Linguistic Means of Achieving Humorous Effects in Kurt Vonnegut's Novel Galápagos

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Master's Thesis

LINGUISTIC MEANS OF ACHIEVING HUMOROUS EFFECTS IN KURT VONNEGUT'S NOVEL *GALÁPAGOS*

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Summary

It is ingrained in our nature to want to relieve stress, pass time, or even utter dissatisfaction through humor. This master's thesis tells the story of humor from its very beginnings, gives an overview of the most important findings in the field of humor, and presents the main three recent theories of humor – Theory of Incongruity, Theory of Superiority, and Theory of Release. Moreover, after dealing with humor as such, this thesis focuses on the linguistic means of achieving humorous effect in Kurt Vonnegut's satirical novel *Galápagos*. Even though irony, sarcasm, and satire can be seen as separate categories of humor, as will be shown in this thesis, I believe that Kurt Vonnegut is a prime example of why it is better to view them as a whole when it comes to utilizing humor in literature to achieve a greater purpose than merely causing others to laugh. In the final part of the thesis practical examples taken from Vonnegut's novel are provided and fitted into the category of irony and/or sarcasm referred to in the theoretical part of the thesis. In principle, there are two main aims of this thesis. The first one is to show from a linguistic perspective that humor in literature can be an effective means of achieving much more than just a humorous effect. The second aim of the thesis is, on the one hand, to demonstrate that Vonnegut's humor is largely based on mechanisms of irony, which Vonnegut uses to critique human intelligence and make fun of human pretensions and the randomness of life, and also that Galápagos a prime example of a satirical novel on the other hand.

Key words: humor, modern theories of humor; sarcasm, irony, satire; Kurt Vonnegut

1. Introduction

Having a good laugh whilst exchanging a back-and-forth banter with other humans around you has been a part of humanity forever. It is ingrained in our nature to want to relieve stress, pass time, or even utter dissatisfaction through humor. Humor enriches our charisma and offers a sanctuary for the tortured soul. Accordingly, humor has been an engaging topic for great philosophers, like Aristotle and Plato. Since it plays a major part in human lives in more than one way, it was not only the Greeks who sought to unveil the regularities and universalities of humor. Through centuries scholars of various disciplines such as behaviorists and linguists have attempted to categorize and define humor with the intent to shine new light upon this at the same time simple, yet very complex phenomenon. Nonetheless, even though we have reached the point of greater comprehension of humor, its powers, and traits, to this day humor to many remains a mystery. This Master's thesis tells the story of humor from its very beginnings, gives an overview of the most important findings in the field of humor, and presents the main three recent theories of humor. After dealing with humor as such, this thesis focuses on the linguistic means of achieving humorous effects in Kurt Vonnegut's satirical novel *Galápagos*. Furthermore, to provide additional information and a deeper understanding of the novel that are needed for the last part of the thesis (in which ways of achieving a humorous effect in *Galápagos* are exemplified), the reader gets to know the author and the novel's plot. Even though irony, sarcasm, and satire can be seen as separate categories of humor, as will be shown in this thesis, I believe that Vonnegut is a good example of why it is better to view them as a whole when it comes to utilizing humor in literature to achieve a greater purpose than merely causing others to laugh. In the final part of the thesis practical examples taken from the novel are provided and fitted into the category of irony and/or sarcasm referred to in the second part of the thesis. In principle, there are two main aims of this thesis. The first one is to show from a linguistic perspective that humor in literature can be an effective means of achieving much more than just a humorous effect. The second aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that this humor is largely based on irony, through which Vonnegut critiques human intelligence and makes fun of human pretensions and the randomness of life. This makes *Galápagos* a prime example of a satirical novel.

2. Classification of Modern Theories of Humor

"However commonplace it is in everyday life, humor seems to be rather elusive and unpindownable as a theoretical concept. However, this has not prevented scholars of various disciplines [...] from probing into the topic of humor, which has, more often than not, resulted

in ‘epistemological hairsplitting’.” (Attardo 1994:1) This Master’s thesis will not get into reviewing all the existing theories, for problems involved in defining and classifying humor are manifold. Instead, attention is drawn to Salvatore Attardo’s and Victor Raskin’s (1994; 2001; 2018) overview of the three most prominent modern theories of humor – theories of incongruity, superiority, and release. Nonetheless, before the development of semantic theories of humor in the 1980s, which pushed them to the margins of linguistic conversation, “for a long time, puns were assumed to be the sole purview of the linguistics of humor” (Attardo 2018: 89). Therefore, after reviewing theories of incongruity, superiority, and release, this thesis presents Attardo’s recapitulation for the universality of the linguistic mechanism used in puns, that is humorous wordplay.

2.1. Theory of Incongruity

At the center of modern Incongruity theories of humor is “the mismatch between two ideas in the broadest possible sense”, as Attardo puts it (1994: 48). The roots of modern Incongruity theories of humor may be traced back to German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer who believed that laugher is the most noticeable sign of a direct result of the incongruous relationship between mental representations of events, ideas, social expectations, and so forth. Schopenhauer formulates the main postulate of Incongruity theories in the following fashion:

> The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. (Attardo 1994: 48)

However, Raskin (1984: 32) points out that this paradox of two conflicting ideas must somehow be brought together or made similar so that laughter arises as the consequence of the synthesis of these seemingly two unsuitable circumstances, which he exemplifies with the following joke:

> “Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.”
>
> (American, 20th century)

In this situation, the doctor’s wife first responds negatively to the whispering patient’s question of whether the doctor is at home, but afterward, she whispers to the patient to come in,

nonetheless. The fact that the doctor is absent creates an expectation that the patient with the bronchial whisper should try visiting some other time when the doctor is in, which would be the most suitable course of action for the given situation. In contrast to this, the age and appearance of the doctor's wife coupled with the unexplained manner in which she delivers the joke's punchline, that is the unexpected whispering invitation to come in, is what creates the incongruity. Raskin notes that "[the punch line] provides a shift from one level of abstraction to another, and the shift takes place 'in a space of seconds'" (1984: 33). About this joke suddenly "the situation of adultery is imposed on the hearer who will fail to get the joke if he does not recognize that new situation. The two situations are similar to the extent that they overlap. Their overlap is related to the invitation to come in which would have come forth also if the doctor had been at home." (Raskin 1984: 32).

