings, in Halliday's terminology, can be actualised into an "instantial" meaning only through the intervention of a reader whose needs and expectations coupled with the interpretive

context in which the process takes place would be responsible for the interpretation given to the text. "Texts are like electric circuits," Nystrand contends, "There is potential but no arc of meaning until some reader completes the circuit" (1986: 43). Irony, it might be argued, operates in the same way: an irony that misfires is equal to a break in communication and what that implies in terms of the interpersonal relations binding the interlocutors.

#### **4. Literary Discourse**

##### 4.1. Self-expression and Audience

As a recognised institutionalised type of written language, literature has basically been ascribed an aesthetic function that puts it on the same footing as other types of art like painting and music. It is constantly compared and made covetous of their purity of expression, however, and nearly always opposed to "ordinary language" or "everyday language" despite the strong linguistic bonds linking them.

The requirements of artistic purity on literature have taken various guises. The belief discussed in Booth (1961) that true artists (or writers) disregard audiences and only write for themselves is a contention that illustrates this longing for purity. It equally echoes slogans like "art for art's sake" and "a poem should not mean but be" that keep sinking and emerging in the history of literature. The writer is thus made to appear in a different light from anybody else trying to use the language to communicate. The aesthetic value is made derivable from the proximity between perception and expression and their being carried out for their own sake: a true artist is thus seen as one who writes for himself.

Such a claim for the priority of self expression in art taken in its stricter sense can only be seen as absurd given the fact that the artist needs the recognition of his audience in order to be treated as an artist in the first place. Writing, even for mere self-expression, presupposes the existence of a reader even if it is the writer's "second self" as Booth calls it. The pact of discourse and the dialogic nature of language are as effective in literature as they are in other types of writing. Besides, recognising the existence of an addressee towards whom the message is aimed does not make literary

discourse less aesthetic. Ford Madox Ford, cited in Booth (1961: 88), says "You must have your eyes forever on your Reader. That alone constitutes Technique." François Mauriac, also cited in Booth (1988: 88), for his part, claims that "An author who assures you that he writes for himself alone and that he does not care whether he is heard or not is a boaster and is deceiving either himself or you." Addressee consciousness, however, is of a different kind in literature from what it is in other types of writing and consequently it poses different constraints on both writers and readers of literature. For readers of texts communicating irony, this kind of awareness is of a crucial importance as it determines to a large extent, as will be demonstrated below, who will qualify for the privileged position of a "confederate" of the writer and who will not.

## 4.2. The Reciprocity Principle and Generic Expectations

### 4.2.1. The Reciprocity Principle and Irony : the Secret Communion

Although of a special type, literary communication equally requires the interaction, necessary in written communication in general, or the completion of the circuit in Nystrand's terms, between writer and reader through the text for meaning to be achieved. Unlike other types of communication, however, while the reciprocity principle holds at the level of genre (what kind of text), it is left to the reader to reconstruct the topic and the comment as the reading activity goes on under the guidance of the writer. "What is unique about fiction" says Nystrand "is the temporary suspension and promise of reciprocity" (1986: 79). Besides, as pointed out in connection with recontextualisation above, any discourse can be encompassed and adopted by literary discourse regardless of its provenance.

The demand for reciprocity is observed all along by the writer ultimately (and ideally since exceptions are not scarce) leading to understanding (between writer and reader). The writer builds up a common base from which to start off the work in terms of which the reader will reconstruct what is to be taken as given and what is to be considered new. Drawing on shared knowledge and bringing selected parts of it to the fore is a way of establishing its mutuality to both interactors and the means to

distinguish the given and new distribution in the rest of the text. Besides, world knowledge and generic knowledge are activated to stir the readers' expectations about the work and serve as clues and tools for the actualisation of meaning.

Understanding in this type of discourse, however, according to Nystrand, does not take place from the start or following the steps normally delineated for informative expository discourse. Unlike that type of writing, no glossary or statement of purpose is normally made at the beginning of the work for instance. No buttressing needs to be undertaken every time a "new" element is introduced. In the case of characters, for instance, it is generally left to the reader to reconstruct their identity from information that is gradually (directly or indirectly) provided in the course of narration. Usually, by mentioning a name, for instance, the writer seems to establish it as given in the story, as part of a common frame of reference for the reader - a frame of reference that the reader will draw upon in order to reconstruct the intended ironies of that discourse.

Thus, because of generic constraints, understanding can only be achieved at the completion of the interaction, once the writer's "promise of reciprocity" is fulfilled; when the writer's needs for self-expression and the reader's expectations of understanding are realised. All the playfulness with the reciprocity principle in between is just a confirmation of the genre.

In the case of ironic texts, a communion between the author and the reader results from this final agreement on meaning, when what has been assumed fits knowledge already available to or retrievable/inferable by the reader and when what has been said proves to be the necessary complement for comprehension to be achieved. Once the mismatch between what is said and what is meant which is characteristic of irony is overcome, the author and the reader's communion becomes a secret one. It is as if language is made to speak through itself: what is said is allied with what is assumed to create what is meant. At the same time, a form of alliance is created between writer and reader resulting from the implicitness of the communication. The warning issued in Ch. I against a blind acceptance of this question of alliance or

association is still applicable in this context. But it is important to recognise that it is in operation in its minimal form as a result of understanding the ironical covert meaning. As Tannen (1989: 23) observes, "by requiring the listener or reader to fill in unstated meaning, indirectness contributes to a sense of involvement through mutual participation in sensemaking."

The perception of the duplicity of the words by the reader reflects his or her close rapport with and proximity to the author's point of view since it also reflects the amount of mutual knowledge that has resulted from the interaction or has been confirmed by it. The fact that the reader has had to supply or draw on the particular information necessary for comprehension (about which the writer remained silent on the assumption that the reader would work it out if not already cognisant of it) proves the accuracy of the writer's expectations about the capacities and the knowledge of his or her reader. The writer's management of the text in terms of given and new, what can be assumed and what needs to be said, coincides in this way with his or her assumptions about the reader's knowledge, bringing them together while excluding anybody else who would have failed to recover and instantiate the intended meaning. In a general manner, as Stewart points out,

What is left unsaid is assumed by members to be apparent, "what everybody knows." In fact, this is precisely why it is safe to allow the unsaid to remain unsaid. "What everybody knows" is arranged hierarchically according to the contingencies of the situation at hand. To make apparent what is unnecessary to the situation, what does not need to be articulated, would be to invert this hierarchy and disintegrate the boundaries of the situation - to disintegrate the very basis of "shared understanding" upon which the situation is constructed.

(1978: 86)

Hence, recognising the ironic nature of an utterance proves that the reader has been capable of going beyond what was said, supplying the missing components necessary for comprehension, while staying in tune with the covertness required by irony, with no need for the author to declare openly his or her intentions within the text itself. Usually, backing for an ironic interpretation is to be found in variably subtle clues inserted in the co-text or context by the author for the reader's benefit. The secrecy of the communion depends on how much is assumed and consequently on how much

is left for the reader to infer or supply. Irony being by definition a mode of meaning that springs from what is said evoking what is absent, what remains unsaid, its description as a "secret communion" by Booth conforms to a great extent to the dynamics characterising its comprehension.

It is, moreover, arguable that the communication of irony, measured in terms of Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, tends to necessitate extra processing effort during its interpretation on the promise of an equal reward in terms of contextual implications and cognitive effects. Communion between writer and reader is bound to obtain once those effects are recovered and the echoic nature of the utterance is perceived. It can further be argued that the secrecy of the communion varies according to the amount of processing effort: the amount of effort required for the interpretation reflects the degree of mutual understanding between writer and reader. The degree of implicitness of an utterance and how much has been left for the reader to work out or supply to reach a plausible understanding indicates a writer's expectations or estimation of what the reader knows. When the reader needs to spend more effort than expected, then that reveals a miscalculation on the part of the writer of what the reader knows and therefore of how much should have been left unsaid. As Sperber and Wilson suggest, implicitness can be an indication of mutual understanding:

A speaker aiming at optimal relevance will leave implicit everything her hearer can be trusted to supply with less effort than would be needed to process an explicit prompt. The more information she leaves implicit, the greater the degree of mutual understanding she makes it manifest that she takes to exist between her and her hearer. Of course, if she overestimates this degree of mutual understanding, there is a risk of making her utterance harder or even impossible to understand. It is not always easy to strike the correct balance: even a slight mismatch between speaker's estimate and hearer's abilities may make what was merely intended to be helpful seem patronising or positively offensive to the hearer.

(1986: 218)

The more silent the writer has been about a particular matter then, the more secret his or her communion with the reader is expected to become when comprehension is achieved.

In the same vein, it can be argued that the greater the processing effort needed for the comprehension of a particular utterance, the greater the number of readers who

would fall short of expending the necessary effort and collecting the full pragmatic effects. Excluding those readers who fail to activate or possess the knowledge relevant to the interpretation of irony enhances the secrecy of the communion with the writer - a communion achieved by those readers who are capable, alert and willing enough to search for the meaning intended behind the duplicitous words. As Booth says,

Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded.

(1961: 304)

#### 4.2.2. Generic Expectations and Comprehension

The notion of expectation in reading is not only important but necessary for defining the quality and amount of knowledge to be invoked in the activity of making sense of a text. Expectations are made more precise when information about the genre of the text is provided. Thus defined, they are responsible for determining a good deal of the meaning itself and the clues for its detection as well as the reaction that the readers might have towards it. Genette says that

la perception générique, on le sait, oriente et détermine dans une large mesure l'"horizon d'attente" du lecteur, et donc la réception de l'oeuvre.

(1982: 11)

Generic expectations actually dictate the type of reading to be applied in the quest for meaning. They also determine the kind of relation to be established between the participants as well as the type of communication undertaken.

In *The Modes of Modern Writing*, Lodge discusses this point with particular reference to the distinction made between journalistic and literary writing. Lodge compares Orwell's story of a hanging with a similar story published in a newspaper. He points out that, while it is crucial that the information and details presented in the article be real and accurate, there is no need for those presented in the Orwell story to be so. While it would be a disaster if any of the information in the article is belied, the effectiveness and appreciation of Orwell's story will not be affected in the least if there were any doubt about the accuracy of the events it narrates. The difference lies in what

is necessitated by the genre. The readers' expectations will not include accuracy as a condition to be fulfilled by Orwell's account. On the contrary, the blurring of the line between fiction and reality might be one of the attractions of the story.

Hence, the outcome of the interaction of the readers and the writer is dictated to a large extent by the generic classification allocated to the text. Genre recognition, recognising a written piece as a novel or poem or a drama, is the first step within the elimination process leading to its comprehension. Decisions about the content and value of a particular work can follow only once its genre is established. Hence Booth's claim that "Exactly the same verbal signals will be read quite differently, depending on decisions - often, from the author's point of view, incorrect - about genre" (1961: 435).

Without going as far as declaring categorically that all literature is based on Fish's interpretive communities' decisions about it, Booth's point remains valid in recognising the importance of the reader's decision about how to classify any given work for what interpretation the reader will give. As Nystrand points out (1986: 75), misinterpretations of Swift's *A Modest Proposal* are to a great extent caused by the readers' faith in the seriousness and straightforwardness of the writer, inspired by the expectations from the genre of exposition in which the latter chose to present his piece. Since "essayists say what they mean and mean what they say," historical information and knowledge about Swift and his era are necessary to direct the reader towards an ironic reading of the text. The choice of the type of text suggesting seriousness can be considered in this light as a mere mask worn by the writer in his quest for effectiveness.

Determining the genre of a text is a form of intertextual activity that illuminates the act of reading. It thus serves to a great extent in orienting the direction the interpretation follows by bringing to the reader's consciousness all the knowledge he or she has gathered from previous exposure to similar texts about the tools needed in the process of creating meaning. "Genre" according to Nystrand "is a way of elaborating not the text itself but rather the communicative event" (1986: 75).

Although a writer can take responsibility for the generic classification of a work, the classification can be subject to change given the continuous problematisation of the criteria for genre distinction. The disputes held over the generic classification of certain works shows that the criteria used in this process are not inherent in the text but dictated from outside. Generic membership is not a characteristic of the text itself but rather a function allocated to it leaving an imprint profound enough to affect the direction taken in the reconstruction of its meaning. Thus Genette asserts that

Dans tous les cas, le texte lui-même n'est pas censé connaître, et par conséquent déclarer, sa qualité générique: le roman ne se désigne pas explicitement comme roman, ni le poème comme poème. Encore moins peut-être ... le vers comme vers, la prose comme prose, le récit comme récit, etc. 'A la limite, la détermination du statut générique d'un texte n'est pas son affaire, mais celle du lecteur, du critique, du public, qui peuvent fort bien récuser le statut revendiqué par la voie de paratexte: ainsi dit-on couramment que telle "tragédie" de Corneille n'est pas une vraie tragédie, ou que le *Roman de la Rose* n'est pas un roman.

(1982: 11)

### 5. Literary Discourse Situation

Because of the generic constraints on communication in literary discourse, the discourse situation and the participants in the interaction acquire different functions and characteristics than they have in other types of discourse. A large part of the effect in literary discourse is derived from its multi-layeredness. Scholes declares literariness a function of duplicity in one of the components of Jakobson's communicative act. Duplicity of the addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, and code is a sign of literariness. The duplicity of the addresser and addressee can particularly be brought to the fore in a study of the interpersonal relationships between author and audience within the particular case of the communication of irony in literary discourse.

Unlike the narration of history or other non-literary narratives, fiction displays a more complex discourse situation where utterance attribution and therefore interpretation can become problematic. The fictionality of the discourse is responsible for the drawing of lines between real life participants, the author and the reader, and the other participants in the interaction who are fictional, with divisions among the latter delineating further complications in the discourse situation.

Thus, the outcome is interaction that takes place at two different levels of discourse. The first type of interaction exists within the work among its characters on the one hand and between the characters, the narrator and the implied author, on the other. Interpretation of these participants' actions and utterances depends not only on the reader's linguistic competence and knowledge of the world but also involves coming to terms with the second type of interaction - author-reader; what the writer tries to do to steer the flow of meaning in one direction rather than another through a careful manipulation of the presentation of his or her as well as the characters' and the narrator's actions, thoughts and words. Keeping in mind that the writer and reader must eventually come together as a sign of the fulfilment of the conditions of reciprocity, interpretation of a certain work necessitates a continuous engagement in decision making about who said or did what and where the writer stands in relation to it. Whether to take an utterance or action seriously or ironically, for instance, can be decided only once possible interferences from other elements from the same level (other characters) and higher levels of discourse (narrator, implied author, or characters with more information) have been scrutinised.

Misreading is frequently a result of easy acceptance of *prima facie* statements or actions disregarding the modifications that could have been revealed through a more thorough consideration of the interaction between the layers of discourse, in other words, through a better consideration of the matter of attribution. Critical attribution of thought and attitude within the work is essential and can only be realised at the author-reader level of interaction. Assuming with Roger Sell (1985: 498) that "All texts address real life meanings from their creators to their recipients, and a creator's estimate of the text's reception by its likely recipient can affect its formation," the reader will also act accordingly. The reader will look for what Booth (1961: 105) describes as "rhetoric in the narrower sense - elements that are recognisable, separable, "friends of the reader"" to guide him or her through the steps of interpretation.

### 5.1. Participants and Layeredness/Embedding in Literary Discourse

As in other types of writing, literary discourse takes place between a writer and a reader over a text. Like all narration, it likewise presupposes an addresser and an addressee. "I tell" Atwood declares somewhere, "therefore you are." The problematisation and consequently the difference of fictional discourse comes from the anchoring of these interpersonal relationships (author-reader) in other relationships around which the text revolves. The author can thus create meaning for the reader only in an oblique manner, through the text. In the same way, the reader sets up the hunt for sense, aiming at the final reconstruction of supposedly intended meaning through the text.

Unlike other types of writing, the correspondence between sender and addresser, on the one hand, and the receiver and addressee, on the other, as Widdowson points out (1975: 47), is disturbed in literary discourse. The sender and receiver stop being identical to, respectively, the addresser and the addressee and distinguish themselves as belonging to different worlds: the former to the real world, and the latter to the world of fiction. A one to one relationship between author and reader is thus distorted by the exigencies of the peculiar interaction in which they are engaged, leading them to communicate through the mediation of other participants.

Herbert H. Clark (1987) examines the same issue and devises four dimensions for language use that can serve as an introduction towards a further specification of the literary discourse situation. He differentiates between

- 1 - the bipersonal dimension (speaker and listener relationship)
- 2 - the audience dimension (variation of language depending on types of interactors)
- 3 - the layered dimension (what is produced and communicated in complicated settings)
- 4 - the temporal dimension (emphasis on the synchrony requirement in production and interpretation of language).

The layered dimension provides a rough depiction of what is at work in the case of literary interaction. Clark recognises the presence of layers of discourse and assigns several parameters for every layer: "a principal, a respondent, a setting, a time frame and a social process the principal and the respondent are engaged in" (1987: 16). Successful understanding rests on the recognition of the whole pyramid of layers each "nested within the domain of the layer just below it" with "genuine language use occurring only at the top most layer" (1987: 16,17).

The nucleus within a work of fiction thus revolves around a fictional situation where characters interact with each other. They can address each other or even themselves (as in the case of monologues, or diaries). Their discourse situation is usually close to what is depicted in real life except that whatever the characters do is eventually monitored in some way or other by the author. This layer is encompassed within at least one extra layer, that of the author and reader. Such a situation brings the discourse close to the case of eavesdropping. Yet, it differs fundamentally from it because of the role the author plays in shaping the goings on in the story as compared to merely witnessing their taking place without him or her being able to interfere with any of its developments.

Similar hierarchies of discourse levels based on the binary polarisations of addressers and addressees have equally been devised by scholars working on fictional discourse to describe the interpersonal structure of such writing. A consensus seems to have been met concerning leaving the real author and the real reader out of the actual discourse situation. Adams, (cited in Tan, 1989: 73), describes the pragmatic structure of fiction in embedding terms

W (S (Text) H) R

(W: writer, S: speaker, H: hearer, R: reader)

The writer and reader are thus portrayed as standing on the periphery of the discourse interaction, with a speaker and a hearer involved in the fictional discourse surrounding the text itself.

With a slight change of perspective, from embedding to layering, the author and reader are equally excluded from other studies of fiction. An implied author and an implied reader are thus created to portray them in a manner that is more abstract and stable throughout the work itself and its life as a literary work. Booth notes that

The "implied author" chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices.

(1961: 74-5)

The implied writer is needed so that one can attribute to him or her the meaning that one can gather in the work, however controversial or implausible it might be. Assuming the existence of such a force governing the narrative might save a lot of what can become mere speculation about the real author's views from taking shape. The practicality of this division is pointed out by Booth as he observes that

It is only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as "sincerity" or "seriousness" in the author.

(1961: 75)

The implied writer, however, needs the implied reader as the person equipped with the right knowledge (cultural, historical, literary etc.) that would guarantee adequate interpretation of the work. Any requirements that are missing can result in pragmatic failure. Cases of irony, parody, and humour are frequently lost on readers who fail to recognise the extra reference needed for interpretation. Ignorance of certain value codes echoed in a certain work because of cultural or historical distance, for instance, can result in serious misinterpretations.

The narrator whose presence seems to be reduced to a minimum in certain works is equally crucial in the communication situation. Rimmon-Kenan says that "there is always a teller in the tale, at least in the sense that any utterance or record of an utterance presupposes someone who has uttered it" (1983: 88). She, furthermore, defines a narrator as "the agent which at the very least narrates or engages in some activity serving the needs of narration." The presence of narrators is more or less perceptible, but they cannot be made to disappear altogether. Their narratees, more or less openly addressed, are equally always presupposed. The interaction between them

can range from direct address in a jocular manner to mere "showing" accompanied by an elaborate camouflage of the narrator's voice.

The narrator-narratee level of discourse comes above the level of interaction between characters. The two levels could, however, be conflated when the narrator is not only reporting things about the characters, but also taking part in the story itself. In Genette's terminology, a narrator is extradiegetic if he is outside or above the story he narrates, but intradiegetic or second degree, if he also features as character in the story. These two types of narrator can, moreover, be called heterodiegetic if they are absent from the story they narrate or homodiegetic if they are present in it. The association of extradiegetic and heterodiegetic characteristics in a narrator usually give him omniscience, i.e., knowledge of what takes place everywhere, at the same time.

The above levels of discourse, as pointed out in Leech and Short (1983), can be conflated in the absence of a reason for the opposite. Besides, their relations are not stable and do not have to be binary; they can be asymmetrical reflecting the conflation of levels on one side of the hierarchy or the other. They, on the other hand, can be multiplied *ad infinitum* reflecting the increase in the levels of interaction and the addition of further layers of discourse. Besides, these layers are believed to multiply with the depiction of every irony in a given work, as that presupposes the existence of some real or imagined originator of the opinion echoed for the purposes of ridicule or comment. That new participant, to whom the ironised utterance is attributed, will constitute another layer to be added to the discourse hierarchy at hand.

## 6. Layeredness and Irony

The definition of irony as a disfavoured echoic response to an implicitly attributable opinion by a certain speaker in order to dissociate him or herself from it has been mostly considered in instances of simple one to one utterances - instances where the context is clearly delineated in the physical surroundings of the interlocutors or to be reconstructed from their utterances. In the two previous chapters, I have tried to explore the grounds on which this definition can be validated and extended to account for irony at the level of discourse in general. Notions like intertextuality,

recontextualisation, and presupposition have proved valuable in elucidating the workability of this definition both at the micro-level (word, sentence) and at the macro-level (texts, genres, narratives). This chapter has been driving towards the argument that this account of irony can equally encompass what goes on in the complexity of literary discourse as well. The potential for incongruity in such discourse is a rich field to exploit for irony, the practice which depends by definition on the duplicity of voice. Sperber and Wilson's definition of irony can thus be functional in literary discourse in the following ways.

First, it is applicable to the nature of narrative fictional discourse itself. For whether a story is told in the first or third person, a certain distance is always to be presupposed between the subject who is narrating and the experiencer of the action. However close the two may be, the temporal distance conveyed by the act of telling itself is capable of betraying the disparity between experience and reconstruction (cf. Ch. VI). Being filtered through the eyes or senses of the teller, the report cannot help being tainted by the latter's perception of the matter. The repercussions on the description or report can easily be detected in the manipulation undergone by the language during the process of reconstruction. Traces of the speaker's choices, preferences, and attitudes are detectable in the translation into the linguistic (written) medium of what was primarily perceived in another code (cf. focaliser/narrator distinction in Ch. VII). The gap realised between perceiving a fact and reproducing it in language is responsible for creating what might correspond to Scholes' view of a fictional context (1982).

A mismatch is thus always likely to occur not only because of the duplicity of code but also because of the remodelling which the narrated event will have to undergo under the direction of the speaker during the process of formulation. The reaction to the other (self) is to be transmitted in the language in forms betraying the degree of proximity or distance achieved. Irony is a possible result in the case of a distance created to convey an undermining attitude of a certain view or the (possible or real) person subscribing to it.

At the micro level of discourse, that is at the level of characters and/or narrator, this kind of irony is frequent. It can be present in what seems to be a mere innocent description or report but is in fact directed against a character. The ironist in this case could be a character expressing his or her disapproval of or disagreement with another character or simply trying to be funny at the latter's expense. The ironist could also be the narrator who, for some reason or other, decides to colour his or her account with a touch of irony. In these instances, the irony could be perceived by the narrator and the reader. The character in question, and one or more others could also be aware of it though not necessarily so.

Irony can also be directed against the narrator as well, in which case he or she could perceive the irony or possibly also be led astray. The narrator could be presented in a way that undermines his or her actions, utterances and thoughts while a pretence of seriousness and support is apparently adhered to. First person narrators are particularly exploited in this manner. For they are directly exposed to the reader by the implied author whose presence, usually reduced to complete silence, betrays himself or herself by portraying his attitude to the narrator and therefore imposing another layer on the discourse. The reader is in this case the only other perceiver of the irony if communication is to be successful at all.

The assumption that the higher the level of discourse of the participants, the more knowledge they are entrusted with thus explains the reason why it is easier for these participants to perceive ironies about which others (from lower discourse levels) could be left in the dark. Conversely, the higher the level at which irony occurs, the less participants will be cognisant of it and consequently the more private it becomes. In the final analysis, the communication of irony can legitimately be described in terms of a secret communion taking place at the higher level of discourse, at the real level of communication (author-reader), above the heads of all the other participants.

It might further be argued that Sperber and Wilson's definition of irony is also applicable to literary discourse ironies due to this very distinguishability of the discourse levels. The potential for disparity of the discourse can be met by a

corresponding potential for disparity in points of view and in values. The possibility of a clash between values at one level and others at the one below it can result in irony. A character or a narrator can become the butt of irony as soon as his or her standard of values is shown to be defective. That can be achieved by depicting it in an undermining context elaborated for that purpose by the agent dwelling at a higher level of discourse. Its inappropriateness, falsity, or absurdity will be highlighted because of the contrast they offer with the background of values already established in the work or presupposed to exist in the mind of the reader. In a general manner, the very foregrounding of the discourse through its recontextualisation in fiction may place it in a position that opens up the way for its evaluation in terms of the function it plays in the discourse as a whole. A certain distance is prone to obtain, in tune with the withdrawal or because of the absence of support for the participant from his or her higher level counterpart, leaving his or her actions and beliefs to be subsumed by the ironic element. Irony is thus capable of adding an extra layer to discourse usually leaving the subject of irony at the discourse level in which it is detected and creating another higher one to which the irony is to be attributed.

The existence of this potential for distinction in the levels of discourse allows for confusions of attribution to occur. Decisions have to be made at the level of the characters about what is believed by the speaker and what is merely being reported or echoed. Once this is done, it has to be checked against what the narrator and finally the implied author (when they are distinct) think or believe. For the disparity in the discourse levels allows for possibilities of transformation of what is perceived as *use* at one level, into *echoic interpretation* at another. The existence of a higher level from which things can be reported, overheard (and over-read), gives room for the expression of unfavourable attitudes to crop up in a discreet, implicit manner. The mismatch in evaluation between the participants at different levels of discourse can be responsible for generating irony against the lower levels or less cognisant participants in the discourse situation since they provide an already existing material that can be manipulated in order to be placed in an unfavourable light.

### 6.1. Layeredness and Dramatic Irony

It can be argued at this stage that even what is known as "dramatic irony" can also be encompassed by this definition of irony as it has been discussed so far. In drama, where it is particularly effective and because of the presence of a double audience (the one within the play and the real theatre audience), the notion of levels of discourse is more tangible and so is the potential for clash and irony. The echoic property governing irony in general is also true of Dramatic Irony.

The reader or the theatre audience becomes aware that irony is at play as soon as a character who, unaware of the fate that awaits him or her (of which the audience is previously or indirectly informed) starts appreciating a present state or some expectations of the future which, the audience knows, will eventually conclude adversely. The presence of the audience at the privileged higher level of discourse in a situation that is equivalent to eavesdropping allows them to have the knowledge necessary for distinguishing what is designed to be interpreted as use and what is to be seen as echoic interpretation.

What is *use* for the victim, in the case of dramatic irony, is presented within a context that highlights its absurdity and inappropriateness usually carefully prepared by the dramatist for that particular purpose. The second audience and sometimes characters in the play itself, because of the extra knowledge they possess, are capable of perceiving the discrepancy. The utterance for them can only be seen as an echoic interpretation. The irony in this case does not reside in anything the character says but in his or her saying it in a context that undermines it while attracting attention to the presence of a higher level manipulator responsible for the already known outcome of the situation. The manipulator, the dramatist, is the participant in the interaction who dissociates himself or herself from the words of the character and draws attention to their absurdity and that of the faith or confidence of their pronouncer. A famous example of the workings of this type of irony can be seen in *Macbeth* (I, vi) when Duncan, unaware of the preparations of his death comes into what will become the *lieu du crime* and says in high spirit,

This castle hath a pleasant seat: the air  
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our senses

...

Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly,  
And shall continue our graces on him.

### 6.2. Unintended Irony

A word about unintended irony is perhaps due at this juncture. I would like to suggest that the echoic account of irony can successfully be applied to describe the mechanism governing unintended irony. The difference lies in where the intention of the irony is located not in what makes an utterance ironic. In intended irony, that is in all or most of the examples examined in this thesis, a speaker or writer assumes the role of ironist by echoing someone else's discourse in order to dissociate himself or herself from it. In unintended irony, however, as in Dramatic Irony, a speaker or a writer's words are perceived ironically by another person who, because he or she disagrees with their validity or sees them in a critical way, will assign an echoic character to them. Again the words are not ironical in themselves but are, as in Dramatic Irony, perceived ironically by an observer-ironist. This is also what takes place when one character's words which are uttered earnestly are perceived ironically by the narrator or implied author, because they are embedded in the discourse of that higher level participant.

It is worth noting that unintended irony here does not refer to irony that results from overreading and therefore assigning the intention of irony to the utterer of the given discourse. That will probably be taken more as a pragmatic failure or a misunderstanding than an active participation on the part of the reader in making meaning. What is meant here by unintended irony is that ironic vision or attitude which a reader perceives when exposed to a given text which undermines itself by its very existence to that reader's attention. The utterer of that discourse becomes the victim of this observer's irony, that is, becomes the person whose words are seen echoically.

## **7. Conclusion**

To sum up then, literary and in particular fictional discourse can invite irony for two main reasons. First because of the very duplicity of code characteristic of all

translation of experience into the linguistic (written) mode that is itself responsible for creating fictional contexts. This duplicity is in turn responsible for generating a duplicity in the addresser because of the gap it leaves for him or her to fit their own impressions of the experience into the supposedly neutral objective report or description. Irony can be a means to express the distance and incompatibility filling this gap between the way something could have happened and the way it is expressed.

Second, because of the echoic character of irony, a reader is to take a step during the process of interpretation from a speaker, once irony is suspected, in search of the addresser higher in the discourse hierarchy to attribute the utterance to. This addresser would be the participant to whom the intention of irony would be attributed unless there is proof to the contrary. In the latter case the quest continues still higher in the discourse hierarchy, perhaps not even stopping at the level of the author. For there is nothing to stop a reader, yet another onlooker possibly equipped with more knowledge, or at least a different perspective, to read a given work ironically, turning its words against its very author - an unintended irony perhaps, but irony nonetheless.