2.2. Theory of Superiority

As explained in section 2.1., the Theory of Incongruity is concerned with the object of humor. On the other hand, the Superiority Theory of humor, by Raskin referred to as "humor based on hostility, superiority, malice, aggression, derision or disparagement" (1984: 36) looks at "the affective response that often accompanies comic amusement, which it maintains is an enjoyable feeling of superiority to the object of amusement" (Lintott 2016: 347). Superiority theories of humor date back to the earliest thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, who highlighted the negative element of humor, namely its quality to hurt others. For Aristotle, comedy was "an imitation of men worse than average," while Plato maintained that "malice or envy is at the root of comic enjoyment and that we laugh at the misfortunes of others for joy that we do not share them" (Raskin 1984: 36). It was in the mid-17th century when English philosopher Thomas Hobbes put forth the gist of this theory saying that "[t]he passion of laughter is nothing else but *sudden glory* [sic] arising from some sudden conception of some *eminency* [sic] in ourselves, by *comparison* [sic] with the *infirmity* [sic] of others, or with our own formerly […]" (Raskin 1984: 36). In other words, the theory of superiority advocates the view that humor is a way of making oneself feel better or more important by dismissing the importance of others, mocking some of their negative physical or character traits or simply laughing at some minor mishaps, such as slipping on a banana peel, whereby laughing about it does not affect the harshness of the fall whatsoever. Naturally, this approach to humor does not do much good since it sees hostility as the basis of humor.

The proposer of an entire theory of evolution based on hostility, Albert Rapp, argues that before humor, wit, or ridicule existed, humor was seen as the laugh of triumph in the primitive all-out duel in the forests, as "a duel without the physical showdown". Over time three distinctive types of such "thrashing laughter" evolved: ridicule, the contest of wits, and finally the suppression of laughter, i.e. triumphant laughter after defeating one's repressor. (Rapp 1948: 279-280).

Sheila Lintott (2016: 347) adds that a good deal of our laughter in comedy is directed at misfortune, presented in such a way as to elicit amusement rather than outrage, tears or compassion". It can be therefore stated that the theory of superiority, despite ascribing humor a hostile character, does not view humor as an exclusively hostile phenomenon, as it can sometimes also be one of the signals of wit and wisdom, or even closeness to somebody:

> That man can take a cruel barbarian gesture and make it into what is (at times) an accepted token of friendship and affection, is (…) one of his most notable achievements, a hopeful augury for the future, and right now a very welcome one. (Rapp 1948: 279)

Noteworthy is that the most important prerequisite for a successful merging of ridicule and love is tolerance, which, according to Rapp, should be accompanied by mellowness in the tonality of deliverance.

A good example of this theory put into practice would be the character of Sheldon Cooper in the famous American sitcom *The Bing Bang Theory*. He plays one of the four main male characters, all of whom are employed at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, USA. Much of the humor in the series, just like the banter between the main characters, focuses therefore on science, that is scientific theories and the latest news, which adds to the general impression of them being portrayed as "nerds".[1] Sheldon, obviously with an above-average intelligence quotient is firmly determined to stick to his own opinions and extremely habitual way of living, all of which often do not correspond well to those of Penny, one of the three main female characters. Penny plays an attractive, outgoing young woman who drops out of community college to pursue her career as an aspiring actress. Her lack of formal education and well-developed social skills set her apart from the rest of the male characters.

[1] According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a nerd is defined as "a person devoted to intellectual, academic, or technical pursuits or interests" and "an unstylish or socially awkward person". (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nerd, last accessed on December 19, 2023)

This stark contrast between Sheldon's and Penny's ways of life and social calibration provides fertile ground for humor based on the Theory of superiority. Even though Sheldon is on an intellectually far greater level than Penny, Penny is incomparably better at communication and socially more *acceptable* when it comes to everyday life situations. In episode 18 of the fourth season, there is a scene in which one of the male characters wants to show a magic trick to the other members of their group. While everybody else seems to be enjoying themselves, Sheldon keeps missing the main point of the card tricks and keeps constantly playfully mocking others for playing along. At one point Penny tries to explain to Sheldon that "[n]ot knowing [the card] is part of the fun", only to get one of Sheldon's typical inconsiderate responses: "'Not knowing's part of the fun'. Was that the motto of your community college?".[2]

2.3. Theory of Release

According to the Release Theory humor is perceived as a "release", that is a discharge of built-up tension because of one's psyche, energy, or external factors, such as social conventions or laws. Humans are forced to operate under many constraints, which after all separates us from animals. Some of the constraints are not merely the widely accepted social norms, but also within our thinking apparatus – morality, logic, and vocabulary. Every sentence we utter or write needs to be thought through in advance before it gets out in the world, which puts each of us under great pressure not to be perceived by others as being incompetent, weak, or simply boring – for we risk falling victim to the mocking of the more dominant as was discussed in the previous chapter. One sign of the human brain handling the tensity of a situation or seeking liberation from various constraints is when we say mid-conversation "Oh, don't mind me. I am just talking nonsense" or "I hope that you get what I want to say". Another way, which is at the same time much more productive, is through humor:

> Every aspect of our existence, from the most trivial to the most profound, is molded by group expectations. It should come as no surprise, then, that the sight of a comic ignoring conventions excites us… because it provides us, vicariously, a moment of freedom from the prisons of our adjustments. (Mindess 1971)

[2] "The Prestidigitation Approximation". *The Bing Bang Theory*, created by Chuck Lore and Bill Prady, Season 4, Episode 18, 10 Mar 2011.

Although it is not the only one, "[t]he best-known theory of this kind is apparently the one proposed by Freud" (Raskin 1984: 38), who advocated that it is in human nature to prefer taking the easy road:

> [I]t cannot be doubted that it is easier and more convenient to diverge from a line of thought we have embarked on than to keep to it, to jumble up things that are different rather than to contrast them and, indeed, that is *especially* [sic] convenient to admit as valid methods of inference that are rejected by logic and, lastly, to put words or thoughts together without regard to the condition that they ought also to make sense. (Raskin 1984: 38)

Sigmund Freud (1960), developed the Pleasure Principle. He argued that the pleasure of making jokes was psychological more than anything else. According to him, the pleasure in the case of a "tendentious joke", as he called them, arises from the purpose being satisfied. It is nevertheless often the case that no matter how much such jokes offered a way of completely avoiding the emotional pain, they are not able to give the incentive to laugh. He distinguishes two types of such jokes.