Having delineated the theoretical basis of irony which this study has advocated and tried to support and validate in connection with discourse as a whole and literary discourse in particular, I would like now to address specific aspects pertaining to the structure of narrative fiction discourse. These aspects, I would like to suggest, because they are essential to the ontological status of any narrative as such, can function as vehicles for irony - vehicles of a different kind and working at different levels from what has been discussed so far in the previous chapters. The paratext, or the introductory, commenting elements on the periphery of the narrative text, and the elements governing the internal organisation of the narrative itself constitute, I would like to demonstrate, a solid source from which a lot of irony is derived. Examining them becomes a necessity if a better grasp of irony is to be accomplished. One major consequence of such an enterprise is the move it intends to achieve from the mere concentration on isolated, local instances of verbal irony in single utterances or simple exchanges, towards raising an awareness of the wide scope of the interplay operating

between a variety of elements which contribute to the construction of the network of irony. What I propose in the rest of this thesis is to scrutinise the more salient and relevant of these aspects always trying to relate them to the echoic account of irony and explain them in terms of it. The next chapter examines the role of the external elements of narrative, the paratext, in conveying irony. The following two will examine the role of the internal elements of narrative.

## CHAPTER V

### Irony and the Paratext

#### 1. Introduction: The Paratext, Definition and Role in Interpretation

The importance that has been granted to the act of reading in constituting meaning in literature has had repercussions on the nature of the elements to be investigated for their contribution to that process. Moving from the view of the text as the centre of the meaning towards the consideration of its interaction with its context and what its reader brings to it has led to the examination of elements, which were previously ignored, that connect them all together. Determining the status of these elements is not a straightforward matter given the fact that they stand on the periphery of the text while being at the same time neither part of it nor part of the real world outside its boundaries. They are, however, commonly recognised as titles, subtitles, prefaces, notes, names of authors, dedications, epigraphs, illustrations, book covers etc., that is all the multiple factors that surround a text and turn it into a book. Research describing these factors and delineating their functions is presently gaining ground. In his generic study of these elements, Genette (1987) designates them the "paratext" of a given work. He undertakes to investigate the form and function of this paratext in its relation to the text and as it affects the reader, thus elucidating the second of the five types of transtextuality that he delineates in *Palimpsestes* (1982). As the title of the study eloquently indicates (*Seuils*), the paratext constitutes the threshold to the text. It constitutes an essential part for its existence. Genette hence defines it as follows

Le paratexte est donc pour nous ce par quoi un texte se fait livre et se propose comme tel à ses lecteurs, et plus généralement au public. Plus que d'une limite ou d'une frontière étanche, il s'agit ici d'un *seuil*, ou - mot de Borges à propos d'une préface - d'un "vestibule" qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d'entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin.

(1987: 7-8)

The paratext can thus be seen as performing the role of the frame whose presence is essential to designate a non-defined entity as a work of art. As Stewart (1978: 21) points out, the message given by the frame is simply "This is art." The frame can thus perform two functions: it "focuses our attention not upon content alone, but upon the organization of content and the relationship between content and its surroundings" (1978: 21). One important role of the paratext therefore is to influence to a great extent the direction reading takes. It constitutes a form of discourse about discourse, a form of metacommunication. It contains a number of guidelines on the way the reading is to proceed. Lerner (1983: 80) considers titles to be essential instructions on how to read literary writing and poems in particular. The paratext therefore comes to be considered not merely as a body of introductory components to the text but as effecting an undeniable influence on its interpretation as a result of its interaction with it and given the authority attributed to its deviser (author and/or editor). As Genette explains borrowing Philippe Lejeune's (1975: 74) "frange" designating "paratext,"

Cette frange, en effet, toujours porteuse d'un commentaire auctorial, ou plus ou moins légitimé par l'auteur, constitue, entre texte et hors-texte, une zone non seulement de transition, mais de *transaction* : lieu privilégié d'une pragmatique et d'une stratégie, d'une action sur le public au service, bien ou mal compris et accompli, d'un meilleur accueil du texte et d'une lecture plus pertinente - plus pertinente, s'entend, aux yeux de l'auteur et de ses alliés.  
(1987: 8)

Two major intertwined issues can be singled out in this view of paratext. The first is concerned with its impact on the reading of a certain text. The second, which in a way legitimises the first, is concerned with its enunciation through a discourse that increases the multiplicity of voices of the work. This is achieved by pointing towards the existence of a higher authority that intends to communicate a number of things about the text itself. The power of commentary that the paratext possesses, whether it is directly or indirectly stated, leads to the admission of a new layer to the hierarchy of discourse, in which the author and/or editor take part.

The titles, notes, prefaces, etc. portray the polyphony of the work *par excellence* since their main purpose is to create a discourse parallel to and surrounding the one at hand. They provide information about it which, given the authority granted to the intentionality of its provenance, cannot be disregarded in its interpretation. Reading Joyce's *Ulysses* without its title for instance might serve as an example of the impact of a paratext on the text it introduces. Moreover, although the impact of a paratext might vary depending on whether it is posthumous or devised during the life of its author, whether the author has had total freedom in its devising or has been compelled to accept it, whether it has changed from one edition to another, its actual existence is in no way in danger: it can exist even reduced to the minimum of the existence of a graphic text. As Genette (1987: 9) points out, the paratextual means might not be constant or systematic and can be readily modified under the influence of various factors, but in the final analysis, no text can exist without a paratext. He says that

... c'est une évidence reconnue que notre époque "médiatique" multiplie autour des textes un type de discours qu'ignorait le monde classique, et *a fortiori* l'Antiquité et le moyen âge, où les textes circulaient souvent à l'état presque brut, sous la forme de manuscrits dépourvus de toute formule de présentation. Je dis *presque*, parce que le seul fait de la transcription - mais aussi bien de la transmission orale - apporte à l'idéalité du texte une part de matérialisation, graphique ou phonique, qui peut induire ... des effets paratextuels. En ce sens, on peut sans doute avancer qu'il n'existe pas, et qu'il n'a jamais existé, de texte sans paratexte.

(1987: 9)

The interest in paratext in this study of irony springs not from the fact that it is crucial for the existence and interpretation of the text alone, but also and essentially from the fact that it stresses the polyphonic, intertextual character of a given work on the one hand, and consists of a form of commentary - possibly ironic - on the other. In fact, a number of the elements of the paratext, as will be demonstrated in the following sections, function as vehicles for irony.

## 2. The Epitext and The Peritext and Potential for Irony

Given these issues concerning the paratext, it might be argued that paratextual elements can be investigated for their contribution to the generation and interpretation of

irony in literary discourse and therefore find their place in this study of irony. The recognition of the existence of those extra voices commenting on the text, and affecting its meaning can only enrich the ways of coming to terms with ironic communication. The recognition of the multiplicity of voice in fictional discourse can readily clear the way for further potential for irony. The authorial manifestation in terms of titles, notes, etc. constitutes another point of view against which the already presented textual points of view are to be compared. If one agrees with Stewart (1978: 20) that in "irony the text begins to demonstrate the relative nature of provinces of meaning," whenever a conflict arises out of this comparison of perspectives, irony can be generated. In fact, Booth (1974) cites titles as possible warnings or clues in the voice of the author towards the existence of irony. Lerner (1983) also observes that a conflict between a title and its text can be a signal for irony being at work. It can be argued, however, that several other paratextual elements can be used for the same effect. It is worth excluding from this argument the category of paratext that Genette (1987: 10) calls "épitexte" and which consists of a number of messages slightly distant from the text itself and originally rather external to it. These messages are generally provided by media-based or private communications (interviews, correspondence, diaries etc.). The main feature of this kind of paratext is that its intentionality is not always accountable. A writer can easily deny being officially quoted on particular matters that seem to form good paratexts for others.

The peritext, on the other hand, is the other category of paratext which contains elements that surround the text more closely and are at times inserted within it. The distinction between epitext and peritext is thus primarily determined by the physical proximity or distance from the text, whether it was part of the original body of the text or not. The second distinction springs from the degree of responsibility that an author is ready to assume in terms of what is contained in the book: while it is total in terms of peritext, it can be totally absent for the epitext.

Concentrating on the peritext for what it offers in terms of ironic communication needs further restrictions on the investigation, however. Although performing a number of functions that contribute to affecting the meaning of the work, some of the paratextual elements identified by Genette like the name of the author, the dedication, the blurb, the editorial peritext and the preface can be excluded from this investigation. The main characteristic they seem to have in common is their seriousness. Seriousness in the sense that they are there to present the work to the public and cannot therefore afford to comment negatively on it, not least in an ironic manner - at least not intentionally. Most of these elements are in fact expected to back up the text and make it more presentable to the outside world, or rather the world outside the author, the editor and the publisher. The role of the elements mentioned above is mainly to produce a positive image of the text and turn it into a book that aims at satisfying the requirements of its ontological status as a book, at a primary stage, and to proceed from there to try to persuade readers of its value.

A paratext of the factual type might, on the other hand, have unintended effects on the interpretation of a certain work. A factual paratext, as defined by Genette (1987: 12), "consiste, non en un message explicite (verbal ou autre), mais en un fait dont la seule existence, si elle est connue du public, apporte quelque commentaire au texte et pèse sur sa réception." A number of the instances of the factual paratext originate, nonetheless, from the textual paratext. Identifying the sex of the author from the name, the text type from the genre mentioned on the cover page or the title, its historical context from the date of publication and the mention of other works if there are any etc. can affect the way a work is perceived. Genette goes on to include all forms of context into this factual paratext (1987: 13): "il nous faut au moins retenir en principe que tout contexte fait paratexte."

It might be argued that, although not frequently, a paratext of the factual type can result in an unintended effect like irony if a conflict occurs, for instance, between

the values an author celebrates in a given work and the actual values advocated by that author in reality.

In comparison, the elements of paratext mentioned above which, it is suggested, need to be excluded from the investigation of irony, are, unlike the factual paratext, approved by the author and/or editor and responsibility for them is assumed by either (in the inclusive and the exclusive sense of the word). They are consequently not meant to victimise their text, minimise or ridicule it in any way.

The remaining elements of paratext - the title, the note and the epigraph - given their closeness to the text, display different characteristics and are, it might be argued, more likely to create some form of conflict or incongruity with the other voice(s) of the work and result in irony. The meaning of the work is thus transformed, as a major effect of the use of irony is to relativise states of affairs that are until then taken for granted. A consequent effect in this case is to turn the text which is an already established communication into the subject of another communication enunciated at a higher level while still being within the boundaries of the work. Following Stewart, one can claim that irony is a form of metacommunication:

In terms of the work that irony accomplishes - a presentation of the relative nature of points of view, of the incomplete and only partially predictable nature of experience - we can see irony as a kind of metacommunication, a communication that bears a message about the nature of communication.

(1978: 20)

Since they are actually physically separated from the body of the text, these elements of paratext can be used to demonstrate the way irony functions in a more open manner. In fact, the mechanisms underlying the production of irony are laid bare. The paratextual elements to be examined are further taken under the responsibility of the writer or his "associates"- they are part of the elements which are considered to form the official paratext (1987: 14-15). Thus constructed by the writer in order to communicate something about the text, this paratext introduces the writer's perspective in it. Perhaps also the writer conveys through this paratext in a less pronounced way than in the other types of paratext his or her own idea and/or attitude of what the text is

about and therefore how it should be understood. Its main role is thus to modify and guide the reading activity and shed light on the creation of its meaning by interacting with the text.

The rest of this chapter will undertake to illustrate the way the last three paratextual elements - the title, the epigraph and the note - can be used in the generation and recognition of irony, especially keeping in mind the question of echoic interpretation that is expected to be clearly at play in these cases. Three sections will follow: they will respectively be concerned with the title, the epigraph and the note in their potential for communicating irony. They will also be examined for the way they can cooperate in their interaction with the text to create irony.

### **3. The Title and Ironic Communication**

#### **3.1. Definition and Functions of the Title**

The title constitutes the name with which a given work is known to its audience. Although it used to be of the long and complex type formally, it has come to be reduced to the modern short form of a title, plus a possible linked subtitle in some cases. Deciding on giving a title to a certain work usually means the exclusion or sacrifice of an infinity of others that could have played the same role, though perhaps not performing the same function. The title, moreover, is what is first circulated among an audience before its text is explored. Although it might serve as a first contact with the readers, a contact that might attract or might repel them, its referential role remains dominant. Various studies have attempted to pin down the different functions of the titles of which Lerner's "Titles and Timelessness" (1983) and Genette's chapter on titles in *Seuils* seem to provide plausible, complementary accounts.

Although using a different terminology and some different perspectives on the topic, both studies offer insights useful for the study of irony. Lerner's first point concerns the fact that titles play an immense role in controlling the reading activity. He considers them to be "instructions" on how to read. He mainly attempts to prove that by concentrating on the analysis of poems and portraits. His conclusion has been that

titles tend to control reading by narrowing down the subject of the poem or by changing it (1983: 199). They rarely broaden a subject except by openly announcing its universal nature, an act he claims that is already determined by the mere fact of belonging to fiction or some other genre. He enumerates the functions of titles as follows (They are numbered here for easier reference): those

- 1- that name the theme (*Pride and Prejudice*);
  - 2- that relate the book, perhaps ironically, to a tradition (*The Old Wives' Tale*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*);
  - 3- that single out a central symbol (*The Rainbow*, *The Bell-jar*);
  - 4- that name the place or setting (*Mansfield Park*);
  - 5- or that name the hero or heroine (and here the form of address may be important: *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Emma*, *Redgauntlet*).
- (1983: 193)

Some of these title types are equally identified by Genette although under a different guise. He first recognises the designation function of a title. This consists in the capacity which a title has to name a given work and consequently function as its referent. He further claims that this function can override any others because of the primacy of the designating or identifying force. He says that "L'identification est, dans la pratique, la plus importante fonction du titre, qui pourrait à la rigueur se passer de toutes les autres" (1987: 77). Genette adds to emphasise this point that

Je suppose que bien des titres surréalistes ont été tirés dans un chapeau, et ils n'en identifient pas moins bien leur texte que les titres les plus concertés - libre ensuite au lecteur, s'il lui chante, de leur trouver une raison, c'est-à-dire un sens.

(1987: 78)

Titles can, moreover, fulfil a descriptive function that can be either thematic or rhematic. Those fulfilling a thematic function are concerned with the content or "theme" of a given work. According to Genette, many forms of titles can fall under this category. He accepts the extension of the meaning of the word "theme" in order to allow it to encompass a host of elements that are not readily identifiable as such. He says that

un lieu (tardif ou non), un objet (symbolique ou non), un leitmotiv, un personnage, même central, ne sont pas à proprement parler des thèmes, mais des éléments de l'univers diégétique des oeuvres qu'ils servent à intituler. Je qualifierai pourtant tous les titres ainsi évoqués de *thématiques*, par une synecdoque généralisante qui sera, si l'on veut, un hommage à l'importance du thème dans le "contenu" d'une oeuvre, qu'elle soit d'ordre narratif, dramatique ou discursif.

(1987: 78)

Following this definition, all the types identified by Lerner can also be treated as thematic titles. The first category of this type consists of literal titles that speak about the central theme or object of the work (Lerner's 1, 4, 5). Narratives like *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Pride and Prejudice* are instances of this category. The second category is of the synecdochic or metonymic type. It is concerned with elements that are less central (*Le Père Goriot*) or even marginal to the work (*Le Rideau cramoisi*). The third category which is essentially of the symbolic type (Lerner's 3) is one that links title and theme in a metaphorical manner (*Sodome et Gomorrhe*). The fourth category is of the antiphrastic or ironic type. It occurs either as a result of an antithetical relation between the title and the work or because it presents an absence of thematic pertinence (Mathieu Benezet's *Histoire de la peinture en trois volumes*, a slim volume that says nothing about painting). Non-pertinence, however, Genette argues, might be merely apparent and in fact fulfilling a metaphoric function as in the case of *Ulysses* where nobody carries the name in the narrative (1987: 78-80). The rhematic function of titles (Lerner's 2) is, however, mainly concerned with announcing the genre to which the work belongs, (*Ode, Journal, Meditations* etc.). It can also be indirectly concerned with the text itself (mostly with its formal character) though not necessarily with its genre (*Pages*, etc.; Raymond M. Smullyan's interrogative and auto-referential title: *What Is the Name of this Book?*) (1987: 83).

Some secondary effects of a connotative nature (Genette 1987: 85-87, 88-89) can emanate from the descriptive function of the title whether it is thematic or rhematic and go hand in hand with it. They are connotative because they spring from the manner in which the title means (1987: 85). Hence, the manner in which a title is constituted can communicate information other than its announcing the theme or the

genre to which the work belongs, information that is instead concerned with its style or construction. Recognising that a title is attributable to a particular writer or somebody imitating that type of title choice is an example of the connotative function of the paratext. The historical dimension of this function can for instance be detected in the typical ways of title giving of a certain period, the nineteenth century tradition of full names (*Jane Eyre*, *Eugénie Grandet*) and single names for the classical hero (*Horace*) etc. Some prestige can be derived from such instances where being part of a tradition gives the text a sense of belonging. Parodic titles also possess connotative capacities as they directly or indirectly echo other works or a tradition. Genette suggests, however, the consideration of the connotative effect a value that is added to the title rather than a function (like the thematic or rhematic, i.e., descriptive function introduced above) of the title given the fact that it does not always spring from an intention of the author.

Apart from these three functions, Genette discusses a fourth one: the seductive function. He claims that this purpose is always present but can be of a positive, negative or neutral nature, depending on the receivers. For the image that an author has of the addressee is not always correct and therefore the effect achieved might not correspond to the effect wanted (1987: 89).

### 3.2. The Role of the Title in the Generation and Recognition of Irony

After this survey of the functions of the title as described by Lerner and Genette, taking into consideration the points at which their views coincide, it is worth considering the way some of these functions generate irony. If one agrees with Lerner that a title controls reading by giving information about the subject of a work and that this is further achieved through narrowing the subject down, simply changing it or, although rarely, enlarging it, one can expect the reader to search for one of these options in order to make sense of a title. Moreover, defining the function of a title thus becomes a matter of determining the relationship that links it to the text. When the function is ironic, the relationship can be expected to involve some form of conflict, incongruity or discordance between the two. When the preliminary instruction on how

to read the text embodied in the title constitutes a misfit with the actual result of the reading, irony or rather the ironic function of the title (Genette) can be suspected to be at work. Instead of discarding a title displaying these properties as nonsensical, the reader can resolve the contradiction and assign a unity to the work by reaching the conclusion that irony is being communicated. Once the inappropriateness or absurdity of the title is established, re-attribution becomes necessary, that is, a split in the voice of the author is in operation. The title thus reveals, given its echoic character, a parallel intentional duplicity in the writer's voice. The writer is distanced from the title as it stands and from anybody who could mean it as a serious and accurate description of the subject of the text. The title thus implicitly attributed to somebody else is used by the author in order to ridicule or criticise the standpoint it represents.

### 3.2.1. Thematic and Rhematic Titles and Irony

A title like *A Modest Proposal* can be described as having a rhematic function since it indicates a form of generic affiliation to which it claims the text belongs. The qualification "modest," however, is what brings it to clash with the outrageous contents of the text and to a certain extent emphasises it. The open declaration of generic affiliation, on the other hand, has an effect of the connotative type on the reading. The title recalls the tradition of the expository genre of writing and thus stimulates the readers' expectations about that genre. That, in turn, stimulates the readers' selection of the appropriate interpretive strategies to be applied in the reading activity. Although the style and the organisation of the text seem to conform to the requirements of the genre claimed, the arguments and the contents of the proposal itself seem far too pretentious and unreasonable especially for one that is described as modest. The readers are thus likely to accept the instructions in the title until they perceive their inconsistency and conflict with the contents of the text. The title will have to be re-interpreted as an implicit instruction to read the text ironically. The narrator's voice is hence relativised and measured against its own inconsistencies.

An instance of a simultaneously thematic and rhematic ironical title is Roger McGough's poem "The Jogger's Song". The title can be considered thematic because it designates the jogger as the central active figure in the poem - information that is inferrable but not openly stated in the text. It is rhematic, on the other hand, because it identifies the genre of the poem and thus indirectly recalls, and positions it within a particular tradition. The connotative value of the title might evoke the pattern adopted by other poems of the same kind, shepherds' songs of the pastoral tradition for instance.

With such an evocation, a parallel can be drawn between the shepherd of the pastoral poetic tradition and the jogger. The former, who is the idealised inhabitant of the vast fields is recalled by his modern version embodied in the health- and nature-conscious jogger inhabitant of modern parks. Equipped with this paratextual hint, the readers can only be shocked once they get to the stage of applying the parallel to the interpretation of the poem. The vulgar, clichéd and male-chauvinist attitude and language of the jogger (and rapist) make it clear that the designation "song" of the title has to be treated as if it were between quotation marks. What is a song for the jogger, in which he indirectly praises and justifies his actions, that is what is a mere description of his opinion of a state of affairs, is in fact presented as an echoic interpretation of that opinion by the poet. Thus reattributed, the ideas expressed in the title can contribute to the creation of further clashes between the character of the jogger and that of his counterpart, the shepherd. Their conflicting attitudes towards women, the venerated shepherdess as opposed to the doubly raped woman in the park, reinforces the ironic property of the title and the light it consequently sheds on the poem.

The rhematic part of the title thus serves to relate the poem and its main character (the thematic part of the title) to a tradition that is used as a background against which its baseness is portrayed, emphasised and foregrounded. The two worlds are thus implicitly compared to the detriment of the modern one. Conversely, a large part of the poeticity of the poem is derived not from any highly poetic or abstract language,

nor from any heightened experience, but simply from this ironic reconstitution of the situation according to the jogger's point of view and its attribution to him. The role of the title in the reading of this poem thus proves to be vital.

Perhaps of a different nature but no less vital is Joyce's choice of the title of *Ulysses*. Since it denotes a male name that could be of a certain importance in the narrative, it can be classified under the literal thematic category of titles. A reader realises, however, that none of the characters of *Ulysses* is called by that name. The alternative interpretation of the title would therefore have to link it to the Ulysses of the *Odyssey*. The function of the title consequently changes from the literal to the metaphoric thematic one, as Genette (1987: 80) points out.

The intertextual reference to antiquity can be perceived as an attempt at the recontextualisation of the original work or hero within a modern setting. The figure of the brave adventurer, Ulysses, finds its parallel in Leopold Bloom. The comparison might, however, leave the modern hero at disadvantage. His failure to reach the standards anticipated by the title creates a conflict between the two that is resolved through a reinterpretation that identifies the ironic nature of the title: it has to be perceived as if between quotation marks. The misfit thus necessitates a re-attribution of the title, which is consequently to be treated as an echoic interpretation of the idea that establishes a connection between the two characters. The author is using the echo to comment ironically on the modern situation.

Another literal thematic title, but of a parodic nature this time, is Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*. The intertextual reference which activates the readers' knowledge of the fairy tale gives them expectations about the way the story is to be handled in the modern text. Although their expectations might not be defeated in terms of character reproduction, the extent of the damage or distortion operated on the story has an undeniable impact. The straightforward, universal story about good and evil, love and hatred, coincidence and magic is recontextualised in the industrialised America of the mass production of knowledge, language, information and consumer goods.

Although Barthelme's title is adequately related to the main character in the story, it does not fail to evoke the situation of the earlier character, its story and what they stand for.

The writer's comment through this intentional link goes in two opposite directions. First, by borrowing the title and applying it to the modern situation, he draws attention to the absence in the modern version of the values of purity and simplicity which the earlier version stands for. This, in turn, bears an implicit critical comment on the artificiality and corruption of the modern world and highlights the gap that separates it from the ideal situation of the world of the fairy tale.

The second effect of this link through the title is related to the re-evaluation of the story through its recontextualisation. Reset in the situation of the new world, the story and what it stands for can be perceived as simplistic and naive. They are echoed in order to be ridiculed. The role of the title thus consists in making present two versions of the same narrative that cannot help but ironically comment on each other through the simple implicit comparison. By highlighting the virtues of the one, the connection brings to the surface the negative points of the other and affects its interpretation and *vice versa*.

As shown in the examples discussed above, the function of the title as an instruction on how to read a particular work is particularly efficient when the relationship that holds between the title and its text is an ironic one. Some of the ways in which that relationship can be established have also been discussed leading to the conclusion that any conflict or incongruity detected between the two might potentially hold an ironical comment on the text.

### 3.2.2. Anticipatory and Retrospective Titles and Text Size

A distinction, however, needs to be made at this stage between the way a title can work within a short text, a poem for instance, and the way it works in longer pieces like novels. But first a word about the directions in which a title can function. Two categories can be singled out despite the fact that they merely form a continuum and are

in fact complementary: one anticipatory and the other retrospective. A title can be anticipatory in the sense that it summarises what the text is about so that to a certain extent the text comes to confirm its title. Narratives like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, are what their titles say they are about. Before reading the narratives, the audience already has a brief idea about their content and only continues to find out more about them as the reading progresses. The title thus provides a glimpse that is more or less detailed and explicit about the theme or contents of a given work. It provides in the same vein explicit instructions on how the work is to be interpreted. The meaning of the title and its *prima facie* relation to the text is not transformed after it is checked against the text.

The retrospective category on the other hand is instigated by titles which can start to have meaning only once they interact or are backed up by the text, as in Balzac's *La messe de L'athée*, for instance or Marguerite Duras's *L'amante anglaise*. In the former, the whole narrative is an elucidation of the title, while in the latter, the elucidation is mentioned as if by accident among other information disclosed about one of the characters. Ironic titles especially fall under this category as their effect is detected in retrospect after the reading activity has taken place. Elucidation of the title has thus to spring from the text and then proceed, in turn, to elucidate the text once the contact or interaction between the two takes place. That *A Modest Proposal* is neither modest nor a proposal, for instance, can only be gathered from the way the text evolves. The duplicitous nature of the title *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, on the other hand, is detected from what the text discloses about the character herself and about the nature of what she considers her prime.

Titles can also function retrospectively in a different manner and for reasons based on the size of the text. In novels, where the body of the text can be of variably extensive length, the impression transmitted by the title might need to be verified against what the text offers as the reading proceeds. As Lerner (1983) observes,

the experience of reading a novel is on such a large scale that the initial instructions are likely to be submerged in the actual reading ... The title of a novel is therefore better seen as an instruction on how to look back on the reading experience, how subsequently to arrange and understand it.

(1983: 192-3)

The length of a text can thus affect the efficiency of a title as a source of reading instructions in the sense that continual interaction between the two needs to be maintained throughout the act of reading.

In shorter texts, however, like most poems for instance, the effect of the title is more likely to be maintained because of the brevity of the interaction. But unlike Lerner who believes that a radical difference exists between the effect of a title on a poem and the effect of a title on a novel, it might be argued that the difference is a matter of degree not of kind. In both cases, interaction between the two is necessary. In ironic cases especially, the function of the title is determined in retrospect, that is after the primary impression of the title as a description of the text is corrected into its treatment as an echoic interpretation of the text as a result of the detection of some conflict or incongruity between the two. Although some titles are clear from the beginning and can immediately be used as directions for reading, they still need to be reinforced by interaction with the text.

### 3.3. Subtitles

Before examining the role the epigraph plays in carrying and indicating irony, a word about subtitles might be in order. The main reason why they are not considered here in detail is twofold. First, if one agrees with Genette (1987: 284), the practice of adding subtitles to chapters or sections in narrative fiction is becoming less and less popular. It is gradually giving way to the "subtler" or "lighter" silent divisions of the text that are doing away even with chapter or section numbers. Apart from instances like *The Name of the Rose* or *Daniel Martin*, little room is granted to subtitles in contemporary fiction. Second, when they are present, subtitles tend to operate to a large extent like titles. In fact, on various occasions, they are interchangeable as when a subtitle in a given edition is transformed into a title for an independent book in another

edition. The main difference seems to be confined to the question of scope - that is, the subtitle tends to be applied to smaller stretches of text than the title - and to the question of attribution - as subtitles tend to be more easily subsumed by the voice of the character-narrator (1987: 276), unlike the title which is often considered more the responsibility of the author. According to Genette (1987: 277), subtitles of the chatty informal type, telling about what happens in the sections they describe have been highly exploited for ironic, humorous purposes in the comic novel tradition (Rabelais, Cervantes, Fielding and the more recent Dickens, Thackeray, Barth, Pynchon and Eco).

An example of a subtitle that is used for ironic purposes can be found in John Fowles's *Daniel Martin*, in the chapter called "Phillida" (also cited below in connection with ironic epigraphs). The subtitle, as the epigraph indicates, is an intertextual reference to an Elizabethan poem describing the poet's infatuation with and agonies over his beloved Phillida, agonies which equal the character-narrator's over the neighbouring farm girl Nancy of his adolescence. The chapter which recounts his initiation into the world of love through his secret "adventure" with the girl is presented from the perspective of the sophisticated, seen-it-all adult he has become. The comparison or parallel he establishes between his youth's love and the subject of the old poem through the borrowed title reflects his present distance from the intensity of the events, the passion and involvement that he relates. But although the Phillida of his youth could only have been taken seriously by the adolescent version of himself, irony generated by the intertextual reference (the echo being based on this passionate love as described by the poet) is not of the denigrating, or undermining type. It is rather, as will be argued again below, of the detached and yet affectionate and warm type. It is a glimpse on the days of innocence from the fuller knowledge of experienced or corrupt adulthood with somehow a touch of envy for that more full-fledged engagement in feeling and behaviour that becomes lacking with age because of the awareness of social inhibitions on the one hand, and because of the embarrassment associated with the

memory of the earlier days of ignorance/innocence. The role the epigraph plays in reinforcing this interpretation will be investigated below.

#### **4. The Epigraph: Intertextuality *par excellence***

##### 4.1 Definition of the Epigraph

Like the title, the epigraph can be chosen by the writer in order to comment on the text. It is however selected from someone else's work and is still attributed to that person though clearly appropriated by the author to clarify, point out, or back up his or her point of view of the text. The epigraph can be considered an intertextual practice *par excellence* because of the way it places side by side texts of various origins and manages to relate them to each other. It is most suitable for the communication of irony because of its silent nature that allows it to comment by mere juxtaposition with the text.

The epigraph usually occurs as close as possible to the text. As Genette (1987: 138) points out, usually before the preface for a book and right above the text for the chapter or section it accompanies. Furthermore, it can be situated both in an initial and a final position. The role of the epigraph can change according to its location (1987: 139): while at the initial position it awaits to be connected with the text, it carries an authoritative conclusive note when placed at the end of the text.

With or without the appropriate punctuation (quotation marks), the epigraph is a quotation that displays the characteristics of its genre delineated by Stewart (1978):

Quotation is a method of making texts, a way to give integrity to discourse and to focus interpretive procedures within a set of parameters defined by what is internal to the quotation "marks"... The discourse, once repeated, is given existence and detachability independent of a context of origin. Its origin dissolves into an etymological infinity, while its detachability gives it self-generation.

(1978: 122)

It is thus described as a form of discourse that is repeated away from its context of origin. Its distance from the context grants the quotation the status of an independent discourse existing by itself. The primacy of its existence to that of the discourse to

which it is grafted gives the quotation authority over the discourse. As Stewart observes,

Quotation from domains beyond the experience of the participants, beyond immediate context, has the force of an extended spatial and temporal boundary, a "for all times and for all places" force. To say "they say," "you know how it is," or "we all know that," to use proverbs, fables, and gossip, is to allow past experience to speak through present experience with an "integrity" and a "detachment" - an "objectivity."

(1978: 122)

Thus described, the epigraph can be classified as a discourse or an utterance of the second-degree interpretation type, a category which provides it with functions other than the mere report of the prior existence of that discourse, as will be shown in the next section.

#### 4.2. Functions of the Epigraph and Irony

The epigraph has other roles, however, apart from the ones that characterise the quotation. While a quotation is expected to act merely locally, that is on the immediate discourse in which it occurs, an epigraph might act upon a whole work. Genette depicts four functions of the epigraph, of which two are oblique while the other two are direct.

One oblique function of the epigraph is effected through the communication it conveys about the identity of its writer, rather than (simply) with its contents. As Genette points out (1987),

dans une épigraphe, l'essentiel bien souvent n'est pas ce qu'elle dit, mais l'identité de son auteur, et l'effet de caution indirecte que sa présence détermine à l'orée d'un texte - caution moins coûteuse en général que celle d'une préface, et même que d'une dédicace, puisqu'on peut l'obtenir sans en solliciter l'autorisation. Aussi l'important dans un grand nombre d'épigraphes est-il simplement le nom de l'auteur cité.

(1987: 147)

The other oblique function of the epigraph is effected through its very presence in a work. As Genette claims,

La présence ou l'absence d'épigraphe signe à elle seule, à quelques fractions d'errer près, l'époque, le genre ou la tendance d'un écrit ... L'épigraphe est à elle seule un signal (qui se veut *indice*) de culture, un mot de passe d'intellectualité.

(1987: 148-9)

The epigraph can hence be considered reflexive on the work in as far as it attempts to situate it and its writer within the tradition. It might provide a fairly accurate perspective on the position of the work within the tradition but at the same time, it might reflect the way in which a writer sees himself or herself in relation to the tradition. As Genette suggests,

En attendant d'hypothétiques comptes rendus dans les gazettes, prix littéraires et autres consécration officielles, elle est un peu, déjà, le sacre de l'écrivain, qui par elle choisit ses pairs, et donc sa place au Panthéon.

(1987: 149)

The remaining functions, of the direct type, are concerned with providing a comment either on the title or on the text. The comment on the title, usually comes to clarify its meaning or to justify it. The interpretation of the epigraph, though rarely, can also be affected by the title (1987: 145). This function of the epigraph is necessary when the title is borrowed, allusive or of the parodic type (1987: 146).

The comment on the text, the most canonic function of the epigraph according to Genette, consists in pin pointing its meaning. This might be achieved with varying degrees of clarity and relevance. Although rarely, some epigraphs are even suspected of bearing no relevance to the meaning of the text and are thus merely provided on the hope that some metaphorical or symbolic interpretation might ensue.

In John Fowles' *Daniel Martin*, in "The Umbrella" chapter for instance, an epigraph is provided from George Seferis. The quotation is about what a flame can remember but the only connection it has with the text is not the flame but the question of remembrance which seems to be an important issue for the character. The whole chapter is about this character's recollections of his childhood and his failure to have recollections of his mother. The connection here is based on a textual element which can be generalised to represent a significant factor in the interpretation of the text.

More generally, however, while some epigraphs delineate clearly what the text is about, others leave it to the reader to find out the connection between them once reading has taken place. The epigraph to John Fowles' *Daniel Martin*, for instance, is a

quotation from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* that seems to describe a situation that is indefinite, decontextualised and abstract:

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears.

Its presence on the title page of the book, however, dictates its relevance. A reader has thus to identify a corresponding referent in the text for the expressions "crisis" and "a variety of morbid symptoms" - a task that can be resolved if the words can be taken as providing clues for the themes of the narrative. By operating a rapprochement with the main character's situation and the fact that the narrative is a description of that situation and the preoccupation with past and present he exhibits in his quest for himself, the epigraph in its abstractness starts to shed light on the gist of the narrative.

The epigraph of the first chapter, on the other hand, is extremely precise as it depicts a scene from "Mr Stratis Thalassinou Describes A Man" by George Seferis. The epigraph is not only applicable to the first chapter but to the narrative as a whole. A parallel is soon established between the character Daniel and the man in the epigraph who is not well, who has lost the woman he loves, who keeps staring at a flame and who offers to tell the story of his life. A theme and a point of reference are set for the reader to situate the first chapter which starts in *medias res* and provide a vague idea about what the narrative proves to be about. The source of the quotation sheds light on another aspect of the narrative, for on the one hand, it summarises the contents of the story (description of a man) and on the other, points out that somebody else is doing the description of the man. In the text, whereas the story is about the description of a man, it is the man himself who undertakes to tell it while marking his estrangement from his former self through the alternating use of the first and third persons singular when referring to himself. This practice continues throughout the novel. The epigraph of the last chapter, also a quotation from George Seferis signals the denouement of the story. The character manages to resolve his life in the way outlined by the epigraph: he

establishes his identity at last and decides on the turn his life is going to take after having allowed it to float for a long time.

The first, third, and fourth functions of the epigraph can also be responsible for producing an ironic effect. The very juxtaposition of the two discourses (the epigraph and the text) is likely to make the first lend some meaning to the second if only because it has been selected by the writer of the text. When an epigraph is attributed to one of the established ironists (Swift or Jane Austen for instance), it is likely that it is going to serve as a potential clue for an ironic reading of the text.

The only other epigraph in *Daniel Martin*, working hand in hand with the subtitle in the chapter entitled "Phillida" can be interpreted ironically. It is a quotation from an anonymous Elizabethan poem describing the poet's obsession with the woman he loves as, for instance, in the following lines:

O what a plague is love!  
how shall I beare it ?

Although it might seem possible to take the epigraph as an exact rendering of the theme of the chapter, this interpretation is discarded if one takes into consideration a few elements that grant it an ironic nature. It is noticeable that an alternation between "he" and "I" is in operation through the whole chapter delineating clearly the distance and estrangement that separates the narrator from his teenage self. Two perspectives are thus at work, the one of the older experienced narrator having the privilege of commenting on that of the younger one, especially since the narrator has had a chance to see the woman again in his adulthood as she came to visit her former home, which he currently owns, with her husband. Because the events describe the narrator's remote teenager years and his first experience of love, the epigraph can be seen as carrying a touch of irony (perhaps of the more affectionate and sympathetic type) from the standpoint of the spoilt, materialist, individualistic adult. The experience with the young girl, with all its obsessions is at the same time far remote in Daniel's life and yet

remembered with a warmth he reserves for the better moments of his life, as reflected in his rhetorical question: "Ban the green from your life, and what are you left with?"

As a second-degree interpretation type of utterance, the epigraph in this chapter plays two roles. On the one hand, it describes the relationship of the character with the young girl as it appeared to him in his teenage years, and on the other, it serves to comment ironically but warmly about that relationship as perceived by the adult narrator.

When the epigraph comments on the title, however, it might do so by providing a background that is more or less directly significant in clarifying and justifying the choice of the title. In Barthelme's "Eugénie Grandet," the epigraph creates a link with the previous work by openly attributing the title to Balzac. The intertextual link thus foregrounds Barthelme's work and puts it in a historical perspective. This reveals the parodic character of the title, prepares the way for the ironical text that follows and consequently warns the reader in a detached manner about the purpose of the work as a whole.

In Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, the epigraph consisting of the Latin "Beati Immaculati," confirms and elaborates on the already ironical title. It summarises in a more economical way the neat, perfect and happy state of being of the four main characters of the narrative as the narrator-character has wanted to perceive them. The reversal and collapse of all that he has believed in - when appearances turned out to be far from reality, when he discovered that his wife has been having an affair for the last ten years with the man he has considered his best friend and his best image of what a man should be like - is described in the epigraph which echoes the illusion he has chosen to live and believe in. His friend, the good soldier of the title, surely is still a good soldier and has a host of other positive qualities for him despite having the affair he had with his wife. Baffled and lost as he is in the rush of events in his life, he tries to find excuses for his wife, for his friend and indirectly for himself for having been unable to prevent the turn things have taken, and for letting himself believe that

things are the way they have seemed. Hence, all he finds to comment on his life is the absurd opening sentence "This is the saddest story I have ever heard." Both epigraph and title in this example thus cooperate in carrying the ironical comments on the character-narrator's vision and way of life. They echo his complacent and somehow naive predisposition to things and hence present an ironical verdict or reflection on the character's perception of life.

In Roger McGough's "The Jogger's Song," the epigraph clarifies the title by identifying the role that the jogger plays in the story recounted in the poem (he is the one who rapes a woman asking for help after she has been raped by two other men). It explains the title by creating a parallel between the real person referred to in the newspaper report (the epigraph) and the character in the poem, and giving a glimpse of the real incident which has instigated the composition of the piece. Here again, the connection between the title and the epigraph can be fully at work only once it comes in contact with the text. The epigraph can be seen as acting directly on the text and as serving as a mediation between that text and the other paratextual element, the title. A cooperation between the two as they interact with the text can be revelatory as far as the meaning of the work is concerned.

One possible way of checking the importance the epigraph has in directing the interpretation of the poem is to try to read the latter regardless of the former. One obvious consequence of this procedure would consist in the loss of three essential elements to the poem. First, the referent of the personal pronoun "she" as in "well, she was asking for it" or "Don't know who she was" remains anonymous, as opposed to the "35-year-old woman" leaving the nightclub in Deptford provided by the epigraph. Second, the reason of her lying alone in the park at that time remains equally unknown, except for the jogger's explanation of it ("asking for it"). This can be opposed to the information provided by the epigraph ("was raped and assaulted by two men"). Third, the main event narrated by the poem remains implicit, while it is explicitly stated in the epigraph ("he also raped her"). Although presented from the jogger's perspective, it is

still possible, however, to infer from the information he discloses that the poem is recounting a rape incident. This transforms the situation against him and casts a sordid light on the quality of his "song." The language of the character and the base, rude register he indulges in are essential clues towards recognising the existence of another level of discourse which is manipulating the language for purposes other than mere description. In fact, the caricature of the all muscles and no brain, with double standards man takes shape as the "monologue" of the character proceeds, and his value standards are unveiled ("Well, she was asking for it," "If she didn't enjoy it,/why didn't she scream?"). The situation of eavesdropping in which the reader is placed by the poet leaves the character to compromise himself gradually through the way he undertakes to introduce himself, and as regards to the woman.

The title plays a crucial role in attracting attention to the ridiculing function of the poem as what constitutes a song to the jogger (the things of which he is proud and is willing to celebrate) is far more than a shameful accident not even worth whispering about. What is presented descriptively by the man is to be perceived as echoically conveyed by the poet. It is at this stage that the epigraph comes as the *coup de grace* to the description of the poem given in the title. The ironical purpose behind the poem, directed against the jogger and all the category of male chauvinists to which he belongs is made clear through the combined consideration of both title and epigraph. The scene thus verges on dramatic irony as all the information is revealed to the audience above the vain, obnoxious character's head, as the tone is set for taking everything he utters, right from the start, in echoic terms. The transparency of the duplicity of the situation is warranted by the epigraph which facilitates proceeding towards the ironic interpretation of the poem without need to go further through its lines.

Disregarding the title for the moment, one can, therefore, say that the epigraph equally tends to explain the text in more or less clear and subtle ways. The very juxtaposition of the two texts of varied provenances is capable of creating some rapprochement at the level of meaning - the one starts to derive meaning from the other.

The already existing text, the epigraph, sheds light on the text on which it is grafted by supplying a concise point of reference upon which the text will build openly or indirectly. That the writer of the poem has chosen it in order to complement his or her own text indicates the importance of the role it performs in the completion of the meaning of the work. Its appropriation by the writer compels it to make sense and give sense to and comment on the rest of the text.

In the examples from Barthelme and McGough, the epigraph presents a second account of the stories. This account reflects a discrepancy in point of view with the account provided in the texts. The two accounts are thus put in perspective, compared and played off against each other. Since the epigraph is chosen by the author, the clash has to be treated as intentional and therefore meaningful. The advantage of objectivity and detachment which the epigraph enjoys and the authority of its source (a newspaper article reporting a real incident) foreground the distortion operated on the account presented in the text. The clash between the authoritative status of the epigraph, which is granted by its being a prior discourse that is evoked in juxtaposition with another more recent discourse, and the weaker one of the text, since it is the discourse that the epigraph is meant to comment upon, can thus result in irony. That is, the clash between the information provided from the accurate knowing perspective of the evoked text, the epigraph, and the compromising and less knowledgeable one of the text allows for the reading of the latter to be to some extent conditioned and measured by the former. This duplicity in the discourse situation thus allows the text to be treated in terms of echoic interpretation, since the main purpose for reporting it is to ridicule the opinions, ideas or behaviours it portrays, and attract irony upon them.

Moreover, in the case of "Eugénie Grandet," the epigraph consists of a summary of Balzac's story while the text undertakes to destroy it and undermine all that it stands for. The role of the epigraph is merely to supply the background against which the text is created and thus make clear the commenting, destructive relation that holds the latter to the former. In "The Jogger's Song," however, the text picks up the

most crucial element in the story pointed out by the epigraph and undertakes not to reconstitute it but to emphasise its atrocity by describing the monologue entertained by the rapist afterwards. By concentrating on this element, the poet depicts the mentality of the jogger and by contrasting it with the account in the epigraph, allows it to be ridiculed and ironised. The link with the title accentuates the contrast of the view of the incident by calling a "song" the clichéd, monosyllabic, limited and sexist language of the jogger. Thus, coming to terms with the attribution of the epigraph, the title and the text and their interaction with each other reveal a work whose irony springs from its very open polyphonic character.

The same applies to "Eugénie Grandet" where both title and epigraph provide the background against which the story is told. Hence, the distorted multivocal discourse of the text is made all the more ironic when perceived in relation to its paratextual elements. Its comment on the realist tradition is measured to a great extent against the silent neutral view provided of that tradition.

Hence, the epigraph, another warning in the voice of the author of the presence of irony, as Booth (1974: 54) observes, extracted from somebody else's discourse and recontextualised and grafted on that of another author, can affect the interpretation of a particular work or even shape it totally (as in the case of "The Jogger's Song"). The meaning extracted from its interaction with the text can further be reinforced by connecting it with the title. The two paratextual elements can succeed in jointly conveying an appropriate background that is to elucidate the ironic interpretation of the text and contribute to its overall meaning.

## **5. The Note**

### 5.1. Definition and Functions of the Note

As Genette points out (1987: 315), the note can belong to the text, to the world outside it, or somewhere in between and can therefore be treated as an adequate illustration of the elusive status of the paratext itself. The note, usually the footnote, can perform a number of functions similar to those of the preface despite the formal

differences that characterise them. As defined by Genette, the note is usually related to one particular element of the text:

Une note est un énoncé de longueur variable (un mot suffit) relatif à un segment plus ou moins déterminé du texte, et disposé soit en regard soit en référence à ce segment. Le caractère toujours partiel du texte de référence, et par conséquent le caractère toujours local de l'énoncé porté en note, me semble le trait formel le plus distinctif de cet élément de paratexte, qui l'oppose entre autres à la préface...

(1987: 293)

One of the functions of the footnote, Genette (1987: 314) argues, is that it can be used as a defense or a self-criticism when it is written by the author later than the text. When fictional, that is adopted by a more or less fictional character and more or less satirically simulating the paratext, the note contributes to, if it does not constitute, the fictionality of the text. The editorial note, on the other hand, belongs to the world of criticism and can be transformed into an autonomous comment (1987: 314-315).

In all its types, the note adds some information (historical for instance) to the text. It performs, however, a commenting function that is variably serious. The fictional type seems to be the one that is more liable for ironic use as it splits and challenges the authoritative voice of the text. The author might interrupt the fictionality of the text, for instance, and introduce a comment that contradicts or clashes with what is being pursued in the body of the text. As Stewart observes,

The footnote ... offers an opportunity for discourse to deny itself visually as well as verbally. As the depiction of a voice splitting itself, the footnote is from the beginning a form of discourse about discourse.

(1983: 74)

Juxtaposed with the text on the same page, the footnote undertakes to expand on the text and possibly to contradict or criticise it emphasising both its polyphony and the corresponding multiplicity of point of view that accompanies it. Describing the notes in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Genette says

Elles surprennent davantage quand elles introduisent - digressions comparables à celles des chapitres liminaires de chaque Livre - une opinion de l'auteur sur tel point de mœurs, et plus encore quand elles font état de quelque incertitude sur la pensée d'un personnage ... contraire au parti d'omniscience affiché dans le récit, ou peut-être à l'identité de principe entre auteur et narrateur, en suggérant que le premier, responsable de la note, en

sait moins que le second, responsable du récit.

(1987: 307-8)

Breaking the levels of discourse also occurs, Genette observes, when the author undertakes to correct the voice of a narrator from which no distinction has been operated before then (1987: 308), as in Beckett's *Watt* : "the figures given here are incorrect. The congruent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous." This, in turn, might be used as a vehicle for irony as will be demonstrated in the following section.

### 5.2. The Note and The Communication of Irony

The narrator-author can, moreover, confirm his or her authority by supplying footnotes which provide further information on or correction of characters from the narrative. Tristram Shandy's fifth footnote in Vol. IV contains the original Latin version of the text that he translates. Although this might serve to consolidate the impression of learning of the narrator (since he is translating it for the benefit of the reader) and his father who quotes it in the original to back up his hypothesis about Christian names to his brother Toby, an ironic touch can still be detected colouring the whole process. The footnote can be treated as an indirect comment on the obsession of the father with his arguments about names. He exploits even the most remote possibility and marginal argument in order to support his point about the importance of names. The excessive amount of space devoted to the translation and its original in the footnote can be perceived as indicating and reflecting the father's excessive concern for such futile matters which he takes every opportunity to raise and document. The narrator's quotation of the passage in the footnote and his translation of it in the text serves to convey a vivid perception of the kind of discussions his father indulges in, as he makes clear at a later point in the passage. The report is not innocent, however, as it is meant in its details to ridicule the father's as well as the other "scholars'" attitude to their intellectual endeavours. While reinforcing the fictionality of the discourse, this footnote echoes an already mentioned topic (the father's hypothesis) to subtly build yet another irony around it.

The author can also assume the role of an editor and add footnotes that correct the, until then, only known or advertised author of the work. In Vol. II, Ch. 19 of *Tristram Shandy*, another footnote, this time of a different origin, is inserted to correct the alleged author's misunderstanding of a scientific term ("The author is here twice mistaken ..."). The footnote further speculates on the reasons that could have caused the mistake ("Mr Tristram Shandy has been led into this error, either from seeing ... or by mistaking ...").

In this example, the voice of the author (Sterne) expressed directly on the same page as the footnote claims superiority in knowledge to that of the voice of the narrator-author (Shandy) of the text. This authority reserves the writer of the footnote the right to openly undermine and criticise the reliability of the writer of the text by accusing him of (absurdly) mistaking the "drawing of a petrified child" for the name of the author, claiming that this mistake could have been caused by the similarity between the two words, which in fact have no more in common than their language of origin and their endings. Because it simulates editorial comment, the comment of the footnote gives the impression that it was probably written after the text was completed and accepted. The footnote can thus be treated as an unflattering communication that is transmitted from a higher level of discourse, behind the narrator's back, about his knowledge and intellect, besides producing a humorous and doubly ironic effect. This is a result of the alleged mistakes of Tristram Shandy who is involved in reporting and criticising his father's obsession with this hypothesis concerning the effects that delivering babies have on their mental capacities.

Apart from the irony that results from this conflict of voices in the work, irony can take place on a larger and more critical scale. It may occur mainly because of the resuscitation of the problem concerning the delicate boundaries that separate fiction from reality. The conventions of fiction writing are challenged and the reader's expectations are challenged with them into finding an alternative view of and approach to fictional discourse.

The notion of fiction writing as an artefact and of the reconstitution of reality being just a form of fiction writing, particularly common in postmodernist and metafictional writing, can thus be raised through the use of the footnote. By being poised between the world of fiction and the world of reality, the footnote hence stimulates a form of self-consciousness in fiction writing that challenges the established boundaries and definitions of what makes the one and what makes the other. One can thus agree with Stewart when she asserts that

In nonfictive texts, the footnote aids the illusion of the real by giving a glimpse of "all that has been left out," all the given information that makes up the true, the real, world. To enter into an agreement with the footnotes of a text is to step further into the text. But in the fictive text, the footnote is often ironic. It stands on the interface between the fiction and reality. To enter into an agreement with the fictive footnote is to stand outside and inside the fiction at the same time. When Beckett and Swift have their footnotes contradict the text, the reader is threatened by a loss of any distinction between the real and the fictive. The assumptions of the reader are split and undercut with every splitting and undercutting of the text.  
(1983: 74-75)

Another level at which the footnote can be effectively used for ironic purposes in fictional discourse is when its main aim is to ridicule another type of discourse, the academic one in particular where footnotes are often used to supply information that cannot be inserted in the text. The use of the footnote can compile a number of ironies possibly of the types delineated above to create a communicative situation that is highly complex. In Barthelme's "The Sandman," for instance, a number of ironies can be depicted from the interaction of the footnote with the text. Addressing a letter to the psychiatrist who treats his girlfriend, a man decides to inform the doctor about his dissatisfaction with the manner in which he tries to manipulate the behaviour and future of the woman. He adopts a scholarly tone for the purpose but does not exclude the use of slang and a variety of other clashing registers. His use of the footnote is essentially meant to parody the learned style of writing associated with academic discussions maintained in the profession. He, moreover, domesticates it to attack and criticise the psychiatrist in a subtle, intelligent and ironic manner.

Two footnotes are of particular interest in this short story. The first comes to support or rather spell out a comment that is inferrable but has been left unsaid in the text. The text provides the solution or rather diagnosis of the woman's behaviour which the psychiatrist has disregarded. The writer, however, points out that this inability to perceive the correct situation is not to be attributed to a failure on the part of the psychiatrist but rather to his discipline as a whole, thus reducing him by implicature to a mere agent of the defective discipline rather than the active agent which he should be or pretends to be:

The one thing you cannot consider, by the nature of your training and of the discipline itself, is that she really might want to terminate the analysis and buy a piano. That the piano might be more necessary and valuable to her than the analysis.

To this, a footnote is added containing a reference to an article that is ironically supposed to help the psychiatrist himself to understand *his* problems better:

For an admirable discussion of this sort of communication failure and many other matters of interest see Percy, "Toward a Triadic Theory of Meaning," *Psychiatry*, Vol. 35 (February 1972), pp. 6-14 *et seq.*

The footnote provides an exact reference to an article that belongs to the field of the addressee, that is something about which he is expected to be the more informed of the two. It is already humiliating and undermining to the psychiatrist's professional ability in that sense. The footnote presupposes further a communication failure between the psychiatrist and his patient ("...this sort of communication failure..."). A failure that is diagnosed by the writer and pointed out to the psychiatrist who is thus indirectly accused of having been unable to perceive it. The affected scholarly tone and form of the footnote, together with the presupposed diagnosis of the situation, plus the implicit assumption that the psychiatrist is incapable of helping others since he cannot even help himself and is therefore in need of some enlightening hints from the writer, all contribute to an attempt to beat the psychiatrist at his own game.

A humorous footnote that takes the possibilities of the practice to the extreme is added six pages later. The writer suggests a solution to the problem that he singles out

concerning his girlfriend's dissatisfaction with the American way of life. Instead of trying to disguise and justify the way things are, he simply suggests letting her come to terms with reality by confronting it: "About her depressions, I wouldn't do anything. I'd leave them alone. Put on a record." He further takes the opportunity to add a footnote that suggests a record with the exact reference to the chosen track to be played for the occasion: "For example, Harrison, "Wah Wah," Apple Records, STCH 639, Side One, Track 3." The ridiculous, humorous title of the song already indicates that the record is a mere confirmation of the recovery policy to be adopted: letting the woman face reality. The choice of the footnote to exemplify the recommended method maintains the affected learning of his discourse at the external level. Because of the purpose for which he puts the footnote (its contents), however, it is clear that that very learning is being parodied and put under attack. While the form is kept intact, the content is made totally inappropriate. The contrast results in an irony directed against the psychiatrist and his discipline. His excessive concern with the way things should be and should be perceived and interpreted by his patients has led him to over concentrate on avoiding these problems instead of helping his patients to confront them. The writer's alternative approach mainly aims at disregarding the highly sophisticated terms and methods, to take things at their face value and let people mature and come to terms with their realities. The assumption of seriousness and scholarliness emanating from the use of the footnote is thus merely meant to echo the psychiatrist's false pretensions at those qualities. Copying the style of academic writing is used effectively to demonstrate and criticise the hollowness of some of those who adopt them.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, it is worth noting that although they may be different in form and function, the title, the epigraph and the note are elements of the paratext which can be used effectively to communicate irony in literary discourse. Their interaction with the text is crucial for that purpose despite the fact that they might differ in terms of the scope of action on the work. In some cases they might affect parts of the work but in

others, they might affect the whole of it. Their cooperation in their interaction with the text might occasionally prove essential for the interpretation of irony. The multiplicity of voice with which they enrich a given work, moreover, enhances its assumed inherent intertextual nature and thus provides an even more fertile field for the generation of irony.

Once the threshold is past, however, the reader is confronted with the core of the text itself. In narrative fiction, as narratology demonstrates, several elements can be delineated as constituting the structure of a narrative. These elements, it is argued in the following chapters, can be manipulated and organised so as to communicate irony. The ways in which this is achieved and the possible functions it conveys are likewise to be investigated subsequently.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**Aspects of Narrative Fiction and Irony:**  
**Temporal Organisation**

**1. Introduction**

It is argued in these next two chapters that one fruitful way of examining the communication of irony in narrative fiction can be carried out through the exploration of the potential that the organisation and manipulation of the narrative techniques which constitute its structure can offer. This argument springs particularly from two points of departure. First, the fact that a story is told by a narrator on the assumption that that narrator is reconstructing its events, which usually have already taken place at some earlier point than the narration, makes all the presented speech and thoughts into second-degree interpretation utterances, liable in turn to become of the ironical type. When the focaliser is distinct from the narrator, as will be demonstrated below, the non-verbal events recounted follow a minimal process of interpretation through which a transfer in medium is operated (in Scholes's sense, this is an indication of literariness and a possible clue for irony), in which what is seen, heard, or felt (perceptual medium) is translated into the linguistic medium. This process thus allows for a minimum of manipulation of information on the part of the narrator which might reflect some form of involvement on his or her part, which in turn might allow for the treatment of this kind of discourse as a second-degree interpretation of an already existing one, that of the focaliser(s), or other sources for the story.

This point can be combined with the second which is concerned with the question of evaluation in narrative. It is possible to expand the view which maintains that every story is told in order for its teller to make a point with it, and that for the teller to avoid the question "so what" it is important that the narrative carries its evaluation within itself. The result would be to believe here that all language and all aspects of

narrative carry some form of evaluation in themselves - an evaluation which might be of the ironical type.

Following divisions set by narratologists, these two chapters will be concerned with three aspects of narrative fiction in their relation to irony as it was presented in the preceding chapters. First, temporal organisation in this chapter and then, focalisation and narration, and speech and thought presentation in the next. Given the duplicity between the story and the way it is rendered by the narrator, irony can be present through the use of any of these techniques. Furthermore, the uses of irony based on these techniques are investigated for the effects on or contribution they make to other aspects of the narrative like the theme, characterisation, and self-conscious criticism in particular.

It is worth noting that although the concern is with the techniques of narrative fiction in general, the focus falls particularly on fiction of the contemporary or metafictional type, given the higher degree of playfulness and manipulation that this type advocates in terms of narrative techniques.

## **2. Aspects of Narrative Fiction and the Potential for Ironic Communication**

The distinction between story (*histoire*) and discourse (*récit* and *narration*) posited by narratologists in their study of narrative fiction can be useful for the study of irony in this genre. The event(s) constituting the story that can be abstracted into a form possibly renderable and translatable into various other means of human communication (e.g., film, pantomime, painting, sculpture...) is what constitutes the backbone of a particular narrative. These events or actions thus separated from their manifestation and presentation in discourse come to function in Culler's terms as "a nondiscursive, nontextual given, something which exists prior to and independently of narrative presentation and which the narrative then reports" (1981: 171).

The presentation of events or their rendering in discourse, on the other hand, is what realises a narrative into a text and permits its treatment, in Culler's words (1981: 172), "as a way of interpreting, valuing, and presenting this nontextual substratum

[story]." The order and situation in which the fictive events (have) exist(ed) are thus described and hence (re)created and/or distorted in the discourse. The attempt to mediate and communicate experience which seems to be the concern of narrative fiction is based on this translation of both the verbal and non verbal events constituting story into a verbal discursive form constituting discourse through a process of narration. The outcome of the narration process variably betrays the fact that these original elements have been subject to some modification resulting from the choices made by their narrator during that process. In narrative, the narrator is the fictional being distinct from the implied author or not, who is conventionally granted responsibility for recounting the story so that its events can be communicated to the narratee.