The first variety is when the release of tension through a joke is due to an external obstacle which is then evaded by the joke. For example, there is a hypothetical situation in which a man and a woman are two colleagues at work. They happen to work the same shifts very frequently, which makes them spend a lot of time together. The man eventually takes a liking to the woman and decides to do something about it. One day he summons up the courage to go speak to her: "Hey, I like you a lot. What are my chances of bringing you out on a date?" The woman answers: "One in a million". The man responds with hope and optimism: "Great, so you are saying that I actually do stand a chance!".

In this situation, although the external factor, i.e. the woman's answer, should imply that they will practically never indulge in any kind of romance, the man does not confront the situation by being sad but rather avoids the negative emotional pain through humor.

The second variety of jokes whose purpose is to release tension is when there is an internal obstacle that should normally be regarded as an issue, but gets resolved through a joke. Let us imagine another hypothetical situation. A man of short stature walks into a crowded pub to have a beer. Already having drunk his first beer, he makes himself comfortable and waits for the bartender to come and serve him another one. However, the bartender is nowhere to be seen, so he decides against the second beer and walks up to the counter to pay. He hears a cheerful

crowd of drunk people talking to each other. He sees the person in charge of issuing beverages, but nobody notices him standing there due to his height. Within seconds he screams at the top of his lungs: “Look guys, I have had a beer and I would like to pay for it, but I’m coming up a little short”.

Unlike the first hypothetical situation in which the woman not liking the man was an external obstacle, in this case, the obstacle is not found externally, but it is the man’s short stature that makes it difficult for everybody else in the crowded pub to notice him – the obstacle is therefore internal. Instead of being apologetic about standing in the way, he decides to use humor as a way of getting attention to himself standing there in front of the bar counter and ends up paying for his drink.

2.4. Puns

Salvatore Attardo (2018) highlights the resurgence of interest in examining puns after they have been marginalized for more than two decades because of the advent of modern linguistic theories of humor reviewed in the previous sections. Since academic research of wordplay is burdened by many terminological problems, this chapter solely concentrates on puns, “a textual occurrence in which a sequence of sounds must be interpreted with reference to a second sequence of sounds, which may, but need not, be identical to the first sequence, for the full meaning of the text to be accessed” (Attardo 2018: 91). Puns would, in other words, be those instances of wordplay, which assume two or more senses, even though they need not consist of two or more words. The discrepancy between the two or more senses naturally generates incongruity. Nevertheless, “puns do not consist of incongruity alone but must have a resolution aspect as well, or otherwise they would be indistinguishable from mere incongruous or ambiguous statements” (ibid., 99). Puns can therefore be put in the category of the Incongruity theory of humor.

Regarding linguistic mechanisms supporting puns, there are several ambiguity-based principles based on which puns can function. The most common one is lexical ambiguity, which falls in the morphological category, like in the sentence “Iraqi head seeks arms” (ibid., 92). Two lexical ambiguities can be found in this pun. Firstly, *head* as a body part vs. a man in charge of an army, and secondly *arms* as a body part vs. weapons.

Secondly, even though the syntactic ambiguity principle is much less widespread in puns, it is still worth referring to. For example, in the pun “Squad helps dog bite victim” (ibid., 92), the syntactic role of *bite* is not clear. On the one hand, it can be viewed as the head of a

verb phrase in a complex transitive pattern, and also as part of a noun phrase *dog bite*, which itself serves as a premodifier of the noun *victim.*

Attardo (2018) also includes an overview of Annarita Guidi's (2012) empirical study of puns. She constructed a corpus of 204 puns from fifteen different languages spanning twelve different language families. In her study, Guidi detected that not all mechanisms are present in all languages. However, her study did reveal that all the puns in all the languages are accounted for by one or more of ambiguity-based principles – lexical or syntactic ones. Moreover, concerning the relative inferiority of syntactic puns in comparison to lexical-ambiguity puns when it comes to their rate of occurrence, both Attardo and Guidi believe that syntactic puns are more difficult to perceive and process, which in the end makes them less favored.

3. Mechanisms of Irony, Sarcasm and Satire

Verbal humor can be analyzed from different points of view. In this thesis, a semantic approach to verbal humor and the mechanisms of irony, sarcasm, and satire are applied. In other words, we explain the preconditions that have to be met for an ironical, sarcastic, or satirical utterance to be considered ironical, sarcastic, or satirical respectively. Before turning our attention to these three subcategories of humorous utterances, a definition of humor is needed first.

Victor Raskin (1979: 326) claims that humor with all its philosophical, psychological, and physiological aspects has been the object of pondering of many thinkers for centuries, but that a unified definition of humor to this day has not been agreed upon. Yet, he enumerates several philosophical explanations of humor which regard it as "a ridicule of human fault or error (Aristotle), an exhibition of superiority over somebody else (Stendhal), an attempt to belittle a person's achievements or a cause of high stature (Bain), a way of lowering somebody's value (Propp, Stern)" – which belong to the theory of superiority – and "a metamorphosis of tense expectation into nothing (Kant), a switch of one's mind and attention from something big and significant to something small and insignificant (Spencer)" – which belong to the theories of incongruity.

What all of these explanations have in common is that they all include the notion of duality: for Aristotle this is the opposition between right and wrong, for Stendhal the duality is represented in the relationship between the superior and the inferior as is in a way for Bain, too, for Propp and Stern this is the high value versus the low value, whereas for Kant and Spencer this is the difference between what is to be expected and the final result and the opposition

between the significant and the insignificant. Similarly, regardless of its type and subcategory, humor (and language as such in fact) also works following this principle, the two sources for understanding the meaning of any sentence – humorous or non-humorous – being the lexicon and our knowledge of certain things about the world we live in. Moreover, when it comes to those utterances whose purpose is to produce a comical effect there is also the interconnection between the literal meaning of a sentence, which one understands at first glance, and the figurative, implied one, which is to be understood symbolically.

All of these three subcategories of humor also depend on this duality between the literal and the deeper meaning of a sentence. Having first presented several philosophical explanations of humor and the basic notion of duality upon which humor and language rest, I now focus on explaining how irony, sarcasm, and satire work. For this particular explanation, I rely on Roger Kreuz's (2020) taxonomy.