The strong relationship existing between the notion of knowledge and the notion of power that has been demonstrated by philosophers, consisting in the latter apparently being an automatic asset to any holder of the former, seems to be relevant both for the study of narrative and for the study of irony in this genre. It seems that the possession of extra knowledge is the base from which an ironist starts off to undermine, criticise or ridicule situations, actions or beings. Being or believing himself or herself to be in this higher cognitive and perceptual position seems to grant the ironist the power to have a more adequate insight of things than the object of irony might have access to. This consequently grants him or her the power to perceive the shortcomings, inadequacies and incongruities to which the latter remains blind.

In literature, the writer/narrator is the person in the power position because of the amount of knowledge that is conventionally alleged to be at his or her disposal. The readers, for their part, are brought to share that position of power as soon as that knowledge is transferred to them; that is, once the reading process is completed. What they would be able to know is highly dependent on what the narrator decides or manages to communicate to them whether explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously. The readers are in some sense at the mercy of the narrator. As Mc Kee's (1977) study of the victimisation of the reader by the literary ironist shows, irony can be derived from the freedom the narrator has over the discourse organisation

resulting in the dependence of the reader on the unfolding and development of the story as monitored by the narrator.

Hence, given the distinction story/discourse(/narration), presupposed manipulations of the first element can be seen as reflecting choices made by the narrator. The knowledge assumed to be available to the organiser of the discourse grants significance to these choices. It legitimises the power for manipulation to which that organiser has access and, which, in turn, is meant to manipulate and shape the effects on the readers and their responses to the narrative. By presenting the story for the readers in the chosen manner, the narrator cannot escape manifesting his or her presence in the discourse even to a reduced extent. In his *Narratology*, Gerald Prince claims that

In any narrative, the narrator adopts a certain attitude towards the events he is recounting, the characters he is describing, the emotions and thoughts he is presenting.

(1982: 44)

The detection of this subjectivity plays a significant role in defining the degree of proximity or distance that a narrator wants to maintain with his or her discourse and consequently dictates the responses and attitudes to be elicited from and entertained by the readers. It furthermore grants significance to the story presented and makes it relevant enough to be worth the readers' time and attention. The various means by which elements of the story are highlighted and presented in discourse clearly signal the narrator's judgements of what is more interesting or more effective. The choices are meant to make it worthy of the attention of the reader. This function has been identified as "evaluation" by Labov, a "second structure" to the narrative and one of the features constituting a natural narrative. This notion will be investigated in more detail below.

The role of the narrator could be restricted to the minimum that has allowed some narratologists to claim its total disappearance from the narrative and started talking about the story telling itself. This claim has been rejected by Gérard Genette among others. He describes it as "chimera" in his *Nouveau Discours du Récit*. He says that

Le récit sans narrateur, l'énoncé sans énonciation me semblent de pures chimères ... récit ou pas quand j'ouvre un livre, c'est pour que l'auteur *me parle*.

(1983: 68-9)

Hence, even if it were confined to naming the characters or (re)producing their speech as in Hemingway's "The Killers," or novels by Ivy Compton-Burnet, the narrator's presence and role cannot be ignored. In fact, the very existence of a narrative is a clear indication that someone has taken the trouble to recount it and therefore must have (re)constructed the components of which it is made.

Choosing what to tell and how to tell it is the narrator's responsibility and as such grants him or her the power to disregard or highlight elements of the story which could have been tackled differently by another narrator. Thus, what the reader gets to know in a particular narrative is to a great extent communicated by or through the narrator, both in what is said explicitly and/or what is said implicitly. Besides, like any other communicator (writer or speaker), the narrator conveys information not only about the world he or she is engaged in presenting but about himself or herself as well. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, the reader comes to construct an idea about the narrator from the latter's very discourse.

Like other communicators, a narrator can use an utterance descriptively or interpretively, to use Sperber and Wilson's terminology. Any utterance in a particular narrative can be attributed either to the narrator or to someone else in the fictional world. When it is an attributed thought or speech, the utterance can be used as a mere report or quotation. Its satisfaction of the principle of relevance would partly reside in its carrying information about itself: the fact that it is reporting to the reader that a particular person has said or thought that particular utterance. A reported speech or thought, moreover, can be used by a narrator in order to communicate a given attitude or evaluation of the attributed utterance either explicitly or implicitly. When the evaluation is implicit, such an utterance achieves relevance by the mere fact that it is used echoically: that is not only representing itself but also allowing room for the detection of the narrator's reaction to the original opinion and/or its originator; irony being just one of the possible attitudes communicated by echoic utterances. Reaching a

plausible interpretation and attributing utterances correctly in a narrative are enterprises that have to be decided once a disambiguation process defining their status has been carried out.

It can be argued that a narrative may be portrayed as a mixture of a number of described (fictional) states of affairs and a number of attributed (fictional) thoughts and/or utterances. Following Sperber and Wilson, the representation of these events (i.e., their formulation into utterances in the narrative) can be seen as an interpretation of them by the narrator (in the same way that any utterance is considered to be an interpretation of a thought of its speaker's). Moreover, when an utterance is reported, it is the interpretation or understanding of it by the speaker (narrator) that is communicated, a case of second-degree interpretation being at work. Interpreting an utterance in a narrative, thus, necessitates a decision on the part of the reader on the status (descriptive or interpretive) that it is to be granted. Disambiguation, however, is not always a straightforward exercise given the absence of a one to one relationship between what is conveyed and what the words alone seem to say. As Nystrand (1986) points out,

There is, in short, no definitive way to determine just how much *what is said* embodies *what is meant* merely by scrutinizing *what is said*. Presumably there is a continuum of semantic possibilities at one end of which *what is said* embodies *what is meant* entirely (e.g., a true logical proposition) and at the other end of which *what is said* embodies *what is meant* not at all (e.g., lies, irony).

(1986: 93)

In the case of irony, therefore, ability to recognise the echoic use of an utterance dictates an awareness of more than what the utterance *says* as an independent grammatical unit. In narrative fiction, another dimension of meaning creation has to be investigated (apart from its language) in the process of interpretation in general and the interpretation of irony in particular, a typically implicit and subtle type of communication. Information about the world of the narrative is not only communicated through what its narrator decides to say but also through the very narrative techniques that he or she chooses to use during the act of narrating. The possible mismatches, disparities and gaps between story and its rendering in discourse, and not least the

correspondence between them, can be indicative of the narrator's attitudes to what is recounted, whether positive or negative.

Considering the constituting narrative aspects, what each of them is doing in the context, what functions they are performing for the meaning, at the moment of their occurrence and for the whole narrative, can play an important role in the disambiguation process. For bending the use of these narrative techniques can create significant effects: manipulating and exploiting them can contribute to the creation of irony by transforming utterances that can be perceived as descriptive into interpretive and possibly echoic ones. As Prince (1982: 60) points out, identifying the features which constitute a narrative can lead to attempts to identify the reasons behind choices of its components.

Hence, a scrutiny of these elements that contribute to the creation of meaning and the readers' perception and response to a narrative can prove useful for the processing of utterance attribution and interpretation both of separate utterances and of the narrative as a whole. While more or less conforming to Genette's terminology, these techniques can all be grouped under what Prince labels "narrating." They will be treated in the following order. First, time (in this chapter), second, focalisation and narration, and third, narratorial modes (*récit* as such and speech and thought presentation) (in the next chapter).

Time will be examined as it is portrayed in the *récit* or discourse in relation to story for the possible alternatives it can offer for the communication of irony. Focalisation, however, will be considered both in its relation to narration and to story and for the potential that it gives for irony. Narrators will be scrutinised in relation to focalisation. The different modes of narration and their subcategory, speech and thought presentation, will be considered in their relation to the different types of narrator (as actualising their discourse or being embedded in it) with particular emphasis on Free Indirect Discourse (FID).

This part of the thesis is meant to demonstrate the various ways in which the choice of narrative techniques during the act of narrating can be crucial for the

generation and comprehension of irony. Before undertaking this analysis, however, there are two factors essential to narrative, so far left out of focus that need to be singled out because of the implications they have for the communication of irony and as a further warrant for the study proposed in these last chapters. First the notion of fictionalisation, and second the notion of evaluation as introduced by Labov. They will be considered in Part A of this chapter while the temporal organisation of narrative will be considered in Part B.

## **Part A: Fictionalisation, Romantic Irony and Evaluation**

### **1. Reality, History and Fiction: The Case of Joan Didion**

Fictionalisation is a controversial concept that has been discussed by narratologists, historians and philosophers as well as writers in their attempt to draw a line between what is real and what is fictional - a distinction which has proved essential at various times for distinguishing between literature and non-literature. However, instead of insisting on the binary distinctions between diegesis and mimesis, telling and showing etc. that have governed these discussions in their fluctuating attempts to value or devalue the degree of proximity to reality (or realism) once the act of rendering that "reality" has been undertaken, it might be more reasonable to note in accordance with Genette that, in the final analysis, it is all a matter of *degree* of telling. Language does not imitate a story or a reality, it merely describes it or recounts it. Hence, transforming what is non-verbal into a verbal act is a form of translation that involves a degree of mitigation and consequently a change of status. It is this change in medium that has led Scholes to claim that "Any description we read is a fiction" and that "fiction results from the semiotic generation of an absent context or the distortion of a present one" (1982: 26). But, though apparently a property of language, this "mitigation" is further enhanced because of the human involvement in this act of description, which in turn, seems always accompanied by an act of evaluation legitimising and warranting its existence. That is what philosopher Richard Rorty identifies as the "power of redescription" of language, that "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed" (1989: 73).

Regardless of the polarised stances that history writing and fiction writing seem to occupy, the concept of fictionalisation has been considered a function of both fields alike. This view considers that, in both cases, a story (imaginary, semi-imaginary, or

real) is constructed in language by "means of selection and interpretation," as Linda Hutcheon (1988) notes. She cites Hayden White (1973:6) as seeing

the link between the novelist and the historian in their shared "emplotting" strategies of exclusion, emphasis, and subordination of elements of the story.

(1988: 66)

In an article published in Mitchell (1981), White emphasises the "moralising impulse" he finds characteristic of narrativity. He further indicates the imaginary, fictional character springing from the imposition of a pattern and structure on the narrated events. He says,

I sought to suggest that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary.

(1981: 23)

This belief in the impact of reorganisation and imposition of order in narratives (whether fictional or historical) dismissing the belief in order as an intrinsic property of stories has further been discussed by Dennis Duffy (1984-5: 190). He is cited by Hutcheon as commenting on Findley's work saying that stories

do not tell themselves. They do not come to us with beginnings, middles, and ends waiting to be bevelled neatly against each other. They come from scraps and tags, and we order them according to our notions of meaning rather than out of a certainty that it had to have been this way.

(1988: 66)

This complexity of the relation between reality, history, and fiction, life and art is equally high on the agenda of metafictional writers in their attempt to undermine the conventions that established realism as a value and necessity of art by questioning its very ontological legitimacy. Patricia Waugh discusses the question of "reality as construct" in this contemporary genre and says that

Metafiction suggests not only that writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language to form a world model, but that history itself is invested, like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interact independently of human design.

(1984: 49)

This consciousness of the contingency of reality and fiction is reflected in contemporary writing in the growing concern for narration, as opposed to the

traditional emphasis on story. In a lot of this writing, the narrator stops being the mere medium through which the story is told and engages instead in reflecting on the process of narration itself, commenting on its problems and difficulties and indulging in highly self-conscious criticism of narrative conventions and techniques. It is this move towards doubt and questioning that has characterised the relationship of the narrator to the narrated which is identified as Romantic irony or artistic irony (Furst, 1984: 283). Tristram Shandy and Don Quixote for instance constitute earlier manifestations of this type of irony that has become so pervasive in modern writing - especially of the metafictional or postmodernist type. As Furst explains,

Romantic irony ... is situated primarily in the space between the narrator and his narrative. The discreet, assured chronicler of traditional irony is replaced in romantic irony by a self-conscious, searching narrator who openly stands beside his story, arranging it, intruding into it to reflect on his tale and on himself as a writer.

(1984: 230)

The propensity of the romantic ironist to baffle the reader through laying bare the conventionalisation of the narrative devices, defeating the reader's expectations of the narrative by distorting and displaying its techniques is far from the cooperative attitude of the more traditional ironist who helps the reader to reconstruct the irony and be the ironist's "confederate." As Furst observes,

The contract between narrator and reader loses its reliability as the basis for communication. Once perspective is converted into perspectivism, the reader is deprived of his sense of assurance *vis-à-vis* the narrative. The signals that he catches from the mercurial narrator may be loud and manifold, but they are inevitably conflicting since the narrator himself has no firm position or clear insight.

(1984: 231)

Hence, raising an awareness of the relativity of knowledge, breaking the safety of the line separating reality and illusion, emphasising the fact that literature is an artefact are all concerns of romantic ironists in the same way that they are concerns of a lot of contemporary writers. This point will surface again on various occasions in this and the following chapters where irony is believed to reside in the manipulation of the writing conventions and techniques and concern for the process of narration.

The American journalist-writer Joan Didion's writings is a case in point. Her work is of particular interest to the issues of "reality as construct" and the indefinite intertwining of reality and fiction and can be duly described as encompassing a lot of romantic irony as it reflects the struggle of its narrator in telling her story. One of the pervasive features in her writing is her vivid consciousness of the relativity of narratives and the multiplicity of stories available to any one narrator. A choice has always to be made in order to determine the narrative which one finally produces of a given story. Joan Didion deals with these questions both in her fictional and non-fictional writing, both in open statements and through the manipulation of narratorial techniques (as in her notorious combination of vague and definite temporal references, e.g. "seven o'clock of an early spring evening in 1968," "one morning in 1968" or multiple narrations of the same events based on the version that the characters prefer to give of these events). Her collection of essays on her experience of the American way of life, *The White Album* (also the title of the first essay), makes an intertextual reference to the Beatles' album whose title it has adopted. The role of the intertextual reference is to draw a parallel between the period that the writer wants to depict and the one that the Beatles seem to symbolise (sixties and early seventies).

Detached from this intertextual reference and seen in relation to the concern of the text with narration, the title, it might be argued, also suggests putting the writer in the role of the photographer who, upon taking pictures of various events or experiences, undertakes to arrange them in an album in a given sequence. This arrangement cannot but leave out what the photographer could not capture or has chosen not to include, while at the same time imposes on that sequence an interpretation that might have been acquired because of temporal distance or other factors. Didion begins her essay "The White Album" by stating that "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Further down, she argues that

We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.  
(1972: 11)

Joan Didion's extremely self-conscious narrator in her novel *Democracy*, also called *Joan Didion* which already blurs the problematic line designed to divide the fiction and the reality in the narrative, expresses her perplexity not only in finding a suitable beginning but choosing which story to tell. She thus undertakes to enumerate the stories that she is not going to tell and the personalities she was interested in at least in all of her second chapter. On the contrary, however, she provides information that proves to be relevant both to the story or stories of the the person (s) in whose lives she is interested and to the construction of her own character as a homodiegetic narrator. She, moreover, maintains a dialogue with the narratee (or reader) throughout this chapter:

I have no unequivocal way of beginning it [the novel], although I do have certain things in mind. I have for example these lines from a poem by Wallace Stevens ...

Consider that.

I have "Colours ..." Consider any of these things long enough and you will see that they tend to deny the relevance not only of personality but of narrative, which makes them less than ideal images with which to begin a novel, but we go with what we have.

Cards on the table.

I began thinking about Inez Victor and Jack Lovett at a point in my life when I lacked certainty ...

So I have no leper who comes to the door every morning at seven.

No Tropical Belt Coal Company, no unequivocal lone figure on the crest of the immutable hill...

In fact no immutable hill...

In fact I have already abandoned a great deal of what happened before.

Abandoned most of the stories that still dominate table talk ...

Moreover, Didion's belief that "to know that one could change the sense with every cut was to begin to perceive the experience as rather more electrical than ethical" (1972: 13), seems to govern the constantly undermining attitude of her narrators to what they are recounting. One of her narrators gives up her career as an anthropologist and takes up biochemistry, "a discipline in which demonstrable answers are commonplace and "personality" absent (1977: 10). It is this decision which allows her to pursue her "anthropological" interests without further concern for the reasons why anything is the case. Instead, she can wallow in the limited pleasure of mere description and classification permitted by her new occupation as a biochemist: "Give me the molecular structure of the protein which defined Charlotte Douglas" (1977: 10).

The discourses of these narrators tend to diffuse an impression of uncertainty and tentativeness concerning the credibility or accuracy of the events they present. Most of the information disclosed in these narratives tends to appear as if in quotes, as coming from one or several characters whose perceptions of a given event might not coincide and in fact might be incompatible or (self-)contradictory with each other. The narrators' roles seem to concentrate as much on singling out these perceptions as on continuously undermining and correcting them either directly or indirectly. The result is at least a double narrative: one that the character has wanted it to be like, and one that the narrator - an apparently reliable extra-homodiegetic one, but reliable only in as much as the sources are - says it is like. In the opening chapter of *A Book of Common Prayer*, the narrator talking about the main character declares that "Charlotte would call her story one of passion. I believe I would call it one of delusion." She openly contradicts what Charlotte says or wants to believe on several occasions. As for instance at the beginning of the twelfth chapter of the second part of the novel:

*'I've never been afraid of the dark.'*  
*'Actually I'm never depressed. Actually I don't believe in being depressed.'*  
*'By the way. Marin and I are inseparable.'*

Accept those as statements of how Charlotte wished it had been. All the narrator's efforts seem to have failed, however, as she declares her defeat at the end of the novel in face of the elusiveness of the story and her inability to construct a more reliable and comprehensive narrative. She finally realises and admits - Part 6, Ch.5 - that her knowledge is acquired second-hand, through the language of others, thus not failing to be coloured by their attitudes and perspectives:

All I know now is that when I think of Charlotte Douglas ... I am less and less certain that this story has been one of delusion. Unless the delusion is mine.

She then closes the novel with a conclusive sense of uncertainty as regards all attribution:

The wind is up and I will die and rather soon and all I know empirically is *I am told*.  
 I am told, and so she said.  
 I heard later.  
 According to her passport. It was reported.

Apparently.  
I have not been the witness I wanted to be.

Focusing on this insistence on the part of metafictional writing on the gap existing between the narrated world and its linguistic rendering, Waugh asserts that

To be aware of the sign is thus to be aware of the absence of that to which it apparently refers and the presence only of relationships with other signs within the text. The novel becomes primarily a world of words, self consciously a replacement for, rather than an appurtenance of, the everyday world.

(1984: 57)

Discussing the same question in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles emphasises the importance of fictionalisation in daily life. What people do with their own pasts is no different from what takes place in fiction writing and possibly in history writing as well:

You do not think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it ... fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf - your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.

More generally, then, recounting a narrative results from a rendering of some (possible) original that is transformed into a fiction by its mere mediation through language and the acts of "selection and interpretation" that are dictated by its organisation for the sake of meaning creation, and in fact, story creation as well. The role language plays in this enterprise as well as its limitations has been spelled out clearly by Genette in his *Nouveau Discours du Récit* (1983: 29) as he says,

Un récit, comme tout acte verbal, ne peut qu'*informer*, c'est-à-dire transmettre des significations. Le récit ne "représente" pas une histoire (réelle ou fictive), il la *raconte*, c'est-à-dire qu'il la signifie par le moyen du langage - exception faite pour les éléments *déjà verbaux* de cette histoire (dialogues, monologues), qu'il n'imité pas non plus, non certes ici parce qu'il ne le peut pas, mais simplement parce qu'il n'en a pas besoin, pouvant directement les reproduire, ou plus exactement les transcrire. Il n'y a pas de place pour l'imitation dans le récit, qui est toujours en deçà (récit proprement dit) ou au-delà (dialogue).

While being far from imitating life or reality, then, a narrative simply re-describes it, in Rorty's sense of the word. A fiction is created from the intervention of language in the rendering of experience, itself coloured by the purpose underlying this rendering: its "moralising impulse" perhaps and the renderer's choices and "notions of meaning." The implications this fictionalisation might have are of the ironic type,

whether romantic or otherwise as the questions of relativisation, doubt and distance characterise all irony. The question of evaluation considered below only reflects the degree to which fictionalisation, or redescription can affect the way an entity or a state of affairs is presented. The potential that they allow for irony is as open-ended as the potential for fictionalisation itself can be.

## 2. The Point of Narrative or Evaluation

Having pointed out briefly some of the problematic questions of narrative fiction, and this potential for irony with some emphasis on the gap created between experience and its rendering due to the intervention of language and its user, it is possible to turn to the notion of evaluation, which can be considered the outcome of that gap and in a sense the *raison d'être* of the narrative itself. For, telling a story seems always to be linked with some point that its teller explicitly or implicitly tries to make with it. A point that would make it appropriate, non-gratuitous and worth the receiver's attention. To achieve this purpose, a "narrative should be non-obvious, and worth telling" says Prince (1982: 159). It

should represent, or illustrate, or explain, something which is unusual, problematic, something which is (made) relevant for and matters to its receiver: the illocutionary force of a narrative should be equivalent to that of a series of exclamatory (and not merely informative) assertions about events in time.

(1982: 159)

That is what Labov (1972) calls evaluation and judges as possibly "the most important element" besides "the basic narrative clause." He considers it a "secondary structure" to the narrative. Evaluation, according to him, constitutes one section of a fully developed natural narrative containing time, abstract, orientation, complicating action, result or resolution and coda. Labov defines it as the way by which "the point of the narrative" or its "*raison d'être*" is delineated by the narrator.

He explains in *Language in the Inner City*, that

There are many ways to tell the same story, to make very different points, or to make no point at all. Pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder, "So what?" Every good narrator is continually warding off this question; when his narrative is over, it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say "So what?" Instead, the appropriate remark would be "He did?" or similar means of registering the reportable character of the events of

the narrative.

(1972: 366)

Exhibiting the peculiarity, uniqueness or simply difference of a narrative that a "good narrator" would be attempting to achieve does not totally or necessarily depend on its content. The recontextualisation of a story that has been told an infinite number of times can give it a different dimension that makes it recountable and therefore worth reading. This is, of course, a rich resource from which parodic and ironic literature is nurtured, since telling a trite story were it simply for the sake of undermining it or indirectly commenting on it makes it worth the reader's (and the addressee's) while once again.

At a more primary level, on the other hand, recounting a story necessitates an effort by the narrator to present it in such a way that would guide the readers' interpretation of it as well as their responses to it. The expected response hopefully being an approximate if not identical reproduction or perhaps simply a tacit agreement with the narrator's own. For by sharing this form of complicity with the reader, through the unfolding of the narrative, the narrator aims at a reward that can be concretised in the understanding that should mark the end of the reading process. To facilitate that outcome, the narrator can use some of the strategies identified by Labov as forms of evaluation to signpost the reactions of the reader.

Labov indicates that the part that comes immediately before the resolution in a natural narrative is usually reserved for evaluation. He says that a

complete narrative begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with the coda.

(1972: 369)

While complicating action and resolution form the core of the narrative, evaluation is considered its second most important component whose devices can be either concentrated in one section or scattered throughout the narrative, creating a "secondary structure." Labov classifies these devices into evaluative commentary and sentence-internal evaluation. The evaluative commentary can be either internal or external. In both cases the narrative is interrupted by a statement reinforcing the

reportable character of the story. The statement can be made directly by the narrator in external commentary. In internal commentary, however, evaluation is embedded in the story itself and takes the form of a statement either occurring to the narrator at that particular moment of the story, or being formulated by him or her to another participant in the story, or being formulated by some other neutral participant or observer. According to Labov, greater efficiency of the evaluation seems to depend to some extent on a higher degree of embedding.

The second type of evaluative devices, the sentence-internal ones, are also subdivided into two categories: intensifiers and comparators. Both relate to the syntax of the basic narrative clause. The intensifiers do not affect the verb phrase and consist in added devices like gestures, phonological changes, repetition, and ritual interjections. The comparators, however, impose a replacement of the unmarked simple past of the narrative verb phrase by devices that include negatives, questions, modals, commands etc. which are anchored in "a cognitive background" which is much larger than the events at hand. Comparators divert from the events as organised in the narrative in order to examine "unrealized possibilities and compare them with events that did occur."

It can be argued at this point, in accordance with the argument presented in the introduction to this chapter, that evaluation can be traced back to the broader categories responsible for the construction of the narrative itself especially as it differs from story and becomes a discursive construct. This might be classified under the internal category of evaluation which is deemed the more persuasive kind by Labov, due to the degree of involvement it requires from the hearer or the reader as Tannen (1989: 138) points out. Internal evaluation as it will be shown on various occasions in the following sections can also be a successful vehicle for romantic or artistic irony. It can allow the narrator to use narrative techniques in order to comment on the process of narration itself as well as on the story. In discussing images as providing internal evaluation, Tannen suggests that "they lead hearers and readers to draw the conclusion

favoured by the speaker or writer." Her argument is based on the degree of participation of addressees:

Hearers and readers who provide interpretations of events based on such story-internal evidence as dialogue and images are convinced by their own interpretations ... In contrast, external evaluation seeks to convince hearers or readers by providing interpretations in the storyteller's voice, from outside the story ... In the former case, the meaning is dramatized, and the hearer does the work of supplying it. In the latter, the meaning is stated, and handed to the hearer ready-made.

(1989: 138)

Tannen's point, it might be suggested, can be adopted to encompass not only images and details as she contends but also in a general manner all categories of narrative construction. The questions of time, focalisation, and narration identified and discussed by Genette (1972, 1973) can all reflect selections made by the narrator emphasising directly or indirectly features or elements that he or she judges worth noticing and pointing out. The narrator can unveil his or her attitude to the characters or situations portrayed, in the choice of technique that he or she adopts. Events, actions, thoughts and speech can be rendered in a variety of ways each generating a different impression and signalling a different attitude from the narrator. Extending the use of a particular technique or exploiting it in an unexpected manner can not only indicate the narrator's attitude but also his or her wish to instigate the same attitude in the narratee. The notion of tone discussed in Leech and Short (1981) seems to describe this bilateral, ideally symmetrical, relation between narrator and reader in terms of attitude towards the narrated, with the former directing and dictating the latter's through various means in the narrative.

Irony, "one point in a spectrum of tone" as Leech and Short (1981: 283) consider it, will be treated in the following sections as a form of evaluation, in Labov's sense, in which the narrator manages to suggest that he or she dissociates him or herself from what is being recounted to question it or make fun of it in accordance with Sperber and Wilson's approach. It is argued that this can be achieved through a careful exploitation of the different narrative techniques which, once identified, would clearly

reveal the echoic character of the utterance conveying them and consequently, disclose its meaning and eradicate its descriptive attribution to the narrator.

Without going as far as claiming that a narrative is a second degree interpretation of a story, it is possible to argue that in line with the notion of "secondary structure" used to characterise evaluation, it is possible to see a great part of narrative as being presented interpretively and possibly echoically in relation to the assumed already existing discourse of the story. This polyphonic, dialogic character of narrative can serve as a warrant for the investigation of its constituent techniques for what they offer for the generation and interpretation of irony. The rest of this chapter will undertake to examine the ways in which irony can lie in the very manner in which events can be organised in time. The following chapter will, for its part, consider the potential for ironic communication as possibly dwelling in the duplicity between focalisation and narration and by the different types of speech and thought (re-)presentation.

## **Part B: Temporal Organisation and Irony: Story-time and Text-time**

### **1. Introduction**

Time is an important factor in narrative. It is used to monitor the distribution and organisation of events and speech. The distinction posited between story and discourse (or text) permits a distinction between story-time and text-time. Story-time is the chronological order that events are assumed to have followed while taking place. Their organisation in the narrative dictated both by the linearity of the space in which they are presented and the narrator's choices of focus constitutes text-time. In these terms, story-time can be seen as the idealised actual order or succession of the events in time. Recounting these events in a written narrative, however, is bound to convert their temporal dimension into a spatial one. The order in which they are disclosed thus becomes a function of their linear linguistic display in the text. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983) points out,

The narrative text as text has no other temporality than the one it metonymically derives from the process of its reading. What discussions of text-time actually refer to is the linear (spatial) disposition of linguistic segments in the continuum of the text.

(1983: 44)

This property of text-time grants the text some freedom in the presentation of the events in the story. Their chronological order can be disrupted or transformed in a variety of ways, in response to the pressure emanating from the text and its narrator. Making a story worth telling usually involves emphasising certain events and disregarding others in accordance with the point and effect that its narrator wants to make.

The reading process also has claims over the story. To make the reader cling to the novel, a narrator has, for instance, to include an element of suspense, which of course would necessitate a certain degree of distortion of the chronological order of the

events. Withholding some information that takes place at the beginning of the story until the end of the text of the narrative might be a way of making a story worth reading.

The duplicity and the discrepancies existing between story-time and text-time resulting from the modifications made by the narrator can be a useful means for detecting the effect and attitude he or she wants to communicate. The variety of techniques created by these modifications, can, thus, arguably be examined for the expression of irony both against elements existing within the world of the narrative itself and outside it.

These different techniques have been identified and grouped by Genette (1972), (1980) under three main categories: order, duration and frequency. As in Rimmon-Kenan's (1983) summary of these categories, *order* accounts for the

relations between the succession of events in the story and their linear disposition in the text. Under *duration* he [Genette] examines the relations between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration. Under *frequency* he looks at the relations between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated in the text.

(1983: 46)

These categories will be scrutinised in the following sections for the potential for irony that they display and will be illustrated with passages from contemporary narrative fiction. The analysis of these passages will also register the effects or purposes for which irony is being used at that particular point in the narrative.

## 2. Order

The distortion of the chronological succession of events can take different forms and different degrees. As Prince says

A given event or series of events may be displaced a few seconds only or a few years in time; furthermore, the displacement may involve very few events lasting a minute or an hour, but it may also involve very many events lasting a month, a year, or twenty years; and some anticipations may occur within retrospections and vice versa.