> Sarcasm, in particular, is a topic of inquiry for experimental psychologists and linguists, because it illuminates many important aspects of communication and miscommunication. (Kreuz 2020)

Note how Kreuz here emphasizes not only successful communication, but also refers to "the failure to make information or your ideas and feelings clear to somebody" (OALD 'miscommunication'). A question arises why do people try to communicate on a deeper level of meaning, the humorous quality of the utterance notwithstanding, if there is a chance of misunderstanding each other despite communication being reduced to the primary meaning of words and sentences? The main reason why one should not restrict oneself to the use of the literal and direct way of communicating one's needs, feelings, or ideas is the nature of the English language. When it comes to the English language, it simply does not like the "use of the imperative and makes extensive use of interrogative and conditional forms" (Wierzbicka 1985: 145). In other words, to put it more simply and to provide an example, should you find yourself in a room with poor air quality in the furthermost corner of the room away from the window, it would be natural to ask somebody present in that room to open a window for you to let some fresh air in. However, instead of issuing a command, no matter how cautious about the wording they might be, the Anglo-Saxons tend to express their wishes using questions. They avoid ordering somebody to open the window. Luckily, English offers a wide range of questions, which can be more or less tentative depending on one's choice of wording:

(1) Would you mind opening the window?

Will you open the window?
Won't you open the window?
Open the window, won't you?

These questions, which are requests, are called speech acts and have been analyzed by two Anglo-Saxon philosophers and linguists, John L. Austin and John Searle (1962; 1979) who put forth the Speech Act Theory. Such interrogatives belong to the class of performative utterances since their primary purpose is to not merely get a verbal response from the interlocutor but to get something done, in this case, to get the window opened. These indirect requests should therefore, according to Kreuz (2020), be regarded as a subcategory of metaphor. The reason why Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory is discussed here is that irony, sarcasm, and satire heavily rely on one of the key components of these performative utterances – not questions – namely, on the *perlocutionary act*, "which refers to the act of the speaker in eliciting a certain response from the hearer, or in making an effect on the hearer. For instance, the speaker, through his/her performative, may want the hearer to be convinced, persuaded, delighted, etc." (Mabaquiao 2018: 8). This correlates to the basic use of verbal irony and/or sarcasm – people say things they do not mean. And they do this not because the literal language with its clear-cut messages fails to be understood or does not serve the purpose of communicating one's thoughts, but because communication [devoid of nuance, innuendo, humor, and poetic turns of phrase] would be straightforward, but also incredibly dull. Nonliteral turns of phrase, like variety, are the spice of life – and of language (Kreuz 2020: 12).

To sum up, humor and language presuppose several notions of duality, the most important one for achieving a humorous effect being the difference between the literal and nonliteral meaning, without which human communication would be rendered highly functional and effective, but at the same time completely dry and nondescript. At this point, similarities and differences between irony, sarcasm, and satire need to be considered.

3.1. Irony

Before defining irony, it is necessary to emphasize that the main focus of this thesis is verbal and not situational irony[3], the difference between them being that verbal irony depends

[3] Situational irony is excluded from analysis in this thesis for practical reasons. The thesis analyzes Kurt Vonnegut's use of irony in a novel of his so dealing with situational irony would be unproductive.

on what is said and the way it is formulated, whereas situational irony implies that something that has happened is ironic:

> [T]he fact that a fireman's house burnt down as a result of his carelessness while he was giving a lecture on fire prevention, or the fact that a health fanatic contracts a fatal illness, could be perceived as ironic. (Holdcroft 1983: 494)

In indirect speech acts, Searle (1979) assumes that two illocutions are expressed simultaneously – the primary and the secondary illocution. The secondary illocution stands for the literal expressed statement, question, or the like, and the primary illocution for what is meant, the speaker's intention. Since the secondary and the primary illocution are not the same in indirect speech acts, the listener must possess a mental mechanism to be able to switch from the secondary to the primary illocution. Searle offers an explanation, which he calls the Inference theory. Inference is in this case another other word for the process of how one arrives at a particular solution through reasoning. According to Searle, one can infer the actual speech act through a process of inference. In doing so, one must be careful of three things. Firstly, one must calculate the literal meaning of the speech act. Secondly, one must find a reason through the process of deduction why the literal meaning cannot be meant. Finally, one must decipher the intended meaning from the literal meaning of the speech act and the situation. (Levinson 1983: 270)

Having said that, irony could be defined as a deliberate exploitation of Searle's inference theory whereby the interlocutor is forced to engage in inferring the intended meaning of a sentence even though the same could be said openly in a more straightforward fashion. Kreuz (2020: 67) adds that irony should not be mistaken for coincidence or unlikelihood because these two lack the interconnection between the occurrence of seemingly ironical events.

He also distinguishes between several figurative forms which, according to him, irony is based on and associated with. These are metaphors, idioms and euphemisms, overstatement and understatement, indirect requests, rhetorical questions, and antiphrasis. In the following paragraphs we briefly discuss each of them.

3.1.1. Metaphor

Traditional semantics sees metaphor as a condensed comparison – tenor A = B vehicle (what you compare the tenor to). The contemporary approach began in 1980 when Lakoff and

Johnson stated in their book *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphors are the liveliest part of language, because they are a part of everyday life and communication, which means that metaphors have to arise from our conceptual system, i.e. out of our common knowledge that is shared by all members of the community. In other words, metaphors are realized conceptually and not merely on a linguistic level (A = B is conceptual and does not have to be linguistically expressed). Moreover, metaphors are therefore not random but are systematically organized so that we can use them to understand one thing in terms of another. Because of this, it can be claimed that the way humans think is largely metaphorical. For example, *Luna's bright smile was enough to enchant the young Lukas* means that Lukas fell in love with Luna because of her bright smile, whereby the conceptual metaphor in our mind would be LOVE = MAGIC.

3.1.2. Idioms and Euphemisms

Idioms and euphemisms can be defined as utterances or sentences which are in no obvious way connected to their referents, but which simply through time become conventionalized in language and acquire a very specific meaning. For example, *bite the dust* is an idiom that serves as a euphemism. Its meaning is not that you have to put dust in your mouth or, even worse, put your mouth on a dusty item of your choice and then bite it, but it means 'to die': "Thousands of small businesses bite the dust every year" (OALD 'bite').