(1982: 49-50)

The two main kinds of incongruity between story-time and text-time or anachronies are identified by Genette as analepsis and prolepsis (equivalent respectively

to the traditional *flashback* and *anticipation*). *Analepsis* involves going backwards in time while *prolepsis* involves going forwards in time. In the case of the former, a past event in the story is brought forward after other events have been narrated. In the latter, however, events from the future (in the story) are disclosed in the text before others preceding them have been narrated.

*Prolepsis* and *analepsis*, according to Genette, constitute a second narrative embedded in the first narrative from which they are anachronies. They can be homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, external, internal or mixed. They are homodiegetic if the information they provide is related to the character, event or story line at hand at that stage of the text. They are heterodiegetic if they are about another character, event or story-line. When the anachrony refers to an event outside the first narrative, it is considered external. If the event occurs after the start and before the end of the first narrative, however, the anachrony is internal. It becomes mixed if the event is brought from outside (either before or after the end) of the first narrative but is then made to join it at a later course. Apparent discrepancies are not considered anachronies if they occur in the form of reminiscences or anticipations entertained in the minds of the characters who are the centre of focalisation at that point in the text. The information they disclose cannot be attributed to the narrator. Their invocation of it is rather treated as a component of the first narrative, probably in the same way that actions are treated.

After this brief overview of the characteristics of the categories of order, it might be worth considering individually the potential these categories offer for the generation of irony in narrative fiction.

### 2.1. Analepsis

The essential property of *analepsis* of any of the types delineated above or any combination of them is to disclose a past piece of information that is (perceptibly or not) missing in the text, by inserting it at a stage where later events have already been narrated. The main function of this exercise is probably to explain or elaborate on a (current) state of affairs. In the case of the whodunnit genre, for instance, the suspense created by *analepsis* constitutes both a main part of the construction of the

narrative, and also a great part of the pleasure derived from its reading. Without disclosing the withheld piece of information, the narrative cannot come to a close. A sense of dissatisfaction will result from the (gratuitous) build-up of the mystery if the pleasure created by the analeptic suspense is not rewarded with a final revelation of the perceptibly missing information.

Where the importance of analepsis does not lie in providing the denouement of a narrative, its role becomes more implicit and its presence is not necessarily missed or perceived. In these cases, analepsis might be used to reinforce particular themes in the narrative. It might also be used to help with the characterisation: the information that analepsis unfolds can, for instance, reveal an unknown trait of a certain character or reinforce one already portrayed. Cases where analepsis is used to comment implicitly and negatively, as in irony, will probably fall under this category. The analepsis will have to appear at a stage that will prove the information it carries inappropriate, absurd, pointless and/or contradicting the situation at hand. The irony will result from bringing forward that past point in the story to juxtapose it with or insert it at a point in the text where the light it sheds will not be confined to an informative function but will rather acquire an evaluative or at least a questioning function. Analepsis will comment on the situation on which it is grafted and therefore will respond to the narrator's desire to highlight the situation or trigger some consequences of it.

#### 2.1.1. *Tristram Shandy* : Ironical Characterisation and Self-consciousness

A passage from *Tristram Shandy* can serve as an illustration of the complexity of meanings and functions analepsis can generate. It displays the variety of factors that can interact to determine the ironic interpretation of analepses as they spring from the discrepancy between story-time and text-time and the consequences they have for the organisation of the text itself and the presentation of the characters.

In Ch. 21, Vol. 1 of the novel, the analepsis that informs about the "affair" of Tristram's great aunt with a coachman is disclosed as if by accident. Tristram decides to inform his narratee about his uncle Toby. That leads him to rule out his uncle's singularity as a matter of "family-likeness." All the males of the family are, according

to him, in possession of an original character denied to the female members except for aunt Dinah. Accidental as it seems, this external heterodiegetic analepsis (sixty years before the conception and birth of the narrator which is supposed to be the time of the beginning of the first narrative) is granted a revelatory function which turns it into a mixed analepsis. The exceptional aunt's affair described in a subordinate clause in fact constitutes a point of divergence between the narrator's father and his uncle Toby whose relationship has so far been idealised. The narrator who admits the remoteness of the event both in time and impact shows no scruples in implicitly criticising his father and uncle's exaggerated concern for it.

Hence a past event that is revealed as if by accident in a digression turns out to be of major importance in the shaping of two of the main characters of the narrative. The father is reported to derive an immense pleasure from including the aunt's story in his discussion of his hypothesis about Christian names. The narrator draws a false ironic parallel between the centrality of the aunt's affair for his father and that of Venus for Copernicus; the former is as seriously considered by its observer as the latter has been. He talks about the "Shandean system" in terms analogous to the Copernican system implicitly emphasising the incompatibility of the scientific endeavour of his father with the triviality of the object of his argumentation. While apparently elevating his father's hypothesis through the analogy with Copernicus', Tristram simply underlines the gap existing between the two and ridicules the gratuitousness of the scientific and philosophical illusion in which his father indulges.

The uncle, on the other hand, is portrayed as an (effeminate) person whose modesty, the most striking of his features, has been contracted along with a war injury that has damaged his manhood. His emotional reactions to his brother's constant reference to the aunt is attributed to the combination of this feature with the "heat of a little family pride" (Vol. 1, Ch. 21). The description, in the same chapter, of the impact the reference to the aunt can bring about (e.g., "The least hint of it was enough to make the blood fly into his face," "...would set my uncle Toby's honour and modesty a'bleeding" ) underlies the narrator's ironic treatment of the uncle in parallel to that of

the father. The emotions aroused in him seem extremely exaggerated in comparison to the triviality and remoteness of their source. The analepsis summing up the events in a single subordinate clause thus stands in contrast with the considerable amount of influence it has had on the descendants of the aunt. It is juxtaposed with the four and a half pages that describe its profound effect, sixty years after its occurrence, on the intellectual and moral dispositions of the brothers.

The narrator further uses the analepsis to comment on his own discourse, in the following chapter, pointing out its digressive and yet "progressive" character. He self-consciously discusses his digressions and their function in the narrative to avoid their being further overlooked by the reader. He then exempts the reader from any shallowness or short-sightedness causing such misunderstandings (e.g., "not for want of penetration in him") and claims the merit to his own skilful use of digression. He simply suggests, in a low-keyed manner, that the digression which contains the analepsis, has, after all, helped with the drawing of his uncle's character since that was the task he has set himself at the start of Ch. 21.

This declaration, however, is neither complete nor innocent. The narrator apparently answers any reader's objection to his disruption of narrative with his digressions by drawing the latter's attention to the constructive role they play. He, nevertheless, does not mention the light in which he has managed to draw his uncle's character. He also says nothing about the role the digression has played in portraying his father and his relation to his uncle and his attitude to them both. The irony in this case is potentially directed against the reader who would have already realised what the narrator has stated and instead of taking it as a hint to look deeper, would simply be contented with the limited interpretation drawn for him or her by the narrator. The narrator's irony at this point consists in echoing to the reader what he or she has already thought or constructed. He cunningly camouflages the further implications of the digressive technique by openly limiting its effect to a continuation of the drawing of the uncle's character.

In this example, thus, at least a double irony is at work as a result of the insertion of the analepsis in a discourse whose original purpose is merely descriptive. The irony against the exaggerated concerns of the father and the uncle over a trivial ancient matter mentioned briefly and carelessly by the narrator is duplicated by an irony, disguised as a remark, directed against the readers who while missing the irony congratulate themselves over managing eventually to deduce (as instructed by the narrator) something about the character from the digression. The first irony is based on the actual evocation and echoing of the reactions and attitudes of both father and uncle to the contents of the analepsis. The second irony, however, springs from the narrator's echoing of a possible opinion on the part of the reader while appearing to adopt it. The criticism of the limitations of such an attitude comes in the form of a recommendation towards adopting it.

### 2.2. Prolepsis

Unlike analepsis, prolepsis is less frequently used in narrative fiction. Although the distinction between story and discourse allows for this kind of discrepancy in time, the technique is seldom used for reasons which probably have to do with a sense of what is and what is not natural in terms of the temporal dimension. Narrating a later event in the story before others preceding it destroys the sense of unexpectedness characteristic of events still in the confines of the future and defies their alleged linearity. While it is possible to know things from the past, the future, in principle, remains unknown and unpredictable until it is converted into present and then becomes past in its turn.

The sanctity of the future has been emphasised in fiction partly because of the element of naturalness and reality that it tries to simulate and partly because of the importance of the notion of suspense that is supposed to keep the reader wondering about what is going to happen next. The suspense that prolepsis can trigger is, however, of a different kind: it makes the reader want to know *how* not *when* the particular event is to come about. Besides, offering a glimpse of the future can lend a better view of the course of events at the moment of the insertion of the prolepsis. In

first person narratives it is more acceptable for the narrator to show that he or she knows the outcome of the story by using prolepsis. It can thus be used effectively in a natural manner to comment on the situations and events contemplated after their completion.

In third person narrative, however, prolepsis has conventionally been less frequent. In contemporary fiction, the linearity of the narrative, its having a beginning, a middle and an end has been criticised for its artificiality. The "disappearance" of the narrators together with their unpleasant omniscience that have made them keep trying to simulate reality in their treatment of the future in the narrative has likewise been a source of dissatisfaction for contemporary writers. For them, prolepsis has proved an effective tool for undermining these elements and the beliefs underlying them. It has thus come to be used not only as a means to ridicule or criticise events and characters in a particular narrative but to undermine the conventions governing narrative writing itself - a vehicle for romantic irony in other words. Hence, in omniscient (extra-heterodiegetic) narration, the narrator who is compared to a God-like figure might not refrain from exhibiting this pan-knowledge by constantly disclosing future events at an earlier stage in the discourse. The narrator can create a multiplicity of ironies in this way. He or she can, for instance, prove the efforts of a certain character ridiculous or pointless by mentioning their outcome before they are even described. The character's ignorance of course makes him or her the butt of irony.

### 2.2.1. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* : Ironic Characterisation

Muriel Spark's Miss Brodie, for example, who is obsessed with transforming the lives of the ten-year-old girls she is teaching is recurrently put in this light throughout the narrative. The narrator providing a whole list of future happenings accompanying each one of the girls' names proves how pointless their teacher's enthusiastic endeavours to make them "la crème de la crème" will turn out to be in the end. Her eventual betrayal by one of the girls from her chosen set (in fact her favourite

one), reported carelessly in a prolepsis, verges on dramatic irony because of the amount of knowledge it grants the reader and denies the characters.

In the same novel, prolepsis is used to ridicule the exaggerated view the characters have of themselves or that others have of them in their close circles, drawing attention to the smallness of their worlds, and the insignificance of their ploys. Hence Ch. 1:

"That you would live quietly, Miss Brodie" said Rose Stanley who six years later had a great reputation for sex ... Sandy's tears now affected her friend Jenny, later famous in the school for her beauty ... Mary Macgregor, ... who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire ...

Here, what is presented by the mixed homodiegetic prolepsis is, to a great extent, a report of the reflections of other members of the school regarding the girls. The things for which they are to become "famous" are petty and ridiculous and only significant in a world as narrow as that of the school. In this use, prolepsis does not only comment on the characters' "achievements" in life and the misapplication of the word "famous." It further ridicules the shortcomings of an egocentricity that drowns those indulging in it in their over-consciousness of themselves and their clustering within the confines of the limited orbit around which their worlds revolve. While pretending to inform the reader about these future events, the narrator implicitly and repeatedly questions the tokens used to identify the girls in the prolepses. This consequently puts them in an ironic light that questions the appropriateness, accuracy and relevance of the prolepsis in the story and ridicules the limitations of the restricted world of the girls. The word "famous" can furthermore be seen as the source of an irony based on its use to parody the school girls stories, a sub-genre on its own, in which it is equally frequent and similarly open to criticism. From this perspective, the irony has an actual intertextual basis for its echoic property to be added to the one which is echoic in the sense of the split in the voices due to its obvious inapplicability to what it describes. The role of the prolepsis is crucial for this purpose because it provides a glimpse of the future events as they are perceived and assessed by the

characters in the situation at hand, thus casting more light on their personalities and environment.

### 2.2.2. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* : Irony and the Theme of Predestination

Prolepsis can also be used to underline a certain theme conveyed in a particular narrative. The theme of predestination and the circularity of time and history, for instance, is thus emphasised in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The narrator keeps divulging future events in the text long before they are due in the chronological order of the story. In the following passage the mixed heterodiegetic prolepsis points out the uselessness of the strong will and efforts shown by the character who, in her enthusiasm, fails to realise she is wasting her youth on a cause determined lost numerous years in advance.

With Ursula's death the house fell into a neglect from which it could not be rescued even by a will as resolute and vigorous as that of Amaranta Ursula, who many years later, being a happy, modern woman without prejudices, with her feet on the ground, opened doors and windows in order to drive away ruin, restored the garden, exterminated the red ants who were already walking across the porch in broad daylight, and tried in vain to reawaken the forgotten spirit of hospitality.

The events that seem to have chosen a certain course refuse to change it regardless of the pressure put on them by the endeavours of the characters. The anticipatory glimpse in this case functions on two levels at once. It manages, on the one hand, to destroy the suspense resulting from the curiosity about the fate of the little girl who left South America for Europe seeking education and enlightenment and stresses blatantly, on the other hand, the notion of predestination underlying the novel. The narrator makes it clear that what matters is not the outcome, which is repetitious and already known and written in the family book composed by the gypsy Melquiades. Instead, it is the way things happen and interact with each other to prove their circularity that matters. The prolepsis here highlights the ironic character of the actions of the woman as they are presented in the context of the development of the story.

On a wider scale, this principle governs narrative fiction as well. The characters are predestined in the same way that people are assumed to be in the "real" world. They are powerless and infinitely hopeless in front of their (written) destinies. The

conventions requiring that these notions be kept underground are often undermined in metafictional writing with the frequent use of prolepsis that insistently betrays the narrator's knowledge of what is to come. It is in this way that the previous example can be seen as ironic in two directions. First, the prolepsis lends a dramatic sense to the situation by predicting its outcome years in advance, and pointing out the ignorance of the character of the fate of her efforts. The prolepsis is condensed in one long sentence describing the dynamic actions and beliefs of the young woman equally offers the disappointing result that is awaiting her and of which she will remain ignorant until the end. One major effect of this strategy is to simulate a dramatic situation in which narrator and audience are brought together in a complicity resulting from their shared knowledge, while the character is marginalised because of her indulgence in an activity that is bound, it is clear to them, to fail. The participants, in the knowledge as it were, can thus perceive the ironic turn of the events at an early stage, as in dramatic irony. What is echoed in this case and is therefore reported in order to be undermined is the character's beliefs and expectations as they are played against their outcome, while she fullfledgedly carries them on.

### 2.2.3. Romantic or Artistic Irony

The other ironic effect created by the prolepsis springs in the preceding passage from its direct upsetting of the established writing conventions which require a linear temporal organisation of events with allowance for analepsis alone. Expectations for such an order from the readers is thus defeated as the narrator shows more concern for the fate of the house than respect for the succession of events itself.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the narrator uses prolepsis to this effect. Whoever expects a story to follow the chronology of a beginning, middle and end is puzzled by the muddle of the distorted information organisation of the story which is heavily divided between prolepses and analepses. The point of the novel is diverted from the story it is telling to the manner it is trying to tell the story although this definitely enriches the narrative eventually - at least in terms of ironic commentary. The irony here operates at various levels. Apart from ridiculing the characters and their

endeavours, it is used both against the realist writing conventions and against the reader expecting these well-trodden techniques to be at work. Both levels allow its classification under the category of romantic or artistic irony. The metafictional value of this novel is in a great part due to this ironic play with order, and with prolepsis in particular.

### 3. Duration/Speed

The notion of duration in story can be measured in terms of minutes, hours, days etc. In the text, its measurement proves problematic because if the duration of the reading is to be taken as a norm, there will finally be as many durations for a single text as there are readers. The alternative proposed by Genette is to compare the amount of space devoted to the events in the text with the amount of time they take to happen in the story. The constancy of speed with which narrative is disclosed is thus determined by the "unchanged ratio between story-duration and textual length, e.g. when each year in the life of a character is treated in one page through the text" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 52).

There are two ways in which this balance can be disrupted: either by devoting a shorter section than expected to a long period of the story, as in acceleration, or conversely, by devoting a longer section of the text than expected to a short period of the story, as in deceleration. Among the infinite number of degrees of acceleration and deceleration, five have conventionally been identified by narratologists. They are as follows ranging from maximum to minimum speed:

ellipsis: zero textual space devoted to some story duration

summary: (long) period from story condensed into a short statement

scene: story-duration and text-duration are (near) equivalent

stretch : (short) story-period extended in long statement

pause: some segment of the text corresponds to zero story-duration

As Prince (1982) points out, these categories are not always openly underlined by the narrator. They can simply be inferred. Prince further claims that

when we speak of ellipsis, or summary, or stretch in narrative, we may actually be referring not so much to an exact relationship between narrative length and narrative time but rather to the relationship between the former and what we know or feel it could or should be."

(1982: 57)

The use of deceleration and acceleration can normally serve to indicate the importance given to certain events. The more fully an event is described, the more important it is made to look. This practice can of course be exploited to generate different effects both by following the principle that underlies it and/or by distorting it. An event can thus be described extensively either because it is important or because its narrator wants to emphasise its triviality by treating it ironically. The potential the duration categories have for communicating ironically depends, moreover, on their textual properties as they interact with other parts of the discourse. This potential will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

### 3.1. Ellipsis and Descriptive Pause

Ellipsis and pause correspond to the maximum forms of modification of story: acceleration and deceleration; an event in the story is omitted from the text and conversely some part of the text exists corresponding to no story-duration. Both techniques can be considered as violations of the maxim of Quantity, ellipsis by saying too little or rather nothing, and pause by saying too much in relation to the norm of pace established in a certain narrative (Prince 1982).

#### 3.1.1. Ellipsis: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Black Mischief*

Ellipsis can be used to emphasise the centrality of the events that are given more space and the insignificance of those reduced or omitted from the text. Its use can, furthermore, create ironic effects that contribute in the characterisation or reinforce a particular theme in the narrative. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for instance, a mystery is created by the omniscient narrator's withholding the identity of the killer of José Arcadio. In this case, the narrator keeps his knowledge and that of his readers at the level of that of the citizens of Macondo. This might reinforce the possible argument contending that the narrator's knowledge is equal to the sum of the information available to the townspeople. Coming from an omniscient narrator, this ellipsis

generates an air of mystery commensurate with the supernatural element that seems to pervade the narrative. In a small town where everything that is said or done is common knowledge to all its inhabitants, the mystery of the killing of José Arcadio has been subject to a number of hypotheses attempting to solve it before it is declared as such.

Every afternoon he could be seen returning on horseback, with his hunting dogs ... One September afternoon, with the threat of a storm, he returned home earlier than usual. He greeted Rebeca in the dining-room, tied the dogs up in the courtyard, hung the rabbits up in the kitchen to be salted later, and went to the bedroom to change his clothes. Rebeca later declared that when her husband went into the bedroom she was locked in the bathroom and did not hear anything. It was a difficult version to believe, but there was no other more plausible, and no one could think of any motive for Rebeca to murder the man who had made her happy. That was perhaps the only mystery that was never cleared up in Macondo.

The inhabitants of Macondo thus try to pierce the mystery reasoning with what they know about Rebeca and the case, but find themselves unable to provide a plausible explanation for its cause. The ellipsis thus results in an irony which is directed against their preoccupation with each other's business and the way things which are made public are fossilised and impregnated with projections from the public opinion. These people's knowledge, based on appearances ("every afternoon he could be seen..."), comes second-hand, that is from what they hear about the couple and the image they are willing to construct of them. Rebeca's report of the incident ("later declared") sounds like a literal repetition of her own words from which only the parts judged relevant are retained ("she was *locked* in the bathroom ... did not hear anything"). Acting like judges, the townspeople then try to analyse the report in terms of what they know about Rebeca's relationship with her husband. The lack of motive on her part is a deduction based on the role they have assigned to the couple and their idea of them rather than on facts. According to their reasoning, José Arcadio has made Rebeca happy, consequently, she has no reason to kill him. The killing thus becomes the only unresolved mystery in the history of the town not because an investigation has decided so but because its elements do not fit with the knowledge the people have constructed about the relationship of the couple.

That the narrator, in his omniscience, has been unable to disclose further information to solve the mystery for the readers can be possibly explained by the fact that most of the knowledge of the happenings in the life of the Buendia family he describes has been gathered from what other people have reported them to have done or said. He is not on the spot as it were when things take place. Instead, being perhaps like other inhabitants of Macondo, he could only acquire them second-hand. A great deal of the narrator's discourse seems to be based on reports made by certain characters or as they become known to the whole town and therefore become part of the vague, collective memory of the people (notice for instance the precise and yet vague temporal reference "One September afternoon"). Ellipsis in this case, can thus be taken to reflect the alignment of the narrator with the point of view of the people of Macondo. Their curiosity, and their possibly erroneous reasoning based on appearances and on their own image of things are echoed in the narrator's recounting of this incident. The magnitude of the exaggeration that events can reach in this small society are mimicked successfully in the rest of the passage where a detailed account of the dead man's blood crossing the town to inform his mother is given ("A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living-room, went out in the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed over the Street of the Turks...").

Ellipsis is also used in the fifth chapter of Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief* to withhold information both from the character concerned and from the narratee which turns it into an adequate means for ironic communication. The narrator leaves a few pages between the first mention of the arrival of the unwanted boots to the army quarters and the revelation of the soldiers' mistaking them for food. The boots were delivered under the name of the person responsible for supplying them with food and consequently they were treated as such. The reader is led, like the minister in charge of the affair, towards drawing the wrong but natural conclusion (that the boots did not meet a lot of disagreement after all). The narrator's eventual revelation of what really

happened (an instance of analepsis, it might be argued) presents what was initially ellided as a humorous, ironic, shock.

That evening there was a special feast in honour of the boots. Cook-pots steaming over the wood fires; hand drums beating; bare feet shuffling unforgotten tribal rhythms ... The singing reached Basil as he sat at his writing-table at the Ministry, working long after midnight at the penal code.

"What's going on at the barracks?" he asked the servant.

"Boots."

"They like 'em, eh?"

"They like 'em fine."

"That's one in the eye for Connolly," he said, and next day, meeting the General in the Palace yard, he could not forbear to mention it. "So the boots went down all right with your men after all, Connolly."

"They went down."

"No cases of lameness yet, I hope?"

The General leant over in his saddle and smiled pleasantly. "No cases of lameness," he replied. "One or two of bellyache, though. I'm just writing a report on the matter to the Commissioner of Supplies - that's our friend Youkoumian, isn't it? You see, my adjutant made rather a silly mistake. He hadn't had much truck with boots before and the silly fellow thought they were extra rations. My men ate the whole bag of tricks last night."

Basil, the English "Minister of Modernisation," in his enthusiastic attempts imposing civilisation on the native cannibals he is dealing with, does not foresee the degree of their primitive nature. One that leads them to decide that the leather boots are strange but still edible things. The army leader, aware of the results of such attempts and opposed to any that would interfere with the performance of his soldiers takes the opportunity to remind the minister of the hopelessness of his enterprise. In his literal echoing of the minister's words ("They went down"), he does not disclose the important piece of information and is yet contented with rejecting its metaphorical use and choosing its more physical meaning as it becomes clear in retrospect. He simply allows Basil to reach a misinterpretation of his utterance by intentionally failing, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, to eliminate a possible implicature conveyed by that utterance and its context : his echoic response is an ironical not an approving one. Connolly, thus, allows the minister to be emboldened by his short response (by not stopping him from taking it as an indication of his humility after his apprehension about the boots issue has proved incorrect) and therefore his will to put an end to the topic by assuming a self-effaced air and simply echoing the sentence. It is noticeable that the narratee is being misled by the narrator since in this passage the actual event is carefully

ellided from the description provided of the reception of the boots. Notice the selected information disclosed in the successive use of the summary and scene (cf. 3.2), for instance. The summary provided in the first sentence can only be seen as ambiguous in retrospect. This ambiguity here is anchored in the expression "in honour of" as it still suggests that the boots are the reason for the celebration (what is described in the presupposition "a special feast"). This expression thus allows for the most probable interpretation to be reached in the circumstances and according to the narratee's knowledge about what the boots are for.

The selection of scene consisting of the report of the short question-answer dialogue between Basil and his servant by the narrator consolidates the way to this misinterpretation process. Its function in this discourse is, however, to build the basis for the erroneous opinions to be echoed once the ironic purpose is disclosed. Certain of his victory over Connolly, therefore, Basil proceeds to eliciting the information which he expects to indicate his concern for his men's welfare and at the same time indirectly confirm his position as the leader of the Modernisation program while also showing his civilised manners, since he makes no open comments on the assumed miscalculations of Connolly. For Connolly, however, this question leaves no doubt about the minister's ignorance of the turn of events and shows enough incriminating pride and self-confidence in his discourse to deserve an ironic answer. He, therefore, echoes once again Basil's words omitting the adverbial "yet" ruling out any possibility of lameness completely and instead, corrects him by bringing him up to date with his preoccupation with the incompetence of his adjutant who fed the boots to the army. Regardless of where he wants to appear to be putting the emphasis while reporting this matter, Connolly is in fact simply saying that his men did not wear the boots but ate them. The drawbacks his utterance has on the previous discourse are immense - it simply fills in the information gap by disclosing an event that is not only unpredictable but unimaginable to the Modernisation minister who was working on the penal code while the event was taking place. The revelation of the subject of the ellipsis after this development in the story thus contradicts the inferences drawn about it that were being

allowed by Connolly and by the narrator behind him, and reached by Basil and the narratee. It, moreover, makes them look inadequate and inappropriate in retrospect evoking all the predictions and warnings made by Connolly and asserting Basil's ignorance in these matters. The irony resulting from the ellipsis thus operates in connection with two intertextual sources - but in both cases it has the effect of undermining Basil's unavailing attempts at modernising the country and reinforcing the image of Connolly as the more knowledgeable and competent leader.

The first intertext which is affected by Connolly's utterance is the immediate previous discourse which includes Basil's interpretations of the events around him as portrayed in his questions and assertions. They are to be interpreted echoically, that is, as occurring in the narrator's discourse in order to implicitly comment on their utterer's perspective on the situation. Connolly's echoic responses are equally to be re-interpreted as conveying a disapproving ironic attitude rather than an approving humble one. He, for instance, converts what is a normal metaphorical use of the expression "went down" for the civilised European into a literal physical use of it. This substitution can reflect a better knowledge of the behaviour and attitude of the people he is dealing with - a knowledge he willingly reasserts by disclosing the details of the incident and correcting the minister's false conclusions and pretentious earlier comments. The irony simply reinforces the superfluity of the whole enterprise, predictable and apparent to all except the English minister. It might be worth noting that for Stewart (1978: 77-81), this kind of inversion of the metaphorical to the literal is considered one form of creating nonsense - an allegory perhaps of what the narrative is about.

The other intertext which this situation serves to recall consists of all the previous discourse of the novel which depicts Basil and his friend, the native emperor as consolidating their efforts in order to inculcate the "civilised" habits and ways of life into the native people. The boots incident is yet another instance of the contradictory outcomes to their plans. In the text, it further ridicules these two people's opinions and

behaviours and turns them into the butt of the irony of the narrator as well as that of various characters who share a different perception of the situation.

To sum up, then, as these two examples demonstrate, one possible function of the use of ellipsis is to generate irony. The irony, on the other hand, can be local, that is only directed against the particular character or event considered at that precise point in the narrative. It can be at work on a larger scale as well, that is, touching on other aspects of the narrative like its theme or the reliability of its narrator for instance.

### 3.1.2. Descriptive Pause: "A Painful Case" and "Eugénie Grandet"

Like ellipsis, pause can serve to help with characterisation or to reinforce a certain theme in narrative. It can be used to reveal matters or characters in an ironic manner. At the beginning of Joyce's "A Painful Case," for instance, the description of Duffy's house creates an idea of the kind of person he is. It reflects his state of mind as well as his way of life. The description of his books is in an ironic tone that underlines his pseudo-intellectuality.

The books on the white wooden shelves were arranged from below upwards according to bulk. A complete Wordsworth stood at one end of the lowest shelf and a copy of the Maynooth Catechism, sewn into the cloth cover of a notebook, stood at one end of the top shelf.

The description silently criticises Duffy's character. It ironically singles out his idiosyncratic opinions and perspectives on simple as well as intellectual matters. Hence, the books are not arranged alphabetically or according to subject but according to size to satisfy their owner's distaste for disorder ("Mr Duffy abhorred anything that betokened physical or mental disorder"). Moreover, Wordsworth's coming at the bottom of his hierarchy while the catechism is the one he keeps at the top can be perceived as metaphorically portraying his intellectual and social tendencies. The depiction of the lid of the desk comes to question these inclinations further.

On lifting the lid of the desk a faint fragrance escaped - the fragrance of new cedarwood pencils or of a bottle of gum or of an over-ripe apple which might have been left there and forgotten.

The obviously under-used material for writing and the over-ripe apple that testify this are described to indicate Duffy's lack of creativity and stagnating character,

a trait to be reiterated and reinforced in the rest of the story (detached, adventureless, self-effaced personality, referring to himself in the third person in his diary). Perceived within the narrator's discourse these descriptive pauses are thus used to indirectly comment on the character to whom they are related. They depict his opinions in an indirect manner, which in turn, are to be perceived echoically and critically in line with the depiction of his character in the rest of the story as a whole.

Descriptive pause is equally used ironically by Pope, in the example already quoted in Ch. III above, to describe a facet of Belinda's character. He describes the contents of her dressing table thus:

Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-Doux.

The bibles juxtaposed in the description with accessories are reduced to the state of the latter. The incongruity seems to create a parallelism in the evaluation of the objects and suggest that the bibles are no more than accessories serving to maintain appearances on reading material competing with perhaps a profane and perhaps more enjoyable one (billet-doux). Their citation with the woman's accessories reduces them to the level of the latter and can be used to reflect the way the character views them as well. The character's personality as viewed by the poet can perhaps already be sought from this simple silent ironical comment.