3.1.3. Overstatements and Understatements

Overstatement and understatement play the same card of exaggerating the truth to emphasize the speaker's feelings towards the issue at hand, whereby overstatement does so in a way that it makes sentences seem more serious or more pronounced when speaking about dimensions/time/value, etc., whereas understatements make sentences less serious and less pronounced. For example, a woman is sitting at a restaurant and orders a glass of red wine which she has to wait for around ten minutes. Overstating would be to say that she had to wait for ages until the wine finally arrived, while understating would be to say that she had not even managed to blink before the wine was already there.

3.1.4. Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are not questions at all, besides the fact that there is a question mark at the end of it. For example, by saying "Just who do you think you are?" (Kreuz 2020: 14) one expresses a feeling of discomfort and even a slight insult. In other words, rhetorical questions express the speaker's annoyance or frustration with a situation at hand and do not require a proper answer other than an apology or words of condolences.

3.1.5. Antiphrasis

Antiphrasis involves uttering the diametrically opposite of what is being meant, which may lead to a conundrum when trying to make a distinction between an ironical statement and an antiphrasis. These two are not synonymous with each other - not every ironic statement implies meaning the exact opposite and not all examples of antiphrasis need to be understood ironically. "When somebody voices a complaint to a sympathetic coworker and she replies, 'Tell me about it!' she truly does intend the opposite (that is, don't tell me about it)" (Kreuz 2020: 14), which is not to be confused with an ironical response since it belongs to the category of conventionalized expressions for expressing solidarity.

3.2. Sarcasm

"Sarcasm involves constructing or exposing contradictions between intended meanings. It is the most common form of verbal irony – that is, allowing people to say exactly what they do not mean," claims Francesca Gino (2016), a behavioral scientist and professor at the Harvard Business School. Contrary to Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, according to which by saying one thing the speaker is achieving something else without being rude by explicitly requesting this to be done, Gino (2016: 20) refers to the 1997 research involving 32 participants where the participants consistently "rated sarcasm to be more condemning than literal statements". To put it in another way, sarcasm encourages the speaker's falsehearted intentions, such as to provoke angry reactions or to mock somebody. Holdcraft (1983: 495), for instance, claims that making sarcasm into a lowly form of irony does not require more than replacing one or more words with antonyms, like in the sentence *It was* considerate *[sic] of you to leave so* quietly *[sic]*, where an angry reaction is provoked exactly by saying the opposite – the intended meaning is rather 'It is inconsiderate of you to leave so noisily'.

On the other hand, sarcasm need not be exclusively treacherous, since "[s]arcasm's challenge is that the message sounds serious but should not be taken literally" (Gino 2016: 21).

Consequently, when trying to meet this challenge from either end of the spectrum, one needs to think outside of the box to come up with such a statement, which in itself facilitates not only more creative thinking but also richness of expression.

To illustrate, the character of Sheldon Cooper will be referred to once more. Kreuz (2020: 55) recalls a situation from *The Bing Bang Theory* in which Sheldon's friend gets upset by Sheldon's insufficiently supportive reaction to good news. Witnessing the conversation between them, Sheldon's roommate Leonard asks him: "Are you proud of yourself?" After considering the question for a moment, Sheldon answers: "In general, yes."

"By responding in this way, Sheldon commits several social sins at one go" (ibid.). Firstly, he is unable to comprehend the annoyance of his other friends, which makes him appear to be completely devoid of warmth or empathy. By asking him a rhetorical question, Leonard tries to use sarcasm as a way of communicating to him that he need not be so incompassionate, even though good news does not concern him. This way of bringing attention to somebody being annoyingly inconsiderate presupposes the other person's ability to read the situation at hand. Because of Sheldon's lack of social skills, he fails to understand Leonard's sarcastic question and gives a thought-through answer to an otherwise rhetorical question.

3.3. Satire

Nicholas Diehl (2013) compares mechanisms of satire, analogy, and moral philosophy and claims that satire is a literary mode with a clear moral purpose since satires often address moral problems by employing arguments to persuade either their readers or the targets of their criticism. According to Diehl, a text has to abide by several central points if it is to be considered satiric. Firstly, he argues that the main point of satire has to be an implicit argument, whereby the audience's central task is to understand this implicit argument. Secondly, satires are works of fiction that often utilize analogy to satirize real-world targets:

> These real-world targets may be as specific as particular individuals or as general as characteristic foibles of humanity, and it is clear that some satires may be enjoyed as fictions without any great understanding of the real-world target. But to succeed in its satirical aims, especially when the target is a particular individual or state of affairs, a satire must establish a recognizable relationship between that which is doing the satirizing and that which is being satirized, that is, between fiction and target. (Diehl 2013: 313)

Diehl claims that analogy is actually by far the most common mechanism for connecting satirizing fiction to the real-world target. Satire thus uses analogy in two ways. On the one hand, the analogy is a tool for the reader to identify the real-world target, and it serves the purpose of provoking the reader to adopt or reaffirm a critical attitude toward the target on the other. If the connection between the satirizing fiction and the real-world target is successfully sustained, the reader understands that fiction is standing in for the real-world target:

> To appreciate a particular work as satiric, an audience must keep in mind two distinct mental representations simultaneously: the literal meaning of a message and an awareness of a discrepancy between that message and the intention of its author. (Kreuz 2020: 71)

The intention is oftentimes criticizing somebody's or something's weakness or insufficiency through humor. Because "virtually all satirists use verbal irony and sarcasm extensively since these devices are especially well suited to the twin goals of being humorous and critical at the same time" (Kreuz 2020: 71), satire may be considered a blend of irony and sarcasm.

To conclude, unlike irony or sarcasm where there is no obligatory presence of the author's pretense to criticize – the pretense may simply be to utter unhappiness or the feeling of unease – the conceptual foundation of satire is the ability of the reader/interlocutor to recognize the author's pretense to criticize somebody or something through humor, or else satire is due to fail.