Realistic writing, where pause is heavily used to create the impression of immediacy, accuracy, true-to-life rendering etc., has been criticised by contemporary writers. The contradictory boring effect that can result from the use of pause has been parodied for instance by Donald Barthelme in his "Eugénie Grandet." The word "butter" mentioned in one of the paragraphs of the story is picked up and repeated uninterruptedly 113 times to create the nineteen-line paragraph that follows its first mention. The choice of topic for the pause (butter), the amount of space given to it (about five times longer than the interaction in which it is first mentioned), and the apparent pointlessness of the pause (since it adds nothing new about the story or about itself) are all features of the pause that Barthelme creates in order to undermine Balzac's use of the technique.

Because it is juxtaposed with the character's dialogue, the paragraph could also be interpreted as a report of a long argument between Eugénie and her father about butter. This would allow its treatment as scene. Since the point about talking too much to say nothing and the insistence on the triviality of the topic still stand, the convention of scene, also considered a truthful means to depict reality in realist writing, becomes the target of the ironist. Other targets can be looked for in Eugénie's father, Eugénie herself, and the class to which they belong. It can be argued that their concerns, ideas and ways of dealing with problems are the butt of the narrator's irony.

In the same short story, Barthelme can be seen to use another way to criticise descriptive pause. He provides a visual representation of a hand that he attributes to Eugénie after mentioning in the paragraph that precedes it that her hand has been asked for. One interpretation of the presence of the picture would be that it draws attention to the precision and accuracy the narrator (in the Balzac story) pursues in providing a clear picture of the situation. The digression consisting in the pause is ridiculed through the awkward drawing of the hand which could be taken as a literal inversion of the dead metaphor (marriage). Again as in the boots example, this inversion can be perceived, following Stewart (1978), as generating a comic effect that verges on nonsense.

### 3.2. Summary, Scene and Stretch

Dialogue has conventionally been considered the ideal form of scene given that it involves rendering language as it is (i.e., in language). In this form of narration, the identity of the text-duration and story-duration comes to its closest. Scene, however, because it is mostly required to provide a certain amount of information without direct interference from the narrator, can be seen to include recounting an event in detail following those conditions. The slogan "Dramatise, dramatise" can be applied to describe the purposes for which this technique is used; the emphasis on "showing" can thus be claimed within the confines of scene.

Unlike pause and ellipsis, scene can constitute a whole narrative. Summary and stretch are, likewise, potentially capable of sustaining a narrative entirely: summary with its relatively short accounts of events in discourse and stretch with its relative

prolongation of them. As Prince (1982) maintains, the "alternation" of scene and summary characterises narrative in general and narrative fiction in particular. He adds that

Should a novelist have to describe certain events necessary to the understanding and appreciation of his novel but not - for whatever reasons - worth dwelling upon, he uses summary. On the contrary, he uses scene when his novel requires specific detailing of the actions, feelings and thoughts of the characters. Indeed, the development of the novel form can partially be described in terms of its greater use of scene than the various narrative forms - epic, romance, tale - preceding it.

(1982: 58)

Given these properties, these techniques become liable for use in situations where their effect is not to highlight or ignore a certain event alone, but, also, to treat it in a humorous or ironic manner. The mismatch between the story-duration and its presentation in discourse is thus a result of a discrepancy within what is recounted or from a sense of inappropriacy of choice. An event that is normally expected to be treated in a scene or stretch, for instance, and is instead simply summarised is likely to be considered as inappropriately used or to be scrutinised for further effects. The alternation between scene and summary can be effective when the one can be used as a background on which the other dwells and from which it derives its effectiveness. The juxtaposition of one technique with the other can be a source of irony, as will be demonstrated next.

### 3.2.1. Summary: *Small World*

The clash that results from the sudden change of speed, that is in the passage from scene to the faster summary is extremely significant. It normally adequately reflects the narrator's judgement of what is worth telling in detail and what is of no major consequence. This clash and sequence can however generate different effects of the ironic or humorous type as they are in fact characteristic of the structure of a lot of jokes or humorous stories. While the scene or the stretch takes the main bulk of the story, the summary operates as the punchline that carries the jest of the story. This, in a way, conveys the evaluation or point of the story since it is supposed to legitimise the fact of subjecting the addressee to the details of the previous part (scene or stretch).

An example of scene working as a background for an ironic summary can be found in David Lodge's *Small World*, Part III, Chapter 1. Robin Dempsey, a lecturer with a few obsessions, "talks" to Eliza, the computer-psychologist at the Computer Centre at his University.

"NOBODY SEEMS TO LIKE ME," Robin Dempsey types.

"WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT ?" replies Eliza.

"IN THE STAFF CANTEEN I WATCH MY COLLEAGUES COMING TOWARDS MY TABLE WITH THEIR TRAYS AND THEN VEERING AWAY WHEN THEY RECOGNIZE ME."

"WHY DO YOU THINK THEY DO THAT ?"

"BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK TO ME."

"WHY DO YOU THINK THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU ?"

"BECAUSE THEY'RE AFRAID I WILL TALK TO THEM ABOUT MY RESEARCH AND THEY CAN'T STAND THAT BECAUSE I DO MORE RESEARCH THAN THE REST OF THEM PUT TOGETHER."

"TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH."

Robin Dempsey types for an hour without stopping.

Taking into account the literary allusion to Eliza Doolittle and that Dempsey is in fact taking the interview seriously forgetting that the virtue of the computer resides paradoxically in its being programmed to ask questions indefinitely, an unusual setting is created for the scene. In the "dialogue," or scene, Dempsey explains what he thinks his problem with his colleagues is, starting with what might be considered a cliché of a child's complaint. The summary which describes what happens in the following hour, however, while confirming that his research is indeed the source of his problem reveals that that is not because it makes his colleagues jealous, as he believes, but rather because it bores them. His unawareness of the real problem is echoed in the sharp juxtaposition which opposes the scene to the summary. The conciseness of the summary describing a lengthy process in which the character takes a turn that lasts an hour is set against the preceding more balanced question/answer scene. Still mistaking the importance of his research and not his lengthy elaborations on it as the source of his trouble, he engages in exactly the same behaviour as soon as he is invited to speak about it by the computer.

The narrator's choice of the summary instead of continuing with the scene emphasises the lack of awareness, the egocentrism and naivety of the character when it comes to this matter. It also lends it a value equivalent to the punch line in a joke where

the preceding discourse comes as a preparation for its occurrence. The readers do not need to be bored with a complete report of what Dempsey has typed. It is enough to say that he has "typed for an hour without stopping" to turn him into the butt of irony. The use of the summary suggests that the narrator does not judge it worthy of a detailed report (Scene). The use of the verb "typed" further suggests the mechanical activity in which the character indulges and deprives it of any indication of quality or reportable content. The use of the phrase "without stopping" emphasises this, moreover, as it cannot be accepted as a mere neutral description of the activity. It is used instead to reflect an evaluation on the part of the narrator as it presupposes the existence of a typing "norm," as it were, according to which people usually stop typing every now and then in order to think. A parallel is established between Dempsey's thoughtless, rehearsed, and mechanical typing and his talking about his research: in both cases, the interlocutor (whether it is the computer or the colleagues) is silenced for a long time by a topic that is not worth reporting - this again implies that the activity takes priority over its contents. The undermining property of the summary is thus in full operation in this passage - especially that it is placed right after a scene and comes to punctuate the end of the section. One possible implicature is that no more needs or can be said as it were: the floor is monopolised by Dempsey who is not willing to give it away.

His zeal to communicate with a machine that can only ask the kind of question that it had been programmed to ask and his obsession with it because it seems to be the only "being" that is ready to listen to him indefinitely (the narrator describes the unusual hours at which he stays in the Computer Centre), his forgetting that it is only a machine, his blindness to the incongruity in his behaviour and his interpretation of the cause of his trouble in terms that betray that he is both self-centred and short-sighted etc., are all factors which are obvious from the narrator's point of view as it is reflected in his discourse. It is this choice of the summary technique which places the character in an ironic light and therefore betrays the narrator's attitude to the character and his evaluation of his behaviour.

### 3.2.2. Scene: *The Sound and The Fury* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

The use of scene in the form of dialogue can generate irony against one or several participants. Because it is embedded in the narrator's or the implied author's discourse, dialogue obviously consists of second-degree interpretation utterances. These utterances are liable to turn into echoic ones given that their report might not be purely informative about what they contain but might also be indicative of the purpose for which they are quoted and therefore possibly their reporter's attitude towards them.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Jason reports a few incidents which reflect his state of mind and his attitude towards things and people. An overt summary of his character would have spoilt the subtlety with which he is depicted in the narrative.

"I aint gwine let him [beat you]," Dilsey says, "Don't you worry, honey." Then the belt came out and I jerked loose and flung her away. She stumbled into the table. She was so old she couldn't do anymore than move hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones can't tote off. She came hobbling between us, trying to hold me again. "Hit me, den," she says, "ef nothin else but hitting somebody wont do you. Hit me," she says. "You think I won't?" I says...

"Let him [the farmer] make a big crop and it wont be worth picking; let him make a small crop and he wont have enough to gin. And what for? so a bunch of damn eastern jews, I'm not talking about men of the jewish religion," I says, "I've known some jews that were fine citizens. You might be one yourself," I says. "No," he says, "I'm American." "No offense," I says. I have nothing against jews as an individual," I says. "It is just the race."

By presenting the episodes without interfering directly in his own voice, the narrator leaves the character to speak his own faults. The direct speech is a second degree interpretation in Sperber and Wilson's parlance, and is embedded in the narrative. It is also of an echoic nature: the discrepancies in Jason's speech have not been recounted by accident. The choice of direct speech depicts more vividly Jason's stand point by depicting his idiolect (e.g. pronunciation, loaded). The narrator's choice of reporting directly points silently towards his bias against what he is pretending to withdraw his voice from. Jason's language betrays his perception of the matters like respect for the elderly, attitude to children, and race. The conflict of

Jason's speech with values and norms of behaviour standardly acknowledged serves to inculcate him. The moral and social weaknesses he exhibits fall under practices readily and commonly identifiable and pejoratively designated as bigotry, racism, child abuse, intolerance etc. What he says and believes becomes echoic in the context of the narrator's discourse where it attracts attention to the opinions it portrays and is consequently turned against him. Jason thus ends up the butt of irony because of his own language.

Besides contributing to characterisation, scene, whether occurring in the form of dialogue or of a detailed ironic account of an event that could have been summed up in a sentence, can also serve to reinforce a certain theme in narrative. The section cited above from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the character's blood crosses the town to alert his mother to his murder is an illustration of this kind of use. The passage will be quoted whole, despite its lengthiness, to show the near symmetry it achieves in the double narration of the incredible event and the amount of effort the narrator has judged necessary to invest in its rendering.

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendia house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlour, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on into the other living-room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.

"Holy Mother of God !" Ursula shouted.

She followed the thread of blood back along its course, and in search of its origin she went through the pantry, along the begonia porch where Aureliano José was chanting that three plus three is six and six plus three is nine, and she crossed the dining-room and the living-rooms and followed straight down the street, and she turned first to the right and then to the left to the Street of Turks, forgetting that she was still wearing her baking apron and her house slippers, and she came out on to the square and went into the door of a house where she had never been, and she pushed open the bedroom door and was almost suffocated by the smell of burned gunpowder, and she found José Arcadio lying face down on top of the leggings he had just taken off, and she saw the starting point of the thread of blood that had already stopped flowing out of his right ear. They found no wound on his body nor could they locate the weapon ...

Although unbelievable in appearance, the incident is recounted in minute detail by the omniscient narrator who, as pointed out above in 3.1.1., seems to gather his information from the inhabitants of the town, that is from a source that reflects a limited point of view and displays characteristics of orality. The description falls in line with a number of supernatural events that characterise life in this narrative. It reflects the way information about the incident must have been exchanged and propagated among the puzzled townspeople. It might be argued furthermore that this passage is a form of parody of the sub-genre of death stories where death announcement occupies a considerable proportion of the bulk of the narrative. Attention to the most insignificant details becomes a necessity for the narrator. Remembrance of the exact sequence of events and the exact words of the people involved are granted an importance that would be judged unnecessary in the narration of other narrative genres (or sub-genres). The act of narration of the events becomes an end in itself - worthy of the addressee's attention for the details it narrates. The passage is thus used echoically in this way where the intertext evoked is the genre of story telling itself. The choice of a supernatural event might also add another dimension to the ridiculing effect intended by emphasising the contrast between the (apparently) earnest manner in which it is narrated and the hard to believe quality which characterises it.

Hence, Ursula's exclamation sounds more like an over-repeated sentence memorised and fossilised within the structure of the micro-narrative. It punctuates the beginning of the anti-climax where the character is led towards the discovery of her son's body. The small details like the exact figures that Aureliano José is repeating, the number of eggs Ursula is about to break, her getting into a house in which she has never been before etc. might be taken to indicate Ursula's perception of them and possibly her later recounting of or reflections upon them. The extraordinariness of the death and that of the autonomous blood stream seem to make the latter deserve the whole page of description devoted to it by the narrator. Since Ursula is the only character in the micro-narrative, it is her perception of things, reflections and words that are going to be quoted (and gradually misquoted and exaggerated) every time the story

of her son's death is discussed. The narrative account seems to echo the resulting reconstruction of the incident through this process of repetition and fictionalisation - and perhaps can be seen as a comment on narration in general. The irony is not only directed against the possible originators of the reconstruction but also against the prevalent thematic feature of exaggeration and supernatural intervention nurtured by the people, on the one hand, and the sub-genre of death narratives, on the other. The effects achieved by scene hence could not have been substituted for by any other faster or slower account. The precision and detail of scene allow events or speech to be reported in the most accurate way. Scene therefore exposes the opinions and stances it portrays vividly and can subject them to possible unmediated criticism - that is, it allows them to comment on themselves by their very presence in the narrator's discourse.

### 3.2.3. Stretch: *Tristram Shandy*

Stretch involves the distortion of an event through its narration in an over detailed way. What could be reported by one verb gets broken into its component actions in the rendering. This technique seems to lend itself easily to ironic use because of this tangible capacity for distortion of story duration. This can be seen at work in the variety of ways which Tristram Shandy adopts in his attempt to render an exact description of the posture of Corporal Trim as he gets ready to read the sermon in Vol. 2, Ch. 17. The importance granted to Trim's posture mainly springs from the perfection with which it is performed - a perfection worthy of practised orators and most surprising in a Corporal "who knew not so much as an acute angle from an obtuse one." The narrator stops his account of the events and delays his report of the sermon reading that has seemed to attract the company's interest and their enthusiasm in order to give a descriptive appraisal over almost two pages of the posture adopted in a sometimes repetitive way.

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon; - which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence ...

The necessity of this precise angle of 85 degrees and a half to a mathematical exactness, - does it not shew us, by the way, - how the arts and sciences mutually befriend each other? ...

He stood, - for I repeat it, to take the picture of him in at one view, with his body swayed, and somewhat bent forwards, - his right leg firm under him, sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight ...

Corporal Trim's eyes and the muscles of his face were in full harmony with the other parts of him ...

All this is further summarised in the following sentence:

- but so he stood before my father, my uncle Toby, and Dr Slop, - so swayed his body, so contrasted his limbs, and with such an oratorical sweep throughout the whole figure; ...

The proclaimed aim of this exaggerated description is to dispel the reader's possible wrong impression of the Corporal's performance. The result, however, is a humorous caricature especially if one realises that it takes the Corporal a long time to read further than the first sentence of the sermon as he is interrupted again and again by his audience.

One possible implicature of this stretch is that Tristram is a connoisseur in oratory, capable of evaluation and appreciation of excellence even in the most unexpected people. The other members of the company, however, seem to be more interested in the contents of the sermon and even criticise him for adopting the wrong intonation ("Certainly, Trim, quoth my father, interrupting him, you give that sentence a very improper accent.").

The precision with which the posture is described, moreover, verges on the ridiculous as it reflects the studied exactitude of the performance. This might be taken to reflect the degree of affectation of which Trim is capable as he tries to attract the attention of the gentlemen he is entertaining. This can be backed up by the narrator's open comment in Ch. 15 concerning the Corporal's eagerness for performing: "for Trim, you must know, loved to hear himself read almost as well as talk." The stretch thus domesticated in order to describe the transformation in Trim's composure puts him in a light that illustrates the painstaking efforts he spends to achieve a perfect imitation of the role he assigns to himself. The excessive physical detail constituting the stretch (Ch.17) dispels the charm that it might have effected on the audience and instead emphasises the ridiculous nature of the mechanisms to which it is reduced:

- for consider, it had one-eighth part of his body to bear up; - so that in this case the position of the leg is determined, - because the foot could be no further advanced, or the knee more bent, than what would allow him mechanically, to receive an eighth part of his whole weight under it, - and to carry it too.

Tristram ends this description of Trim's posture by pointing out its usefulness and practicality to the readers especially painters and orators among them. He also emphasises his position as a connoisseur while implying that the readers must also have been involved in working out, perhaps trying it themselves, how Trim is standing:

This I recommend to painters: - need I add, - to orators? - I think not, for unless they practise it, - they must fall upon their noses.

#### 4. Frequency

Frequency corresponds to the relation between the number of times an event takes place in story and the number of times it is recounted in text. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983) points out, the notion of repetition is particularly relevant in the consideration of this technique. The events presented in narrative can be summarised in several ways that can involve presenting certain features of these events and disregarding others. In Rimmon-Kenan's terms,

repetition is a mental construct attained by an elimination of the specific qualities of each occurrence and a preservation of only those qualities which it shares with similar occurrences. Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning.

(1983: 56-57)

Five types of frequency relations have been identified in narrative fiction:

Iterative: telling once what happened n times

Repetitive: telling n times what happened once

Singulative: telling once/n times what happened once/n times

Other: telling m times what happened n times (m distinct from 1, 0, and n).

Compressing several similar events together through the selection and presentation of the features they have in common alone seems sometimes a necessary decision a narrator has to make to proceed with the rest of a given story. These frequency relations will be considered for their potential for irony in what follows.

#### 4.1. Singulative Narration and Iterative Narration: *Don Quixote*

A text cannot tolerate a singulative narration, which is considered the most common form of narration, if the event is of no consequence to the development of the story. An iterative narration is then preferred in this case. In Sancho Panza's attempt to narrate the fisherman's transportation of the three hundred goats across a river in a boat that can only carry one at a time, for instance, as pointed out by Rimmon-Kenan (1983), when he undertakes to report every trip separately it becomes clear that his simplicity and inappropriate zeal for accuracy and truthfulness is being ridiculed. His lack of narrating skills prevents him from realising the inappropriacy of singulative narration to his story. This awkwardness is soon put to an end by Don Quixote who perceives the non consequential character of the event(s) narrated and asks him to assume that all the goats are across and to proceed with the narration. Irony in this case results from an extensive misapplication of the technique and a failure to recognise the necessity of an alternative resulting from the inexperience of the narrator.

#### 4.2. Repetitive Narration: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and "Nothing Has Changed"

Repetitive narration, on the other hand, can be used effectively for characterisation and for thematic reinforcement. It can be ironically used to undermine both characters or situations and whole narratives. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the time factor is the centre around which the whole narrative seems to revolve; repetitive narration is a rule. An exchange between the founder of the whole family in the narrative, José Arcadio Buendia, and his son at the beginning of the story underlines clearly this element of repetition which is to a great extent responsible for undermining and destroying the notions of future and hope.

José Arcadio Buendia conversed with Prudencio Aguilar until dawn. A few hours later, worn out by the vigil, he went into Aureliano's workshop and asked him: "What day is today?" Aureliano told him that it was Tuesday. "I was thinking the same thing," José Arcadio Buendia said, "but suddenly I realized that it's still Monday, like yesterday. Look at the sky, look at the walls, look at the begonias. Today is Monday too." Used to his manias, Aureliano paid no attention to him. On the next day, Wednesday, José Arcadio Buendia went back to the workshop. "This is a disaster," he said.

"Look at the air, listen to the buzzing of the sun, the same as yesterday and the day before. Today is Monday too."

Events and utterances seem to repeat themselves among the members of the successive generations of the family. The characters are continuously reproduced not only through the repetition of names but also the repetition of personality traits. They are all predestined to solitary lives. They unconsciously keep alive the family trait that singles its members out right through from the time of their creation to the time of their extinction. The characters keep struggling in a way or another against time, exhausting their mental capacities on repetitive actions that help them avoid idleness and postpone their ends. In the same way that Colonel Aureliano Buendia makes his gold fishes only to melt them and remake them again, Amaranta unweaves her shroud every time it is about to be finished in order to weave it again. Most of the male members of the family have to go through the apprenticeship in the laboratory and the reading of the parchments written by Melquiades the gypsy and cherished by their ancestor. The women in the family also recall each other with their skills. The narrator does not refrain from openly stating the analogies that bind them through the generations. The same conversation that Ursula engages in with her son is repeated more than half a century later with her great-grand son.

José Arcadio Segundo was still reading over the parchments. The only thing visible in the intricate tangle of hair was the teeth striped with green slime and his motionless eyes. When he recognised his great-grandmother's voice he turned his head towards the door, tried to smile, and without knowing it repeated an old phrase of Ursula's.

"What did you expect?" he murmured. "Time passes."

"That's how it goes," Ursula said, "but not so much."

When she said it she realized that she was giving the same reply that Colonel Aureliano Buendia had given in his death cell, and once again she shuddered with the evidence that time was not passing, as she had just admitted, but that it was turning in a circle. But even then she did not give resignation a chance. She scolded José Arcadio Segundo as if he were a child ...

Hence José Arcadio Segundo reads the unintelligible parchments for years again and again in the same way that his ancestors have done, knowing that they can only be deciphered one hundred years after their composition. Ursula, in a last attempt to save the house from destruction is conducted towards her buried-alive great-grand son to rehearse with him assertions whose absurdity she has discovered long before.

The people's unawareness of the way their destinies are turning allows them to carry on believing in the linearity and progress in time. They are made to carry on ironically with their hopes and habits, unawares. Ursula's recognition of this fact does not discourage her, however, from trying to pick up the remains of her house. Her actions can also be seen ironically in the long run since the house is destined to collapse not only because of the insects attacking it but also because of the hurricane that destroys it and the last of Ursula's descendants together. It can thus be argued that the close resemblance between the events and the people in the narrative can allow its narration to be considered of the repetitive kind. The irony in the various characters' means to tackle time in their ignorance or ignoring of the pointless character of their efforts is to a great extent created by this repetitive activity.

It might, furthermore, be argued that irony functions at another level in the repetition of these events through an intertextual reference to Greek mythology. Amaranta's weaving and unweaving of the shroud recalls Penelope's parallel weaving and unweaving of the tapestry in the *Odyssey*. Perhaps the main difference lies in the fact that while Penelope is trying to gain time waiting for the return of her husband in which she believes, Amaranta is not waiting for anybody but only for her life to pass - or perhaps for her death to come. Both, however, seem to have something in common and that is their gaining time by delaying the completion of their activities through the undoing of what they have just finished doing. Jankélévitch (1964: 58) perceives a significant parallel between the activity of Penelope and the constructive and destructive work of irony itself. He points out that "L'ironie fait et défait sans cesse sa tapisserie de Pénélope, son ouvrage perpétuellement naissant ..." This parallel is enlightening in the context of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* where the themes of repetition, doing and undoing are particularly acutely treated through the behaviour of the characters over the generations. To treat their activities as the enactment of irony itself is perhaps revelatory for the interpretation of the narrative as a whole as it solves the mystery governing the apparently pointless activities of the characters. The emphasis on the

activity itself seems to govern irony in the same way it governs the weaving and the silver making. As Jankélévitch eloquently observes

L'ironie n'accepte d'être ni pétrifiée dans le marbre ni médusée dans le désœuvrement du souci: mais elle dépanne ce désœuvrement par une projection qui s'accomplit dans l'oeuvre, tandis qu'elle anime l'oeuvre par l'opération. Cette oeuvre contestée, volatilisée, ironisée, cet ouvrage - fantôme en un mot que chaque soir vient mettre en question, c'est la trame pénopéenne de l'ironie; chaque soir, lorsque les prétendants ont le dos tourné, la rusée vient sur les pointes des pieds arracher les fils de la toile arachéenne et, en détissant l'ouvrage qu'elle a tissé, remettre en marche l'opération.

(1964: 60-61)

As pointed out above, repetitive narration can also affect the base of the whole of a narrative. In the technique known as *mise en abyme*, the narrator tells a story (at least) twice. The diegetic part of the narrative is analogically reconstructed at the hypodiegetic level in the fashion of a mirror image. Irony can be one effect of this reduplication where one part can be used to comment on the other.

In Colin Thubron's "Nothing Has Changed" published in *Firebird 4, New Writing from Britain and Ireland* (1985), the narrator talks about the importance of suffering for writers like himself. Experiences in his profession are supposed to be felt with "an embarrassing excess of sensibility" and utilised afterwards. The narrator illustrates his point with reference to the story of a woman he used to "love" in his youth who has married and left the country and whom he went to visit in hospital after her return for surgery. However, the story itself and another episode taking place in the garden of the woman's former house is recounted twice in the space of seven pages. In the first narration, the elaboration on the introduction, the narrator tells things the way he likes to think they are or should be. He fills it with <sup>clichés,</sup> makes it predictable and dresses himself in the role of an abandoned, romantic loving youth transformed into a still loving sensitive but nostalgia-struck adult in search of a new start. As the narrator visits his former girlfriend's garden and starts to think that nothing has changed, his attention is drawn to the fact that the beech tree that he has always written into his version of the setting has never and could never have existed. He then states that

That's the trouble with us writers. We write these fictions into our lives for our protection. (The imaginative person, after all, can believe anything.) But only now am I shocked by the gathering of the memory, the lie. All these years. In place of the beech there is only a circle of cold sky. This is unaltered.

So I will try to find the truth again before it goes.

Accordingly, he gives another version of the garden and hospital episodes that is more or less analogous to the previous account in terms of events. The difference, however, which is a radical one, lies in the fact that the characters end up playing different roles. The narrator turns out to be a person incapable of loving but still keeping up the pretence in his visit to the woman. She, on the other hand, while deciding to marry someone else after accusing him of faking his emotions, proves to be still attached to him. The second version of the story is the one that the narrator refuses to admit for a long time. His decision to "try and see her again in the hospital, as she really was," reveals the undistorted side of things (e.g. the woman's hair is prematurely grey auburn, she is no longer beautiful that is if she ever was etc.). The fragments of conversation mentioned in the first version portraying the sense of rapport linking the narrator to the woman, are recontextualised so that their meaning also has changed. The utterance "I always wanted your children," for instance, is first mentioned as part of the scene the narrator writes in his imagination and that involves "stage directions" for the woman and for himself. The shift into the pronoun "you" instead of the original "she" indicates the dramatic element of the scene and its non-factuality. The element of identification springing from the immediacy and rapport created by the use of "you" proves to be a mere illusion. It all takes place in his mind coloured by his perception of things or possibly because of his writer's instinctive capacity for distortion .

The second version of the utterance, however, reinforced with a parenthetical "Yes, she did say that" is devoid of any prescribed emotional reactions on his part to garnish and embellish its occurrence. It is not elicited by his own unspoken reflections over his deep sorrow for the woman's and his own sake but is simply a revelation that comes after a moment of silence on his part. The woman's deep grief is met by mere sympathy and coldness. The irony can be demonstrated by a juxtaposition of

equivalent events from the two clashing and mutually corrective versions of the paragraph describing the hospital meeting.

1. *Not only your children, but mine (because after all these years I still love you, I couldn't marry anyone else).*

2. I look down at her and try to imagine what that sterility is like. Children, in reality, mean nothing to me: I can't envisage my own.

1. *You think my grimace of sorrow is only for you, of course, but it's for me too, and for our unborn, our never-to-be-born sons and daughters.*

2. I can't find anything to say. It is only her own pain that we are momentarily sharing.

1. *Your whole body is shaking in my hands.*

2. Then she starts to shake, from deep inside, like the tremors of a motor stopping.

1. *Suddenly, realizing, you twist your head and kiss my fingers.*

2. She closes her eyes, as if to blot out the reality of my expression, and turns her head to kiss my fingers.

1. *I see my tears falling on to the sheet.*

2. I see her tears falling on to the sheet.

Thus recontextualised, the events and utterances generate a different view of the narrator and his relationship with the woman. The near identical version of the events supplied by the narrator's imagination is commented upon by their later reconstruction. The title "Nothing Has Changed" is an ironic description of the narrator's state of mind: the way he has rebuilt things to suit his fancy for such a long time, his detached self-centered immature personality, recognised as such by the woman in the garden fourteen years before ("You don't really feel or need anything or anyone, do you?" She glances bitterly at the sky. "Do you?").

With the first part of the story as a distorted version of the second, coloured by the narrator's modifications of it to fit the script he creates for it, the second version comes as a correcting comment on the first. A moment in which the narrator decides to search for the truth in the events he has stored for a long time. He thus proceeds to reject the elements supplied by his imagination and ends up with an inverted situation to the way he has wanted things to have happened. The narrator who seems to have started off with a criticism of the writing profession and its reliance on "buried unhappiness," with the story as an illustration of it, ends up criticising the fictional

distorting elements that writers resort to in their reconstruction of experience. He provides instead a more sober, recontextualised version that destroys the idealistic image the narrator creates of himself and the clichéd tone granted to the whole story. He in fact puts it in an ironic light by juxtaposing its clichéd romantic dramaticality with the bitter emotional inadequacy from which the awkwardness of the situation emanates. By narrating the events twice, the narrator ironically undoes the meaning of the one by correcting it with the factuality and bleakness of the other. The second narration thus silently provides the moral of the short story by ironically commenting on the first narration. The source of the original (experience) is being echoed ironically.

### **5. Summary**

An attempt to argue for the importance of the exploitation of temporal organisation for the generation of irony in narrative fiction has been sketched out in this chapter. The potential for irony, it has been argued, springs from the distinction made between story and discourse. Irony can be directed against characters, situations as well as the conventions of writing themselves - in which case it is better termed romantic irony. Its use can help with the characterisation and/or reinforce certain themes in a particular narrative while guiding the reader's response through the narrator's manipulation of the techniques available to this discourse. The next chapter will consider the potential for irony in the manipulation of the categories of focalisation and narration, and the different modes of speech and thought presentation.