4. Humor in Literature

According to Salvatore Attardo (2001: 37-45), there are two schools of thought within linguistics whose focal point of analysis are longer humorous texts: the expansionists and the revisionists:

> The former group of scholars attempts to extend the linguistic analyses of jokes to longer humorous texts, while the latter tends to revise the joke theory in order to make it applicable to these longer texts. (Chłopicki 2017: 146)

In this chapter, we will discuss to what extent literature and humor overlap. Throughout centuries studying narratives has been an important issue of great interest not only to linguists of different persuasions but also to literary scholars and philosophers:

> For each work of literary art is the work of an author presenting a construct, something made, a meaningful, unified experience, controlled purposefully as we cannot know life to be controlled. In other words, a work of literary art embodies an attitude that is implicit in the work, whereas in real life we cannot satisfactorily discern God's attitude toward the reality of our experiences. This point of authorial attitude…is crucial to literature. (Hasley 1970:10)

Depending on whether one is the subject or object of humor, the mixed blessing principle applies to humor, especially with humor based on superiority. Similarly, since each work of literary art almost always reflects one's opinions and attitudes, it is bound to be subjective, which opens the possibility of analyzing it from multiple angles. In itself, this is essentially a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the fact that you can approach literature from different standpoints means that literature facilitates a diversity of opinions. *Per se*, this may be considered a blessing, but it is in human nature that everyone has an opinion. However, opinions oftentimes clash. There is also the saying that what is one man's trash is another man's treasure. Although narratives are primarily concerned with the story, that is the form, humor analysis "focuses not so much on the form as on the desired effect" (Chłopicki 2017: 143). This argument has been put forward by many linguists whose satisfactory definition of humor is often on a broader end of the spectrum, claiming that as long as a gesture, an utterance, or a piece of text is laughter-evoking, it may be considered to be humor. On the contrary, Attardo (1994: 4) points out that "[i]n other fields the importance of clear subdivisions is more keenly felt. Literary criticism is a good example." These variations in the desired effect are explained by three different theories of humor, which were dealt with in the second chapter of this thesis.

Similar to Aristotle's three-act structure, narratives and humor share a threefold structure which entails the Setup, the Confrontation, and the Resolution, which Chłopicki calls escalation, variation, and accumulation (2017: 145). The most important, and usually the part that to the greatest number of people matters the most, is the last one. Abbott Porter (2002: 60) also emphasizes the importance of closure in a narrative:

> What we can say is that closure is something we tend to look for in narratives. We look for it in the same way that we look for answers to questions or fulfillment of expectations. This would appear to be a natural human inclination. For this reason, the promise of closure has great rhetorical power in the narrative. Closure brings satisfaction to desire, relief to suspense, and clarity to confusion. It normalizes. It confirms the master plot. At

> the same time, we don't want closure too quickly. We seem to like the experience of remaining in doubt while moving toward closure. But even as I write this, I have to stop and remind myself that "we" refers to an immense number of very different people. Some of us demand closure and have little tolerance for narratives that don't provide it.

Firstly, one similarity between narratives and humor, which Abbott addresses, is that both are capable of raising suspense to the point where closure is wanted, although not always provided, as he notes. He goes further and believes that the mere promise, the initial assumption of closure has great power in narrative. As we have already seen in the Release theory of humor, the power of humor is to trigger the need in humans to relieve suspense or free themselves from the shackles of logic and common rules through humor.

Secondly, the starting premise of the study of humor in narrative was that humor plays an important role in creating the overall impression while reading a story. However, Chłopicki (2017: 163) maintains that "the nature of its presence is the subject of debate." He adds that various levels of narration and humor have been postulated, all of which play a significant role in interpreting a story which includes the duality of writer and reader, narrator and narratee:

> These levels are inextricably connected with the issue of point of view in a narrative, all trying to account for various direct and indirect ways in which the reader is given to understand that somebody's individual point of view is expressed in the story, often via somebody else's eyes or words (e.g. narrator's or character's). (Chłopicki 2017: 146)

In terms of the novel *Galapágos*, Vonnegut opted for the indirect approach of sharing his opinion through the ghost of Leonard Troutsky, who is one of the characters in the novel and the novel's narrator at the same time. Through many overly exaggerated, sarcastic comments about the human brain Troutsky, that is Vonnegut, gives a humorous account of all the reasons why passengers on the ship *Bahía de Darwin* misbehaved and acted in a way that is to be frowned upon, at least according to Troutsky, i.e. Vonnegut. For example, in the following citation, Vonnegut introduces one of the passengers:

> There was no mystery a million years ago as to how a thirty-five-year-old American male named James Wait, who could not swim a stroke, intended to get from the South American continent to the Galápagos Islands. He certainly wasn't going to squat on a natural raft of vegetable matter and hope for the best. He had just bought a ticket at his hotel in downtown Guayaquil for a two-week cruise on what was to be the maiden voyage of a

> new passenger ship called the *Bahía de Darwin* [sic], Spanish for "Darwin Bay." [sic] (Vonnegut 1985: 7)

The content of these introductory three sentences about James Wait could have been reduced to one. For instance: "One of the passengers was a thirty-five-year-old American named James Wait, who had just bought a ticket for a two-week cruise on what was to be the maiden voyage of a new passenger ship called the *Bahía de Darwin*." However, Vonnegut prepares the punchline by letting the reader know about Wait's inability to swim nonchalantly saying it is no mystery how he intended to get to the Galápagos Islands – by buying a ticket for a cruise ship. In between he adds a sarcastic comment stating the obvious. Vonnegut (1985: 8) proceeds by describing Wait's negative character traits, whereby he blames it all on the human brain:

> Ortiz himself was in no danger from him, but an unescorted woman who looked as though she had a little money, and who was without a husband and past childbearing, surely would have been. Wait had so far courted and married seventeen such persons—and then cleaned out their jewelry boxes and safe-deposit boxes and bank accounts, and disappeared. […] It is hard to believe nowadays that people could ever have been as brilliantly duplicitous as James Wait—until I remind myself that just about every adult human being back then had a brain weighing about three kilograms! There was no end to the evil schemes that a thought machine that oversized couldn't imagine and execute.

In this case, the indirect way in which the reader is given to understand Vonnegut's low opinion of criminals, such as James Wait, is through Troutsky's de-emphasizing the importance of being responsible for your behavior. Vonnegut achieves this by depicting the human brain as an oversized creature of its own capable of imagining and executing evil schemes.

5. About The Novel *Galápagos*

It is crucial to give some background information about the novel's plot and about the author as well, as that will help us understand the humorous examples analyzed in the last part of the thesis. Let us start with the novel itself.