## CHAPTER VII

### Irony and Focalisation and/vs. Narration and The Modes of Speech and Thought Presentation

#### 1. Focalisation and/vs. Narration and Irony

The distinction between focalisation and narration, mood and voice, in narrative was first posited by Genette (1972). The confusion between perspective and narration present in former treatments of the area under the heading of point of view has been clarified. Disentangled from each other these activities can be seen as related, respectively, to the notion of information selection through the agent "who sees," and the verbalisation of that information by the agent "who speaks." Distinguishing between the two aspects of narrative allows for their identification as well as the perception of the relations linking them. The significance and effects depending on the correspondence or distance between the two can be appreciated only once the fundamental distinction between focalisation and narration is established. This division has been amended by Genette in his *Nouveau Discours du Récit* (1983: 43) where he attempts to dispel the visual impact of the formulation of focalisation as "who sees" by replacing it with the more general "who perceives." He, however, dismisses the very symmetry between the questions as "factitious" and explains that

la voix du narrateur est bien toujours donnée comme celle d'une personne, fût-elle anonyme, mais la position focale, quand il y en a une, n'est pas toujours identifiée à celle d'une personne: ainsi, me semble-t-il, en focalisation externe. Peut-être vaudrait-il donc mieux se demander, de manière plus neutre, *où est le foyer de perception ?* - ce foyer pouvant ou non ... s'incarner en un personnage.

(1983: 43)

This "foyer de perception" or "centre of focalisation" is thus the filter through which the events of the story are presented in the text by the narrator. It does not have to be centred on a particular person. Three main types of focalisation have been identified: unrestricted, internal and external. When no restriction is present on what a

narrator describes, the focalisation adopted is *unrestricted*. According to Genette (1983: 49), this perspective traditionally known as omniscient or Godlike point of view is very close to the absence of a centre of focalisation altogether. He thus considers this non-focalisation, typical of classical narrative, equivalent to a *variable* type of focalisation with possible instances of *zero* focalisation. The characters or events in this type of focalisation can, as Norman Friedman points out,

be seen from any or all angles at will: from a godlike vantage point beyond time and place, from the center, the periphery or front. There is nothing to keep the author [the narrator] from choosing any of them, or from shifting from one to the other as often or rarely as he pleases.

(cited in Prince, 1982: 51)

The omniscience conventionally attributed to the narrators adopting this type of focalisation has been questioned for two reasons. First, as Prince (1982: 51) shows, although such narrators can tell "more than any or all the characters (could) know and tell at the time of the situation described," they often do not refrain from admitting directly or indirectly that their knowledge is not absolute. Prince gives an example of the direct type of confession of ignorance from *Notre Dâme de Paris* where the narrator says "I know not, be it remarked by the way, whether this is not the same cell..."

Second, according to Genette (1983: 49), the notion of omniscience itself is absurd in the context of fiction writing. He suggests replacing it with "complete information" which he judges more suitable to account for the fact that it is indeed the writer who creates everything, and consequently does not need to "know" anything.

The second type of focalisation is of the *internal* kind. Events and situations are presented merely through what one or several characters are capable of perceiving about themselves or others at the stage depicted in the story. The focalisation is *fixed* if the perspective adopted throughout is that of one character. It is *variable* if it is that of several characters presenting different sequences of events, and finally *multiple* if different perspectives are used to narrate one or more events more than once.

*External* focalisation, the third type, unlike internal focalisation, does not correspond with any character in the narrative. Only material actions and physical appearances are presented. Information about the thoughts or feelings of the characters is not directly divulged but has to be inferred merely from the outside descriptions. The so-called behaviourist or objective type of narrative, like "The Killers," for instance, relies on this principle. The narrator's knowledge in this case is usually surpassed by the knowledge that can be presented by one or several characters.

Although every one of these types of focalisation might be used exclusively in a given narrative, focalisation shifts are also frequent. Prince (1982: 52) cites the example of Sartre's *L'Age de raison* where a variable internal focalisation is adopted, and according to which, everything is supposed to be presented from the perspective of one of four characters. In one of the sections where one of these characters, Daniel, is the locus of the focalisation, a shift is noticeable that does not correspond to the type of focalisation adopted.

When he emerged he was carrying in his right hand St. Michael's sword of fire and in his left hand a box of candy for Mme Duffet.

The centre of focalisation is shifted to a point outside the character, where the image reflected is put in an ironic light. The box of candy in the left hand seems to counterbalance or question the existence of St. Michael's sword in the right. The implications that the sword has are ridiculed because of the situation in which it is depicted.

It is also noticeable that the choice of mood and the choice of voice are, to a great extent, interdependent. According to Genette (1983: 52), a heterodiegetic narrator does not need to explain where he or she got the information recounted from. His or her "omniscience" is part of the contract. Genette quotes a character from Prévert to illustrate this point: "Ce que je ne sais pas je le devine, et ce que je ne devine pas je l'invente." A homodiegetic narrator, on the other hand, needs to justify where and how he got the information provided about the other characters' thoughts or feelings or about situations from which he or she is absent.

When more information than expected from the focalisation type adopted is given, the contract between voice and mood is violated and *paralepsis* results. The example discussed above from Sartre and the case of Marcel in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, "perceiving" and not guessing Mlle Vinteuil's thoughts as discussed by Genette, can serve to illustrate *paralepsis*. *Paralipsis*, on the other hand, is a violation in the opposite direction: when too little information is allowed in relation to the adopted focalisation type. The homodiegetic narrator of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, for instance, commits a *paralipsis* by withholding the information that reveals that he is the murderer in the story he focalises.

By allowing the characters on whom the focalisation is centred to enjoy certain unusual faculties, a narrator can manage, as Prince (1982: 53) says, to "violate a law without violating it." Allowing them to eavesdrop and be in the right place at the right time etc. grants these characters the power to enrich a given narrative with information they would not be in a position to acquire or perceive otherwise.

Moreover, while adopting a particular type of focalisation, the narrator can exhibit different degrees of faithfulness and accuracy in the rendering of a particular story. A narrator can thus keep the focalisation chosen or break out from it to let his or her own perspective intervene in the text potentially allowing the communication of irony to occur. While a narration can produce a near translation or transposition of the non-verbal focalisation, mismatch between the two is possible, which again leaves room for irony.

### 1.1. Internal Focalisation

The narrator's verbalisation of Lok's perceptions in *The Inheritors*, using the internal type of focalisation can be considered of the near correspondence type.

The bushes twitched again. Lok steadied by the tree and gazed. A head and a chest faced him, half-hidden. There were white bone things behind the leaves and hair. The man had white bone things above the eyes and under the mouth so that his face was longer than a face should be. The man turned sideways in the bushes and looked at Lok along his shoulder. A stick rose upright and there was a lump of bone in the middle. Lok peered at the stick and the lump of bone and the small eyes in the bone things over the face. Suddenly Lok understood that the man was holding the stick out

to him but neither he nor Lok could reach across the river. He would have laughed if it were not for the echo of the screaming in his head. The stick began to grow shorter at both ends. Then it shot out to full length again.

The dead tree by Lok's ear acquired a voice.

"Clap!"

His ears twitched and he turned to the tree.

Hence, Lok fails to recognise the harmful function of the objects held at him by one of the "new people" because of his reliance on the restricted knowledge he has and which tells him that "the stick" and "the lump of bone in the middle," though aimed at him, cannot reach him across the river simply because neither he nor the man are able to throw it across the river. The logic underlying his reasoning is reflected in its restricted form in the language the narrator uses to describe the situation. All the situation and actions are described in accordance with Lok's perception and interpretation of them alone. For instance, the forehead and the chin of the man are seen as "white bone things above the eyes and under the mouth." They are presented as abnormalities following Lok's norms and knowledge of the world: "his [the other man's] face was longer than a face should be."

Information is also unfolded in the order in which Lok perceives it and is interpreted accordingly from his perspective. For him, the "dead tree" acquires "a voice." He has to turn round to see what has caused the "voice." Lok's lack of knowledge of the correlation between the "stick" and the voice in the tree, in fact the restricted nature of most of his interpretations of the "new people's" movements are conveyed faithfully by the narrator. He naively fails to perceive the danger and even gets ready to ridicule what he counts as the other man's ignorance. Because of the confidence he has in the superiority of his own knowledge about rivers and people, he does not see any sense in the man's behaviour and thus fails to recognise the threat ("He would have laughed ..."). He is, however, to be immediately acquainted with his shortcomings. As the situation is reversed, he becomes the object of the irony of the situation. Lok's belief in the ignorance of the other man and consequently his assumption of the superiority of his own knowledge is echoed ironically as soon as the arrow, missing him, reaches the tree right by *his* ear.

The extra-heterodiegetic narrator in this case thus manages to convey the ironic attitude without having to distort the internal focalisation or intervening with his own perceptions and interpretations of the events. The focaliser's opinions are undermined by unfelicitous events recounted further in the narrative. It is noticeable that the restricted perspectives of children and mentally retarded characters are usually successfully conveyed using this type of focalisation. The narrator here abstains from directly speaking in (and evaluating) the discourse and instead tries to portray the perceptions of the characters as closely as possible to the way they perceive them (e.g., Benjy and the game of golf in *The Sound and the Fury*).

Irony can also be produced when, unlike in the above example, it is the language of the character and not a description of the situation which is provided. The narrator's role is restricted to reporting the utterances which aim not only at informing about the way the character perceives things but also affecting the way he or she is perceived and judged by the readers. The passages (scenes) from Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, cited in Part B, section 3.2.2. of the previous chapter, where Jason tells about a few incidents in which he was involved, fall under this category. The extra-heterodiegetic narrator adopting an internal type of focalisation makes his character betray his racial intolerance, short-sightedness, violence etc. through the very words he uses to talk about himself and others. The reported speech seen in the larger context in which it is embedded (the narrator's) fulfils a further purpose than informing the reader about what Jason has said. It is echoically interpreted in the recontextualisation and is used to communicate an irony enhanced by the internal contradictions of the arguments and logic of the character portrayed.

Irony can equally be generated in the same manner in homodiegetic narratives, where an internal focalisation is adopted and where the narrator is auto-diegetic. The narrator thus recounts directly his own perceptions. No quotes are needed and yet irony emanates from the character-narrator's words. In Barthelme's "Chablis," for instance, a family man tells a two and a half-page story that verges on interior

monologue: while apparently only recounting some of his marital problems, he inculcates himself. The story starts thus:

My wife wants a dog. She already has a baby. The baby's almost two.  
My wife says that the baby wants the dog.

The first striking element in this narrative is the fact that the narrator treats the child and the dog on equal terms: they are cohyponyms in the two clauses in which they feature. The same value is therefore allocated to both ("already"). They are interchangeable: the wife can have the one or the other and since he has done his duty by letting her have the baby (after she "wore him down" about it), he sees no reason why she should still want to have a dog. The humour and irony arise from the reasoning that the narrator exhibits in arguing his case. The logic underlying the value system he unveils are taken for granted, as presupposed recognised universal facts. The narrator thus fails to recognise the incongruities and the strangeness of the matters he discusses. The discourse becomes echoic by virtue of its recontextualisation or embedding in the (implied) author's discourse. Since the narrator is also the vehicle of focalisation, the words the narrator uses are a close translation of his perception of the matter. The latter is ridiculed because of its very presentation in the form of a narrative.

### 1.2. Retrospective Narratives and Narrator Interference in Focalisation

The perceptions allowed by the modal choice can, however, be tainted by the perceptions of the narrator. The language the latter uses to render the experience or situation at hand would betray such interventions. The distinction between narration and focalisation recognised even in first person retrospective narratives can thus be subject to a mismatch that indicates interference from the narrating self in rendering the perceptions of the experiencing self. This phenomenon is commensurate with the notion of fictionalisation, discussed in Part A of Ch. VI, where it is believed that all redescription creates a form of fiction. As Waugh (1983: 123) points out in her discussion of Irving's *The World According to Garp*,

any history, any autobiography, is always a reconstruction, a fiction. The individual recounting his or her life is a different individual from the one who lived it, in a different world, with a different script.

Waugh further maintains that,

To write of "I" is to discover that the attempt to fix subjectivity in writing erases that subjectivity, constructs a new subject ... Merleau-Ponty [says] "I am never at one with myself." And "I" will never be. To write about oneself is implicitly to posit oneself as an "other," to narrate or historicise oneself as character in one's own discourse.

An instance of a narrative that self-consciously explores the relations between the "I" experiencer and the "I" narrator is *Daniel Martin* by John Fowles. Shifts between first and third person narrators punctuate the variations in distance between the narrator and the former version of himself. They demarcate, among other things, the proximity or distance of the perspective given of the actions from that of their present narrator. In a chapter called "In the Orchard of the Blessed," a heterodiegetic narrator reports the thoughts of Dan (elsewhere "I": a successful English film script writer living in the States) about the novel he wants to write and his self-conscious comments on the value of distance in writing.

He had already, without having admitted it to Jenny, borrowed her proposed name for his putative hero: ... the pin-found "Simon Wolfe." He didn't like the name and knew he would never use it, but this instinctive rejection gave it a useful kind of otherness, an objectivity, when it came to distinguishing between his actual self and a hypothetical fictional projection of himself.

This distance then as the practice in the novel shows is essential even in retrospective narratives. Potential for irony follows from this spatio-temporal distance causing the disparity in perspectives between the narrator (external focalisation) and his former self (internal focalisation). The knowledge that a narrator acquires between the time of his or her first perception of things and their narration results in the distance that transforms his or her present perception of them. Ambrose Bierce's "Oil of Dog" is a problematic instance of ironic discourse based on this kind of disparity between the vehicle of focalisation and the narrator. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether the perceptions and beliefs disclosed are those of the younger Boffer Bings ridiculed by the older narrator, or whether they are still held by the narrator, in which case *he* would be the object of the irony of the implied author. It is noticeable that, in this

example, even in the cases where difficulty in perception attribution is felt, irony would still be at play.

My name is Boffer Bings. I was born of honest parents in one of the humbler walks of life, my father being a manufacturer of dog-oil and my mother having a small studio in the shadow of the village church, where she disposed of unwelcome babes ... It had been my custom to throw the babes into the river which nature had thoughtfully provided for the purpose, but that night I did not dare to leave the oilery for fear of the constable. "After all," I said to myself, "It cannot greatly matter if I put it into this cauldron. My father will never know the bones from those of a puppy, and the few deaths which may result from administering another kind of oil for the incomparable *ol.can.* are not important in a population which increases so rapidly.

While verbalising the perceptions of the child, the adult narrator might be considered as inserting some of his as well. The expression "honest parents" could be the approving view that the parents had of themselves and inculcated in the child and which the narrator is echoing ironically. It could also be a description the adult narrator himself ascribes to the parents waiting for the following elaborations to reveal its inappropriateness. The same applies to the comparative "humbler." The child might have been aware of the social status of his family. If interpreted as the narrator's, however, the expression is to be counterbalanced by the explanations given of it in terms of the occupations of the parents. The mother's "disposal" of babies right near the church can be taken as an incompatibility in terms: "*in the shadow* of the village church," considered in its (dead) metaphorical sense (clandestine), indicates the furtive, sordid and hypocritical nature of the practices of the mother. In its other metaphorical sense (protected by the church, building and establishment), this expression shows how the mother takes advantage of the church to engage in activities abhorred and banished by that institution.

As for ascribing intention to nature and appreciating its thoughtfulness for providing a river in which to dump the babies, this again can very well be the way the mother, and consequently, the child have viewed the matter. Assuming that nature is plotting with them in their sinister occupations falls in line with the camouflage granted by the church to provide a background morally doubtful enough for the narrator to

undertake undermining it simply by mentioning it in his discourse. The reported thoughts of the boy clearly betray his distorted order of priorities when it comes to individual versus social matters: what counts most for him is that his father does not find out about his treachery. That people's lives might be endangered is a secondary matter especially in terms of what the demographic statistics prove about the increase in the population. He might even be suggesting that he is doing a favour to his society by contributing in reducing its large number.

If the passage is taken to be conveyed through the child's internal focalisation, he is then made to inculcate himself and his family by this direct verbalisation of his perceptions and their incorporation in the narrator's discourse, where the narrator is considered as having a distinct set of perceptions of the matter and therefore simply ironically interpreting the child's. If the passage is to be considered the narrator's own unchanged perception of the past events, which seems to be suggested by the end of the story, then, what he conveys is ironically turned against him and proves that the child's corrupt upbringing and family lifestyle has not been corrected and enlarged by any further adult knowledge of established social values. Responsibility for the irony thus can be attributed to the implied author. His distinct point of view becomes necessary in order to lend the discourse its duplicity and explain the echoic character of the opinions portrayed in the narrative.

### 1.3. Unrestricted Focalisation

An extradiegetic narrator endowed with an unrestricted (zero) focalisation, on the other hand, can also comment unfavourably on the events or characters depicted. He or she can, for instance, slip unfavourable comments of varying degrees of implicitness into the discourse. He or she can, moreover, create irony through the very manner of displaying the selected information in their texts. In *Madame Bovary*, for example, in possession of a bird's eye view of the agricultural fair at Yonville where Rodolphe and Emma happen to be, the narrator chooses to relate the two events simultaneously by intertwining them with each other in the text.

From magnetism little by little Rodolphe had come to affinities, and while the president was citing Cincinnatus and his plough, Diocletian planting cabbages, and the Emperors of China inaugurating the year by sowing the seed, the young man was explaining to the young woman that these irresistible attractions find their cause in some previous state of existence.

"Thus we," he said, "why did we come to know one another? What chance willed it? It was because across the infinite, like two streams that flow but to unite, our special bents had driven us towards each other."

And he seized her hand; she did not withdraw it.

"For good farming generally!" cried the president.

"Just now, for example, when I went to your house ---"

"To Monsieur Bizat of Quincampoix ---"

"Did I know I should accompany you?"

"Seventy francs."

"A hundred times I wished to go; and I followed you - I remained."

"Manures!"

"And I shall remain tonight, tomorrow, all other days, all my life!"

"To Monsieur Caron of Argueil, a gold medal!"

"For I have never in the society of any other person found so complete a charm."

"To Monsieur Bain of Givry-Saint-Martin."

"And I shall carry away with me the remembrance of you."

"For a merino ram!"

(cited in Muecke 1979)

The involvement of the narrator in the passage can be traced not only in the few expressions that can be directly attributed to him (e.g., "she did not withdraw it [her hand]"), but also in the very organisation of the information available to him. The juxtaposition of the report of the fair with the meeting of the couple brings the two activities to the same level. It lends Rodolphe's love confessions a character that is as mundane, standard, and clichéd as the speeches which they hear in the background. A parallel is thus established between the two simultaneous undergoing activities. Hence, while the famous names are cited in order to elevate the mundane activities these people are supposed to have engaged in (Cincinnatus' plough, the emperor of China and the seed ...) and which constitute the concern of the fair attendants, the highly philosophical ideas that Rodolphe tries to explain are conversely debased because he tries to apply them to describe his own situation. Thus, the ascending touch that he yearns to give to his argument in entertaining Emma is presented in an echoic manner. It is as hollow, regulated and predictable as the ceremony of prize distribution (which the narrator keeps) alternating with his own speech. The incongruity between the two situations depicted, the one in its attempted abstract intellectuality and the other in its

very down to earth predictable simplicity, reduces them to the same level and suggests that the former has acquired properties characteristic of the latter from the mere fact of sharing its context. Rodolphe's utterances, thus contextualised, lose the depth, the poignancy or softness they would have had were they uttered in another context by another person. The narrator's wish to present this character in an unfavourable light has been served effectively by the manipulation and juxtaposition of parts of the information with which he has been provided by the unrestricted focalisation.

#### 1.4. Summary

The distinction between focalisation and narration proves to be a useful means for determining the manner in which the interactions between the two result in the creation of irony. Whether by faithfully verbalising the information provided by the type of focalisation adopted, or by interfering with its formulation, the narrator finds ways of communicating irony both against the characters and/or the events he chooses to comment upon. In the preceding sections, the internal and unrestricted types of focalisation have particularly been examined. In the case of retrospective narratives, it has been suggested, narrator interference might be more likely to occur and yet more problematic and difficult to detect given the difficulty residing in determining the focaliser at that point in the narrative. The next section will undertake to consider the various ways in which the modes of speech and thought presentation can be exploited to convey irony.

### **2. The Modes of Speech and Thought Presentation and Irony**

A discussion of narration and focalisation can naturally lead to a discussion of speech and thought presentation in narrative since the latter involves the verbal events which, combined with the non-verbal events, constitute the former and help with resolving the question of attribution. This is of course not to exclude the relationship these aspects of narrative have with temporal organisation examined in the preceding chapter. In fact, all these aspects are highly intertwined and their classification is merely a convenient way of isolating and therefore better examining sometimes the

same issues from various angles. Correspondence between what they describe is often at play, hence the occasional use of the same example over different sections or even different chapters (e.g., The passages from *The Sound and the Fury*). What is described as scene (dialogue), for instance, in terms of time, is nothing but a form of internal or unrestricted focalisation on the one hand, and direct report of speech on the other.

Narrative is constructed from the information disclosed about non-verbal and verbal events. The presentation of the latter, like that of the former, takes different forms. It involves different degrees of involvement or distance by the narrator. The question of authenticity of these fictional verbal events might lead to a recognition of the fact that they are produced and not *reproduced* by the narrator/author. This controversial matter is central to a lot of contemporary fiction writers struggling with inherited outworn writing conventions and readers' expectations. In John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the "omniscient" self-conscious narrator discusses the notion of fictionalisation and reality in terms of the freedom and "predestination" of characters. In the digressive Chapter Thirteen, the narrator says,

There is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition.

The novelist is still a god, since he creates (and not even the most aleatory avant-garde modern novel has managed to extirpate its author completely); what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle not authority.

I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind, any more than you control - however hard you try... - your children, colleagues, friends or even yourself.

There is thus no clear-cut distinction between what is real and what is imaginary as the one feeds on the other. Verbal acts in narrative are subject to the same problematic situation. A narrator can create them in the same way that he or she could pick them from their own "real" world. In any case, as Genette (1983: 34) observes, they are still subject to the same rules and difficulties met in the reproduction of

authentic verbal acts - quotation marks, for instance, to indicate the literal nature of the citation. This leads to a consideration of shifts from the oral version of the speech reported to its written form which might presuppose some form and degree of translation touching on the question of intonation, voice quality etc. This matter, of course, is not as problematic when the literalness of the speech is not the aim of the (re)production. When less "mimetic" forms of report are adopted, other considerations are at play. These forms which might include either the narrator's taking charge to report the utterances in his or her own words or some combination of it with the character's, while exempt from the claim to literalness, perform functions which can coincide with those of direct report or might totally differ from them.

It might be argued, however, that the presentation of speech will always reflect a choice by the narrator. This choice of the mode of presentation indicates the manner in which the narrator wants the language to be perceived. At a second level, however, it reflects the way it has been appropriated to fit within the confines of the fictional discourse. Its meaning is bound to change and adjust to the new context in which it is evoked. This assumption has led Tannen (1989) to posit the notion of "constructed dialogue" to replace all that is commonly considered "reported speech." She says that

what is called "reported speech," "direct speech," "direct discourse," or "direct quotation" (that is, a speaker framing an account of another's words as dialogue) should be understood not as report at all, but as constructed dialogue. It is constructed as surely as is the dialogue in drama or fiction.  
(1989: 110)

Although this notion of "constructed dialogue" is suggested in order to describe natural conversation, it can also be considered adequate for the description of reported language in narrative fiction - as a parallel between speakers and narrators (in terms of responsibility for fashioning language) can be drawn. In any case, it is this property of narrative fiction which grants it what Bakhtin identifies as its dialogic character. This intertwining between the various voices in the discourse where the one recalls and/or comments on the other(s) highlights the polyphonic intertextual nature of the novel as discussed in the first four chapters of this study. Hence, one effect of this

manipulation of others' words might be their undermining through irony. The various modes of speech and thought presentation identified in narrative lend themselves to its expression given this duplicity inherent in their actual formation, although at different levels and in different ways. Irony can be directed against a character by another, for instance, or it may be generated by the narrator against one or several characters. In cases where irony is directed against its speaker who is also a narrator, another agent, the (implied) author has to be called upon to take responsibility for the ironic communication. Besides, some utterances may become ironic because of the context in which they are embedded and/or because of the context which they create. In any case, irony plays an important role in pointing the direction the assessment of characters takes as it reflects the attitudes that the narrator adopts towards them and that they adopt towards each other.

The notion of degree of freedom (or literalness) granted to the characters in terms of the type of speech or thought presentation they are allowed is relevant to the expression of irony. While some utterances might seem to attract irony upon themselves, others are made to produce irony against some other victim. But here is, to start with, a typology of speech and thought presentation modes in narrative with specifications about the position of each in terms of narratorial/authorial control.

As Leech and Short (1981: 320) note, there are two factors to which the reporter of speech or thought may choose or not to commit himself or herself: "what was said" and "the exact form of words which were used to utter that statement." A report of both would constitute Direct Speech (DS). A report of what is stated alone, however, constitutes Indirect Speech (IS). In the Narrative Report of Speech Acts (NRSA), an even more indirect form than IS, a mere report that a verbal event or speech act has taken place is reported (but not what was said or its exact formulation). Free Direct Speech (FDS), on the other hand, is a form that is freer than DS. The quotation marks and the reporting clause are omitted to let the characters speak out directly. Between DS and IS a form that has been identified as "unspeakable" (Ann

Banfield, 1982) and therefore more typical of written (literary) discourse can be detected. Called Free Indirect Speech (FIS), because of its mixing of the narrator and the characters' voices, this form displays linguistic features proper to IS as well as to DS. The norm in this cline of authorial or narratorial control has been granted to DS since it is unmediated and is, therefore, the closest form of report to an original utterance.

In reporting thought, however, Indirect Thought (IT) is considered the norm, given the fact that knowledge of other people's thoughts can only be acquired second-hand. No direct access to the thoughts of others is normally possible. But in a narrative, because of the concern of novelists with portraying the minds of their characters, Direct report of Thought (DT) has been used in forms such as what is conventionally known as interior monologue. The impression of a character talking to himself or herself is also given in Free Direct Thought (FDT), where the reporting of thoughts is even freer with its omission of the reporting clause and the quotation marks. Both cases, nevertheless, have been criticised for an artificiality which emanates from the consciousness with which what is non-verbal and intrinsically private is exhibited through verbalisation. Their function is better performed by Free Indirect Thought (FIT), though, which provides a balance between the two: by keeping the sense of immediacy characteristic of DT and producing the more natural sense of mediation of thought characteristic of IS. The most controlled form of thought report is the Narrative Report of Thought Acts (NRTA) where both the content and the form of the thought are shaped by the narrator's formulation of them.

The concept of second-degree interpretation developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1989) is particularly relevant to the description of these different types of utterance and thought presentation. The notion of interpretive resemblance can be applied to describe the different degrees of literalness or indirectness in the report of an original utterance. Determining the possible reasons behind the mediation or faithfulness in a particular report can serve to help deciphering the effects that it is

meant to arouse. Whether directly attributed or not, these different types of utterance can communicate irony. Deciding whether an utterance is reported echoically for the narrator to convey disapproval or disagreement with the opinion it presents or its originator is part of the disambiguation process that determines the utterance attribution and the attitude ascribed to it. Recognising the attitude of the narrator to the reported utterance and the response he or she wants to elicit depends, however, on the mode of report used. An examination of the potential each one of the modes described has for the analysis of irony is undertaken in the following sections.

### 2.1. Direct Speech (/Thought) and Free Direct Speech (/Thought)

However direct speech or thought representation might seem in narrative, they always remain mediated by a narrator. The reporting verb and the quotation marks characteristic of the direct form are a clear indication of its embedding in the narrator's discourse. Their usual absence from the Free Direct form exposes the thoughts or words of the characters in a more direct way and stylistically restricts the role of the narrator to naming the thinking or speaking character at most. As shown in both modes, the utterances can provide information not only about what the character wants to convey, but also about the characteristics of his or her own personality. The Direct and Free Direct forms can, therefore, contribute to the development of the story and to characterisation. The case of Jason in *The Sound and the Fury* cited in section 3.2.2. of Ch.VI, Part B is a clear example of the way in which a character's personality can be depicted through the very language he uses. The DS reveals the moral weaknesses of the character and inculcates him through the direct exposure of his value system as it is illustrated in the incidents he recounts. The irony arises from the obvious incongruity between what Jason nearly boasts doing (e.g., not being put off by the old woman's challenge to hit her) and what is socially recognised as right behaviour. The way he reproduces the dialogue reflects his own evaluations and comments on it ("She was so old ... we need somebody to eat the grub ... You think I won't?") while his description of the situation indicates his perspective on the incidents reported ("... so a bunch of

damn eastern jews ... I have nothing against jews as an individual ... It is just the race"). The DS, hence, not only informs the reader what Jason has said, but also inculcates him by revealing the contradictions in his discourse which the narrator judges best reported verbatim to conserve the vividness of the original as it is portrayed in the idiolect of the character and the logic underlying his discourse. Therefore, while dissociating himself from its contents and form, the narrator makes the speech more open to condemnation. By portraying it as barely (accurately) as possible, the narrator foregrounds it and leaves it to speak for itself with a minimum of intervention on his part.

The ironic use of DS can, furthermore, serve thematic purposes in narrative. In Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief*, for instance, fragments of a speech pronounced by one of the high officials in the newly independent African country is reported to highlight the flagrant degree of mismatch that exists between the prevalent native culture and the incompatible imposed European one. Even when the will to learn and change (in this case a blind will for copying) is present, misunderstandings emanating from the versatility of the value systems hamper, to a great extent, the efforts of the enthusiastic (Oxford graduate) African Emperor and his English Minister of Modernisation to "civilise" the country. The speech quoted below from Chapter Six is given in tribute to the visit of two English women surveying the condition of the animals in the country. A dinner party organised in their honour has a menu that consists of a list of vitamins that range from A to G, from tin sardines to jam, written by the emperor himself and carrying the misleading title "Imperial Banquet for Welcoming the English Cruelty to Animals."