Galápagos is a science-fiction novel set in 1986. It tells the story of a band of humans blatantly not suitable for each other on a shipwreck on the Galápagos Islands. After a global financial crisis and the appearance of a non-deadly disease that causes all humans on Earth to

be infertile, excluding the travelers on a fictional island in Ecuador called Santa Rosalia, they all face the extinction of the human species. The plot encompasses the time of over one million years during which, thanks to the laws of natural selection and evolution, their descendants, the only fertile humans left on the planet, eventually evolve into animal-like creatures resembling sea lions with fur replacing their skin, although still enjoying the privilege of being able to walk, catch their food and breed:

> Their arms have become flippers in which the hand bones are almost entirely imprisoned and immobilized. Each flipper is studded with five purely ornamental nubbins, attractive to members of the opposite sex at mating time. These are the tips of four suppressed fingers and a thumb. Those parts of people's brains that used to control their hands, moreover, simply don't exist anymore, and human skulls are now much more streamlined on that account. The more streamlined the skull, the more successful the fisher person. If people can swim as fast and far as fur seals now, what is to prevent their swimming all the way back to the mainland, whence their ancestors came? Answer: nothing. (Vonnegut 1985: 185–186)

Moreover, the one narrating this story of survival of the fittest is the ghost of Leon Trotsky Trout – a Vietnam War veteran and a military deserter who has been watching over humans for the last million years following his accidental decapitation while working on a passenger ship *Bahía de Darwin* trying to complete his research on humans: "I had chosen to be a ghost because the job carried with it, as a fringe benefit, license to read minds, to learn the truth of people's pasts, to see through walls, to be many places all at once, to learn in-depth how this or that situation came to be structured as it was, and to have access to all human knowledge" (Vonnegut 1985: 253). The aforesaid *Bahía de Darwin* was a ship intended for a celebrity cruise called 'Nature Cruise of the Century', which due to a chain of unconnected events like the advent of a new disease and the economic catastrophe ended up carrying a band of the last fertile humans to reach and survive on a previously uninhabited island in the Galápagos. Members of this group are the ship's captain Adolf von Kleist, girls from a cannibal tribe living in the Amazon rainforest of Ecuador called Kanka-bono, who eventually bear him numerous children, a Japanese girl born with a fur coat covering her body called Akiko Hiroguchi, a widow and a Biology teacher named Mary Hepburn. Although there are some other characters onboard as well, they are not listed here due to their insignificance to the novel's story.

5.1. Kurt Vonnegut's Life and His Humor

Having explained the general plot and context of the novel, it is now time for me to indulge in giving some additional pieces of information about Kurt Vonnegut himself.

The story of Kurt Vonnegut begins with his grandparents' emigration from Germany. As Charles J. Shields (2013) writes in *As It Goes*, his biography of Kurt Vonnegut, it is not certain how Vonnegut's mother Edith Sophia Lieber, and father Kurt Vonnegut Sr. came to be, "but he and Edith, four years his junior, had known each other since childhood". Both parents' families belonged to Indianapolis's wealthy German Americans, who gravitated to 'Das Deutsche Haus', the city's German cultural center. Together they had three children, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. being the youngest one born in 1922. At the time of his birth, his parents were still enjoying the fruits of the accumulated wealth of their ancestors, although the Prohibition in 1921 had caused a catastrophic downturn in his grandfather's brewery fortune. Frequent trips aboard a ship from New York to Hamburg to visit Vonnegut's aunts and uncles were nothing unusual, so a private education for the children went without saying. When home, "[t]he sense of humor in the house was *Schadenfreude* – very Germanic – taking pleasure in the misfortunes of others. […] Likewise, Kurt Jr., for the rest of his life had an odd (and sometimes disconcerting) habit of laughing suddenly in the middle of describing something unpleasant" (ibid.). Although they had three children together, neither Vonnegut's father nor his mother accepted their parental roles for they could afford others to do so. Thanks to the Vonneguts' cook and housekeeper, Ida Young, Kurt Vonnegut had somebody to talk to and to get some affection from. In October 1929, due to the Wall Street crash, the Vonneguts' wealth was further depleted, which ultimately affected his mother's mental health and made her turn on his father: "Late at night, and always in the privacy of our own home, and never with guests present, she expressed hatred for Father as corrosive as hydrofluoric acid" (ibid.). Vonnegut (1985: 255–256) speaks openly about this in *Galapágos*:

> I ran away from a real parent who had never once in anger laid a hand on me. But when I was too young to know any better, my father had made me his co-conspirator in driving my mother away forever. He had me jeering along with him at Mother [sic] for wanting to take a trip somewhere, to make some friends and have them over to dinner, to go to a movie or a restaurant sometime. I agreed with my father. I then believed that he was the greatest writer in the world, since that was all I could think to be proud of. We had no friends, and ours was the shabbiest house in the neighborhood, and we

> didn't even own a television set or an automobile. So why wouldn't I have defended him against my mother?

To escape his mother's insults, Vonnegut's father used to retreat to his artist's studio where he painted portraits. The emotional distress due to a gradual reduction of the family's wealth in combination with prescription medicine to deal with her mental issues resulted in his mother's suicide. Edith Vonnegut died in 1944 on Mother's Day, at the age of fifty-six from an overdose of sleeping pills.

In February of 1945, just a few months after his first deployment to Europe as an American soldier in World War II, Vonnegut survived the Allied bombing of Dresden. He was given the task of "finding the remains of residents smothered in basements by the firestorms" (Shields 2013). Fortunately, Vonnegut came back to the United States with minor health issues and shortly thereafter found employment as a reporter. His career as a writer began in 1950 as he received a $750 check for his *Report on the Barnhouse Effect*, his first published story.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007) was an American postmodern sci-fi writer above all known for his short stories and novels. His most renowned short stories and novels were written in the second half of the 20th century. Having experienced the loss of his mother on Mother's Day, being shipped overseas only to be captured by enemy soldiers, and then finally having survived the Allied bombing of Dresden – everything in a matter of half a year – he underwent a complete transformation. These events played an important role in shaping Vonnegut not only as a person but subsequently also as a writer. As a young child, he was deprived of love and emotional support from his parents, whereas in World War II he experienced physical violence. Having seen the scope of injustice humans can do to each other both emotionally and physically, Vonnegut consequently adopted a rather fatalistic outlook on the world, best represented in his cynical sense of humor – *Galapágos* included:

> This financial crisis, which could never happen today, was simply the latest in a series of murderous twentieth-century catastrophes that had originated entirely in human brains. From the violence people were doing to themselves and each other, and to all other living things, for that matter, a visitor from another planet might have assumed that the environment had gone haywire, that people were in such a frenzy because Nature was about to kill them all. (Vonnegut 1985: 25)

In the very opening sentence of this citation, where he is supposedly referring to the 20th-century Great Depression he witnessed as a child, Vonnegut starts with an unrealistic comment thus setting the tone for the rest of the brief explanation of the chain of events leading to the shipwreck he found himself in alongside with the other travelers. In addition to this and although he explicitly does not offer his view of why people were and are doing bad things to each other, by presenting what an extraterrestrial might think of it (under the pretense that there is a possibility of life on other planets and that it is plausible for something or somebody else to see and comprehend the earthly events), Vonnegut might have wanted to covertly paint the picture of his complete lack of understanding of the reasoning behind the horrific events he had witnessed before writing the novel.