Presently, when the last vitamin had been guzzled, Viscount Boaz rose to propose the health of the guests of honour. His speech was greeted by loud applause and was then done into English by the Court Interpreter.  
 "Your Majesty, Lords and Ladies. It is my privilege and delight this evening to welcome with open arms of brotherly love to our city Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Tin, two ladies renowned throughout the famous country of Europe for their great cruelty to animals. We Azanians are a proud and ancient nation but we have much to learn from the white people of the West and North. We too, in our small way, are cruel to our animals" - and here the Minister for the Interior digressed at some length to recount

with hideous detail what he had himself once done with a woodman's axe to a wild boar - "but it is to the great nations of the West and North, especially to their worthy representatives that are with us tonight, that we look as our natural leaders on the road of progress. Ladies and gentleman, we must be Modern, we must be refined in our Cruelty to Animals. That is the message of the New Age brought to us by our guests this evening. May I, in conclusion, raise my glass and ask you to join with me in wishing them old age and prolonged fecundity."

As already clearly shown by the title, the whole atmosphere of the dinner party is based on cultural misunderstandings. The English version of the speech contains expressions which sound absurd, unnecessary or even insulting out of their cultural context (e.g., arms of brotherly love, wishing old age and prolonged fecundity to rather elderly women). It epitomises the incompatibility of the value systems of the two cultures and reflects the depth of the misunderstanding of the cause of the two women. The speech functions as a caricature of the whole enterprise of "civilisation" or modernisation that the emperor wants to inculcate in his country. The narrator, furthermore, chooses to report a section of the speech in NRSA. He thus summarises the part where the Minister of the Interior boasts his own early attempts at being modern by showing a sophisticated way of being cruel to a wild boar. The conciseness of the NRSA saves the reader going into the unnecessary detail of the actions of the Viscount and fulfils its function in reinforcing the absurdity already discerned in the DS.

The irony which has the Viscount as its primary victim also encompasses, on the one hand, the whole company who seem to share his beliefs (congratulated him on his obviously erroneous nonsensical speech), and on the other hand, the Emperor and his English Minister of Modernisation (and the English women) who do not realise the extent of ignorance and cultural disparity they are trying to fight.

Like DS, FDS invites irony upon itself and/or its utterer through its very presentation (and foregrounding) in the narrator's discourse, which lends the situation in which it is embedded its eavesdropping quality. An example of the way utterances are quoted not only for what they say but for what they implicitly communicate about their utterer can be found in Dickens' *Bleak House* (cited in Leech and Short (1981)).

The FDS is used descriptively by its utterers, in Sperber and Wilson's terminology, but, while openly attributed to them, it is used echoically in the narrator's discourse. The workings of the legal system and especially its indifference to the ills of the people to whom it is supposed to do justice are undermined in the court scene depicted, where a verdict of accidental death is pronounced on the case of Mr Nemo.

"This won't do, gentlemen!" says the coroner with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Don't you think you can receive his evidence, sir?" asks an attentive juryman.

"Out of the question," says the coroner. "You have heard the boy. "Can't exactly say" won't do, you know. We can't take that in a court of justice, gentlemen. It's terrible depravity. Put the boy aside."

Boy put aside, to the great edification of the audience, especially of Little Swills, the comic vocalist.

Now. Is there any other witness? No other witness.

Very well, gentlemen! Here's a man unknown, proved to have been in the habit of taking opium in large quantities for a year and a half, found dead of too much opium. If you think you have any evidence to lead you to the conclusion that he committed suicide, you will come to that conclusion. If you think it is a case of accidental death, you will find a verdict accordingly. Verdict accordingly. Accidental death. No doubt. Gentlemen, you are discharged. Good afternoon.

It is the side in the power position that gets the benefit of the FDS. The dominant voice outspeaks every body else and clears the way for a hasty delivery to conclude the case. The FDS with its ultimate propensity to freedom is commensurate with the power allocated to and abused by its utterer. The concatenation of utterances with no quotation marks or reporting clauses encourages the possible existence of an interaction between the coroner and the jury and perhaps other participants in the court room. Although some distinction might be made between the different voices, the narrator does not seem to be interested in clearly attributing the utterances. Instead he only selects the expressions that are most important to their speakers to suggest the haste with which they want to reach a conclusion. The report of the scene in the court room is organised in a caricatured manner that reflects the irony directed against its characters and the institution they represent. The narrator's choice of the FD form thus brings the coroner's (and the other possible participants') utterances into the foreground

(after the use of DS), and emphasises their irresponsible conduct and reasoning towards the unfortunate members of their society.

## 2.2. Narrative Report of Speech Acts (/Thoughts) and Indirect Speech

### (/Thought)

Unlike the D and FD modes, the NRSA(T) and the ID(T) are more emphatically mediated by a narrator. They are more assimilated into the narrative because of the absence of the graphological markers (quotation marks) and because of the degree of interpretation the narrator is allowed in their formulation. The narrator has a larger freedom of manipulation in rendering the content and/or the form of a particular utterance. He or she plays a more openly interpretive role than in the direct forms by standing between the reader (or narratee) and the "original" utterance. Attributing the utterance or opinion to a character, the narrator can give his or her own account of what the character has said or thought. The expected degrees of distortion of the original utterance can reflect the narrator's stance from that utterance and/or its utterer. An example of irony in this mode is the section in Joyce's *Ulysses* (cited in Leech and Short (1981: 286-287) where Gerty Mac Dowell 's affairs are described in a mixture of NRSA and IS.

His eyes misty with unshed tears Master Tommy came to her call for their big sister's word was law with the twins ...  
Cissy's quick motherwit guessed what was amiss and she whispered to Edy Boardman to take him there behind the pushcar where the gentlemen couldn't see and to mind he didn't wet his new tan shoes.

In the first clause, the narrator intervenes openly in reporting the thought. The agent of the cognitive verb (guessed) is presented in a metaphorical presupposition: it is not Cissy who perceives the problem but her "quick motherwit." It is also this capacity which makes her decide what is to be done about the problem. Accordingly, her directives are cautious (not let see, don't wet) and her speech is described by the narrator as a discreet action (whispered). The narrator in this case, as Leech and Short (1981: 287) point out, is ironically imitating (parodying, echoing) the inflated

euphemistic style of pulp romantic fiction to report the down-to-earth concerns of the characters.

### 2.3. Free Indirect Speech (/Thought)

Between the two extremes of direct and indirect speech and thought presentation, comes the mixed category of FIS(T). Although not always stylistically marked, FIS(T) is normally characterised by the omission of the reporting clause as in the direct form, while keeping the tense and pronouns appropriate to the indirect form. This mixed form is not always linguistically marked. A blending of the voices of the narrator and the speaking or thinking character is thus achieved. As Pascal maintains,

FIS serves, as always, a double purpose. On the one hand it evokes the person, through his words, tone of voice, and gesture, with incomparable vivacity. On the other, it embeds the character's statement or thought in the narrative flow, and even more importantly in the narrator's interpretation, communicating also his way of seeing and feeling.

(1977: 74-5)

FIT is considered a freer form in thought presentation than IT, which is the norm, while FIS is a more controlled form in speech presentation than DS, which is considered the norm. Leech and Short (1981) draw the following clines of authorial/narratorial intervention in speech and thought presentation:

Speech presentation:	NRSA	IS	FIS	DS <sup>(norm)</sup>	FDS
Thought presentation	NRTA	IT	FIT	DT	FDT
			(norm)		

They further maintain that

Given that the norms for speech and thought presentation are at different points on the continuum, the different values of FIS and FIT can be naturally explained. FIS is a movement leftwards from the norm ... and is therefore interpreted as a movement towards authorial intervention, whereas FIT is seen as a move to the right and hence away from the author's most directly interpretative control and into the active mind of the character.

(1981: 345)

The resulting effects of these modes are those of distance from the character for FIS and closeness to the character in FIT. Both cases, however, indicate a superposition of the narrator between the character's words and the reader. As Pascal notes,

free indirect speech, is never purely and simply the evocation of a character's thought and perception, but always bears, in its vocabulary, its intonation, its syntactical composition and other stylistic features, in its content, or its context, or in some combination of these, the mark of the narrator.

(1977: 43)

This category has been ascribed the function of presenting a narrator's comment, whether positive or negative, on a character's thoughts or utterances. As Pascal supporting Dorrit Cohn notes, this comment can be irony when it is negative, or sympathy if positive. He claims that FIS

As a means of reproducing someone else's argument it is a pleasant variant from direct quotation, which is often too long or awkward to fit in, and from simple reported speech, which can easily grow clumsy and wearisome ... It offers too a seductive opportunity ... for "narratorial" distortion that insinuates a loaded comment, of irony perhaps, into what is ostensibly a faithful reproduction.

(1977: 136)

Thus fused, the narrator and the character's voices constitute a good opportunity for the expression of irony - the practice which thrives on the duplicity of voice *par excellence*. The intertextual or heteroglossic nature of FIS readily invites the echoic character of ironic utterances. With the narrator's discourse for context, the incorporated words or thoughts of the character can be turned to comment on themselves or the state of mind of their producer. The narrator's duty being apparently restricted to verbalising or reproducing these thoughts or utterances from the character's perspective, it can in fact be seen as colouring the interpretation to be allocated to them. As McHale (1978) has noted, FIS(T) is most appropriately used to convey "indirect interior monologue." The two passages cited below fall into this category though they differ in terms of narrator self-consciousness. The first passage comes from Joyce's "A Painful Case." Mr Duffy, the gloomy effaced pseudo-intellectual reads in the papers about the death of a woman he has flirted with for some time in the past. Disgusted with the memory of his former involvement with her, he indulges in self-pity, self-recrimination to mark his engagement in his epiphany.

Not merely had she degraded herself; she had degraded him. He saw the squalid tract of her vice, miserable and malodorous. His soul's companion! He thought of the hobbling wretches whom he had seen carrying cans and bottles to be filled by the barman. Just God, what an end! Evidently she

had been unfit to live, without any strength of purpose, an easy prey to habits, one of the wrecks on which civilization has been reared. But that she could have sunk so low! Was it possible he had deceived himself so utterly about her? He remembered her outburst of that night and interpreted it in a harsher sense than he had ever done. He had no difficulty now in approving of the course he had taken.

The exclamatory and interrogative clauses, the particles "evidently" and "but," the temporal deictic "now" are stylistic markers of FIS. The character tries to analyse the new situation and his relationship to the woman in retrospect. He tries to visualise her moral deficiencies and dissociates himself from ever having been involved with her (e.g., the ironic "His soul's companion!" where the source of the echoic utterance is his former self as he viewed the woman at that time). In the final utterance, he comes out triumphant from the self-trial by deciding that he has been right in abandoning her. He thus reestablishes his dignity to himself and wipes off any sense of guilt or irresponsibility he might have had in the past over his leaving her ("He had no difficulty now..." perhaps implicates that he has had some difficulty before).

This outbreak of indignation, moral superiority and self-pity, however, commensurate with other facets of Mr Duffy's personality disclosed earlier in the narrative, can be interpreted ironically. His reaction is a clear indication of his selfishness and his inability and unwillingness to understand or communicate with others. He, furthermore, puts himself in the position of a judge or God and decides that the woman is "unfit to live, without any strength of purpose, an easy prey to habits." These descriptions can be seen as ironically applicable to his own monotonous lifestyle. He then reverses the situation and believes that he has wrongly elevated her image in his mind ("Was it possible ...") forgetting that he is the one responsible for their separation. The confirmation of his condemnation of her only open sign of affection as an outbreak of baseness in fact confirms his obstinate refusal to acknowledge the social human side of relationships. In the passage, it operates as a condemnation of his already described satisfaction in his egocentricity. The narrator, through a report that is vividly typical of the character's mind and logic manages to portray him in an ironic light that confirms the impressions previously developed of

him in the narrative. The character's indignation is shown as exaggerated and inappropriate as it mingles with the narrator's discourse; it reflects negatively on the portrayal of his personality in the narrative and only confirms earlier descriptions of it.

In the following passage, taken from *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the narrator is more openly conscious of the inconsistencies in the character's thoughts and of his own role in reproducing them. Charles goes to meet Sarah Woodruff in the woods to hear her story but they are nearly discovered. Relieved ("exhilarated") at his escape, he considers in Chapter Twenty-two his past and present actions and the future prospects he draws for himself.

And how should he have blamed himself very deeply? From the outset his motives had been of the purest; he had cured her of her madness; and if something impure had for a moment threatened to infiltrate his defences, it had been but mint sauce to the wholesome lamb. He would be to blame, of course, if he did not now remove himself, and for good, from the fire. That, he would take very good care to do. After all, he was not a moth infatuated by a candle; he was a highly intelligent being, one of the fittest, and endowed with total free will. If he had not been sure of that latter safeguard, would he ever have risked himself in such dangerous waters? I am mixing metaphors - but that was how Charles's mind worked.

Although the narrator steps in and admits that what he is reporting is taking place in Charles's mind, the passage can still be read as FIT, following Pascal's (1977: 41) discussion of the technique. The temporal deictic "now," the expressions "of course" and "after all," the (rhetorical) questions are stylistic indicators of FIT. Further indicators can be gathered from the tense shifts and from the knowledge already provided about the way Charles sees himself and others (e.g. highly intelligent, one of the fittest, cured her of her madness...). The high esteem in which Charles holds himself allows him to rehearse and in fact reconstruct his motives for getting involved with the woman. He has already admitted to himself being attracted to her in Chapter Seventeen, but has camouflaged his self-confession, realising its impropriety by finding an elusive, abstract, alternative explanation: "it was not Sarah in herself who attracted him - but some emotion, some possibility she symbolized." In this passage, the character seems to be having a discussion with his superego, a miniature of the Victorian society in which he lives and to which he feels bound to explain his

behaviour. Perhaps he is rehearsing, as part of his calculating sophisticated (free-willed) personality, what he would need to say in case he has to explain his behaviour to somebody else. By managing to find the right arguments to his superego he will surely be prepared to convince anybody else if necessity arises. His first excuse is therefore found in the socially appreciated role of scientist and benefactor he assigns to himself: "he has cured her of her madness." It is noticeable of course that nobody except his friend the doctor thinks of her as a psychological case or believes that she needs medical help. All the rest think she needs moral help instead, if anything at all, since she is a fallen woman who has lost her virtue. The metaphor of the lamb and the mint sauce reflects, furthermore, the high opinion Charles has of himself: he is unattainable, he can surpass and "absorb" all difficulties and temptations. The possible impurity to which he might have been exposed has no more effect on him than a mint sauce would have on a wholesome lamb.

The next step comes as a recognition of what he wants to hear and especially what would still keep him socially safe ("He would be to blame, of course, if he did not ... That, he would take good care to do"); the implicature being that in his judgement, he has not gone too far *yet*. It follows from this that he is a balanced man who knows his limits and intends to keep them. He reassures himself that everything is still under *his* control and that he is *still* in the right. The "of course" and "now" confirming the condemnation and discarding of the future possibility also confirm his present feeling of righteousness and his willingness not to get further involved after having performed his *duty* - the primary Victorian value, the narrator observes in a previous chapter.

The utterance that follows epitomises the Darwinian Liberal views of Charles and constitutes the core of the irony, in the passage and perhaps also in the novel as a whole. He denies an analogy suggested by the reference to playing with fire made in the preceding paragraph. The denial, however, presupposes his former consideration of the analogy - his superego or someone else might be (have been) able to accuse him of being a moth fatally attracted to a candle. His hypocrisy thus denies the clichéd

metaphor and reprimands his honest side by an elaboration in which he enumerates the qualities that are to hold him above suspicion and corruption.

The expression "one of the fittest" recalls his scientific endeavours and his interest in Darwin. But that has already been discussed and rejected by the narrator in Chapter Eight: "Charles called himself a Darwinist, and yet he had not really understood Darwin." Charles's feeling of superiority is equally ironised in Chapter Nineteen. After an evening of animated scientific Darwinian discussion with the village doctor, Charles becomes the vehicle of focalisation on his way home and betrays his naive singling himself out and identification with the heroes of the theory :

Unlit Lyme was the ordinary mass of mankind, most evidently sunk in immemorial sleep; while Charles the naturally selected (the adverb carries both its senses) was pure intellect, walking awake, free as a god, one with the unslumbering stars and understanding all.  
All except Sarah, that is.

Confident in his self-esteem, thus, Charles takes it for granted that his behaviour can safely be explained retrospectively, in terms of free will. His argument for his superego counts on the latter's agreement that his free will is a given on which he has responsibly and confidently drawn in his actions ("If he had not been sure of the latter safeguard ..."). Again reinforcing with the rhetorical question things he supposes common knowledge about himself, the character tries to perpetuate the deceptive idea that he has calculated his behaviour with Sarah, that he is (still) in control of his destiny and therefore that she has had no influence over him whatsoever (the lamb and the mint sauce).

Given these few facts about Charles's thought processes in this "interior monologue," it is possible to consider him the butt of the narrator's irony in at least three different ways. That is, it is possible to perceive his thoughts as descriptive or *used*, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, by him, and echoically interpreted by the narrator through his half incorporation of them in his own discourse through the use of FIT.

First, there is the incongruity between the information formerly disclosed about his attraction to Sarah and the scientific social pretence that he wants to keep as the

reason behind his secret meetings with her: what is known in the narrative and what he wants to make it look like. It is his own way of fictionalising his own reality (to follow the narrator's argument in Chapter Thirteen concerning fiction creation). He is, indeed, the moth and she is the candle around whose flame he has risked involuntarily his reputation and peace of mind. His claim to free will is thus nothing but a hollow if not an absurd pretence prepared to comfort his ego and deceive his superego.

Second, since this is a report of the thoughts and perceptions of the character, it is conventionally expected that it should comprise a revelatory element of truth and confession. The passage demonstrates that, but in a reversed manner: although the report is truthful to Charles's reasoning and reflections, the reflections and thoughts are not an accurate report of his feelings. He himself is disguising his own feelings and real thoughts, dressing them up to fit the image he wants to keep for his censor - his superego - as well as for his ego. As pointed out above, he seems to be engaged in a reconstruction of a defensive version of his actions rather than an examination of them. His inner thoughts transformed into socially acceptable ones reveal his personality or at least his state of mind at that stage in the narrative. The passage depicts a psychology that is already torn between what is permissible and what is really happening. The character's hypocrisy to himself is a trait of the moral code to which he needs to conform. His distortion and reinterpretation of the facts to deceive himself and anybody who needs to know about them is ironically betrayed through this intrusion into his mind.

The third point also concerns the question of free will. The last utterance is not in FIT but is rather pronounced by the narrator, in his own voice. Although it seems to be confirming Charles's capacity for choice - even of the metaphors used that is, it also conveys at least two implicatures.

First, it seems to hint at the agitated state of mind of the character, as he is engaged in justifying his actions. The use of the contradictory and outworn metaphors of fire and deep waters and that of the sauce and the lamb reflect his attempt to exempt

himself while avoiding to name the real things which trouble him. He does not directly refer, even once, to Sarah, for instance. She is evoked only through the different euphemistic metaphors which connote danger and the clinical reference to her madness (in which he does not really believe).

Second, the narratorial utterance seems to remind the reader of the fact that Charles is a character in a narrative that the narrator is recounting. By specifying that the words are Charles's, the narrator distances himself from the evaluations in which their user indulges. He self-consciously makes it clear that his role is restricted to that of a mediator and that therefore, he takes no responsibility for what he is reporting. More implicitly this implies that he does not agree with its content or its form which he indirectly judges as defective ("I am mixing metaphors"). Although apparently plausible, it is not possible to take this utterance as a further reminder of the fact that Charles is a character in a fictional narrative and that he is, despite his claim to free will, controlled by his immediate creator, the author. This point is discussed by the narrator in Chapter Thirteen where he clearly admits the necessity to ascribe freedom to fictional characters and to dismiss all "quasi-divine plans" for them if they are to be granted a real existence. It is hence more plausible to interpret the narratorial utterance as an indication from the narrator of the character's deceptive high opinion of himself and consequently as a reminder of his distinct perception of himself as revealed in the earlier chapters.

Charles's monologue is thus ridiculed, on the one hand, for the deceptive arguments that he maintains to justify his behaviour to himself (and to others) and for the foolish pretentious image he has of his intellectual and moral capacities that he wants to preserve and draw upon in his argument. All his thoughts thus stand "in quotes," as far as the extra-heterodiegetic narrator is concerned, ironically commenting on their own absurdity and falsity.

#### 2.4. Summary

FIT as exemplified in the above section portrays vividly the state of mind of the characters it is depicting, reflecting their own logic and beliefs while keeping the discourse within the confines of narratorial control. While the intertwining apparently brings them together, the disparity between the voices and perspectives of narrator and character leaves room for the expression of the superiority of the one over the other in the form of ironic comments: what is *used* by the character is *echoically interpreted* by the narrator.

The other modes of speech and thought presentation examined above exhibit a certain degree of distortion and control on the part of the narrator even if it is confined to the choice of using or not using quotation marks for the FD form. The duplicity of voices and therefore of perspectives is always present although it is expressed in varying degrees and forms and the potential for irony is equally, always present, ready to emerge whenever an incongruity between the two is perceptible. The contexts these utterances create and the ones in which they occur, the relations between the vehicle of focalisation and the narrator can hence be a useful means for attitude disambiguation and utterance attribution in narrative and <sup>a</sup> means therefore for the analysis of irony.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored various factors involved in the production and interpretation of irony in an attempt to provide a better understanding of what goes on when this multi-faceted, intricate phenomenon meets with the equally complex properties of literary discourse. I have argued in favour of Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony which is based on considering verbal irony as a category of what they identify as "echoic interpretation utterances." I have suggested that when perceived against a background in which all discourse is seen as intertextual, the echoic approach can serve as a powerful analytical device of the mechanisms governing irony. The way irony operates in narrative fictional discourse, I have maintained, can be explained in terms of the interaction of some elements which are peculiar to this discourse, as well as to some that it shares with several forms of literary and written discourse like journalism, or oral personal narrative, for instance.

Irony and literary discourse are two highly complex phenomena. Attempting to come to terms with irony in literary discourse is a doubly intricate task. This attempt to bring them together has required that an amalgam of theoretical work from various fields which try to elucidate irony be brought to the fore. The fields involved include pragmatics, semiotics, discourse studies, and narratology and some others that span more than one definite field. Their contribution to this study consists in offering it ways for reaching beyond the analysis of simple ironic utterances and exploring how irony works as part of the interactions operating within discourse at large (and fictional narrative discourse in particular).

Dealing with the subtlety of ironic communication is a task that represents a challenge to all those undertaking to elucidate it. Subtlety and covertness are among the most problematic and consequently disconcerting aspects of irony given the difficulty they raise for its interpretation. This thesis proves, nevertheless, that there are ways in

which irony can be tackled and made amenable to actual analysis in the same way that other verbal phenomena can be. For this purpose, irony is linked here with accountable if complex and problematic notions like intertextuality, recontextualisation and speech representation. These notions provide adequate support for the move towards offering the basis of a framework for the analysis of irony.

However, perhaps like in all research concerned with pervasive and yet elusive aspects of communication, this thesis can claim neither finiteness nor thoroughness - and if it did, it would immediately risk falling victim to what it has been studying. It can be seen, instead, as focusing on expanding and making connections between theories that touch on the mechanisms underlying irony, raising questions judged relevant for this end and bringing to the fore issues that were left unexplored about its functioning in fictional narrative discourse. In some places, the thesis might seem tentative. This is due to the difficulties encountered throughout the research on the subject in connection with the occasional need to break into new ground and/or the attempt to tackle problems that were left unsolved by other researchers. The origin of these difficulties can probably be attributed to the highly intricate and expansive nature of the topic, and the fact that support from previous research in the area (linking pragmatics and narratology) hardly exists. Pragmatics and narratology are themselves rather young and still stumbling areas of research with wide ranging scopes defying any linear, singular summary or description. The solutions they have offered have tended to be merely local and in need of further expansion or linking with others. The first problem encountered in this research was related to the need to expand Sperber and Wilson's account of irony in order to make up for its shortcomings and turn it into a generalisable tool of analysis. The other problem was related to the fact that narrative fiction is a peculiar type of discourse that has its own properties and resources and therefore requires some further examination of these properties and an adaptation of the approach proposed in order for it to account for ironies in this discourse.

This thesis has hence taken it upon itself to explore further boundaries of irony as developed in texts and to establish it as an identifiable, describable, accountable, and

classifiable trait of communication; one that might be problematic but only partly deserves the mystification with which it has been surrounded over the centuries; a feature that is subtle and elusive but is by no means inaccessible or ineffable as might be erroneously suggested by some approaches to the subject (cf. Furst 1984, Ch.1 and Ch.9).

Although it has relied at times on what was put forward about irony in literary criticism or rhetoric, this thesis insists on focusing on an eclectic approach that relies on the combination of fields like pragmatics, discourse studies and modern narratology because of the more systematic, if less comprehensive methods, solutions and tools of analysis they propose. This can be considered a multi-faceted, multi-tooled attempt to elucidate how irony operates in general and in narrative fiction in particular.

I have tried at the outset to combat a main hindrance to the study of irony by emphasising one important insight about its nature, namely, the fact that the notion of irony cannot be narrowed down to a single finite meaning that is paraphrasable. Irony is, on the one hand, "an additive, not substitutive, instrument of knowledge," to adopt Eco's words (1984: 89) describing metaphor, and one that consists of a blend of meanings and interrelationships, on the other. It would be delusive and desultory to regard irony as boiling down to a single formula that isolates its meaning in saying something other than or opposite to what it seems to be saying. Hence the deficiency of the semantic definitions of irony which are judged here either simplistic or overgeneralised because they are based on this alleged meaning reversal or meaning expansion they associate with irony. A more plausible predisposition would be to consider irony as contingent on the interaction of aspects of the situation in which it occurs and feeding on the different resources characteristic of that type of situation. What is available to written discourse, for instance, can differ greatly from what is available to spoken discourse, and what is typical of narrative fiction can be totally irrelevant for academic writing. The umbrella principles seen as governing verbal irony regardless of where it occurs should remain those of re-attribution and the accompanying distance which conform to Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony.

These principles are accommodated and displayed in various ways by the discourse of narrative fiction, opening possibilities for the generation of irony and accounting for its comprehension.

After reviewing the theoretical background on which irony has been discussed, I have argued in favour of the pragmatic account of irony proposed by Sperber and Wilson, which I have judged more plausible and more adequate than others. This approach has two main shortcomings, however. First, it ignores elements which I consider of important consequence for a more powerful and comprehensive pragmatic approach to the subject. These touch mainly on the uses to which irony can be put in discourse, as well as the psycho-sociolinguistic considerations that secure and facilitate its functioning. They have been investigated in this study in order to provide complementary answers to the questions "how" irony works and "why" it is used. The answers provided are further considered in relation to the discourse of narrative fiction, where they prove of particular significance to its comprehension.

Second, although it is successfully applicable to one-to-one or micro situations, Sperber and Wilson's approach might prove inadequate when confronted with layered and/or longer stretches of discourse. In the case of the discourse of narrative fiction, I believe that there are other considerations coming into play, like narration techniques or temporal organisation, that need to be considered in relation to this view of irony. This can be carried out in terms of two governing principles or components of Sperber and Wilson's account that are expandable in relation to discourse in general, but that can also be investigated in relation to literary discourse and narrative fiction in particular: the question of attribution and that of distance or dissociation.

1. The question of attribution: for Sperber and Wilson an ironical utterance is a second-degree interpretation utterance of the echoic type, one that is attributable to someone other than the speaker or to the speaker on a past occasion. Some distance between the discourse of the speaker and the ironical utterance is necessarily created.

This point, I have suggested, can be fruitfully linked to the question of intertextuality (or polyphony) as it has been singled out in studies on discourse and

literature. At a restricted as well as on a large scale, the practice of irony as seen by Sperber and Wilson can be legitimised and comfortably accommodated within the larger intertextual view of discourse. As a characteristic of language, intertextuality offers a potential ground for the creation of irony and explains how it can be recognised and why it would risk being missed, both in discourse in general and in literary discourse.

2. The question of dissociating or distancing attitude or evaluation accompanying this voice splitting can be reflected at various levels: first at the level of the sentence, and second at the level of the narrative discourse as a whole. In the discourse of narrative fiction, it is reflected in the elements that introduce it and surround it such as the title for instance, and the very organisation of the discourse itself, both in terms of the report of speech and the report of events.

While allowing its users to declare their supremacy over what is being ironised, irony also claims a minimum degree of complicity or merely rapport with the audience as a result of its involvement in the re-creation of this covert form of meaning. An experimental study might be needed in order to determine the actual degree of involvement of the audience of a given work as it is indicated by the degree of influence or manipulation that is exerted on their assessment of or reaction to the situation presented by the ironist. It might be worth measuring the actual readers' responses to ironic communication, the degree of effect operated on their reactions and evaluation of particular characters because of the use of irony, as opposed to their reaction to characters or events presented non-ironically or in an openly negative manner. This study has attempted, however, to track down and detect an ironist's own reaction and attitude towards what is being told through the examination of the organisation of the various components of a narrative as delineated in narratology. It has further argued that the selection and organisation of what is worth telling and the manner in which it is perceived and is intended to be perceived reflect to a great extent the attitude adopted and communicated towards it. The title, the epigraph and the note are introductory elements to a narrative that can provide useful means for the manifestation of irony given the voice splitting or intertextuality *par excellence* that they display. The

temporal organisation of a particular narrative can betray a lot about the attitude of its narrator to the events and characters portrayed. The split between the act of narration and that of focalisation, for its part, can be a potential source of ironic communication, especially when it is seen as connected to the question of speech and thought representation. The various ways in which these techniques can be exploited for irony and the effects they produce on the perception of the events and the characters of a particular narrative, and the way narrators perceive themselves in these narratives constitute a main preoccupation of this thesis.

Sperber and Wilson's account of irony has been extremely helpful in providing the basis and principle on which this study of irony in the discourse of narrative fiction has heavily relied. The main shortcoming I have discerned in this account (and that of other pragmatists') has consisted in the focus placed on short sentences and simple one-to-one exchanges. I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis that the theory is applicable to, and expandable to cover longer stretches of discourse. The directions of investigation it has opened are no less significant than the solutions it has provided at the outset. It has efficiently blended with other theories and contributed in the elucidation of irony in the discourse of narrative fiction - where the layeredness of the discourse lends itself particularly to irony, but creates problems in pinning down where in that elusive maze, the irony is located.

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