John May (1972: 30) claims that *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* is set in the recognizable present; *Slaughterhouse-Five*, on the other hand, ranges freely over past, present, and future because its principal character, Billy Pilgrim, "has come unstuck in time", which means that *Galapágos* is not the only novel in which Vonnegut plays with the time in which the plot is set. Similarly to his semi-autobiographic anti-war novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut also hints at his World War II traumas in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater,* and *Galapágos*. All of this undoubtedly indicates that his war experience determined not only his seemingly chaotic style of writing but also the humor in his dark-themed, but light-hearted novels.

Overall, despite taking part in some of the most grievous horrors of the 20th century Vonnegut still shows in *Galapágos* an optimistic belief that there is still hope for the human race. For example, the epigraph to Book One (out of two) of the novel reads: "In spite of everything, I still believe people are really good at heart" (Vonnegut 1985). Having said that, it is important to note that although not mesmerized by human predispositions to engage in conflicts, Vonnegut in *Galápagos* still refrains from openly criticizing the world and takes a step back putting himself somewhat in the role of a homodiegetic narrator: "I was there too, but perfectly invisible" (Vonnegut 1985: 20). Judging by the fact that it is him who tells the story, he is true to be regarded as the narrator, but at the same time he challenges the role typically ascribed to the homodiegetic narrator by putting himself in the shoes of a ghost: "The *Bahía de Darwin* […] was a ghost ship […] I was the ghost of a ghost ship […]. So I was invisible as I stood next to Captain Adolf von Kleist on the bridge of *Bahía de Darwin* as we awaited the end of our first night at sea after our hasty departure from Guayaquil" (Vonnegut 1985: 219-220).

Having said that, how is it then possible for him to convey that he is in opposition to the wars described above and the ways of thinking of most people? In sum, it seems that it is the juxtaposition of Kurt Vonnegut's positive attitude towards the bare nature of humans along

with his not-so-optimistic "belief that people only do things to help themselves, rather than for good or sincere reasons" (OALD 'cynicism'), which he ascribes to the Darwinian concept of the nature's survival of the fittest, that facilitates and ensures the success of Vonnegut's mechanisms of humor based on irony, satire, and sarcasm. More on this in the following chapter.

Ryan Weppler (2011: 97) insists that one of the main hallmarks of post-1945 American literature, which Vonnegut is a member of, is a shift away from realism into skepticism, especially among novelists. While realism typically assumes the correlation between language and reality, this new skepticism is reflected in the novelists' loss of signifieds and referents:

> Resulting in part from this collapse of the distinction between language and reality, postwar novelists have new modes of representation for which scholars have proposed labels, including (historiographic) metafiction, fabulation, post-realism, antirealism, and black humor, with Vonnegut's fiction figuring prominently in each of these accounts.

Putting a label on somebody's life work is more often than not misleading and debatable at the very least, and "an excellent case in point is the current critical haste to designate Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. as a "black humorist" and the consequent determination apparently to keep him in that category", which Vonnegut personally accepts, but with demur: "It's just a convenient tag for reviewers" (Saal 1970: 34). In contrast to this, Vonnegut (1981) describes in *Palm Sunday* his identity as an author in the following lines:

> I am a member of what I believe to be the last recognizable generation of full-time, life-time American novelists. We appear to be standing more or less in a row. It was the Great Depression which made us similarly edgy and watchful. It was World War II which lined us up so nicely, whether we were men or women, whether we were ever in uniform or not. It was an era of romantic anarchy in publishing which gave us money and mentors, willynilly, when we were young — while we learned our craft. Words printed on pages were still the principal form of long-distance communication and stored information in America when we were young. No more. s

6. Mechanisms of Achieving Humorous Effects in *Galápagos*

The central claim of this Master's thesis is that *Galápagos* is a satirical novel. We have established that for a work of literary art to be satirical, it necessarily has to pertain to two realms of meaning, the literal one while reading the text, and the intended one. The intended meaning of a satirical novel is to express criticism of a real-world target, which the reader infers from the context of real-world events using analogy.

Bearing in mind all that is stated in the previous chapters about the novel's plot and Kurt Vonnegut himself, speaking more broadly, on the one hand, this novel may be read as Vonnegut's affirmation of Darwin's theory of biological evolution,[4] but also as his refutation of the view that humans are the ultimate achievement of evolution.

In this final chapter of my thesis, representative examples of irony, sarcasm, and satire from *Galapágos* are enumerated, whereby the following pattern will be followed: first I present a citation from the novel after which the reader is presented with the explanation of how the humorous mechanism was employed by Vonnegut in that example.

1

> The killers left the marine iguanas alone, believing them to be inedible. Two years would pass before their discovery that partially digested seaweed in the bellies of these creatures was not only a tasty hot meal, ready cooked, but a cure for vitamin and mineral deficiencies which had troubled them up to then… Some people, moreover, could digest this purée better than others, so that they were healthier and nicer looking— more desirable as sexual partners. So, the Law of Natural Selection went to work, with the result, a million years later, that human beings can now digest seaweed for themselves, without the intervention of marine iguanas, which they leave alone. That is such a much nicer arrangement for everyone. (Vonnegut 1985: 261)

By comparing partially digested seaweed in the bellies of marine iguanas to a ready-cooked, tasty hot meal, Vonnegut is euphemistically diminishing the repulsiveness of it, which he later refers to as 'purée'.[5] This irony creates incongruity between the expected reaction to a digested

[4] Darwinism or Darwin's theory of evolution states that all organisms regardless of species come to be and evolve through the natural selection of minute, inherited genome variations that over an extended period improve the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce and increase its probability to do so.

[5] "[F]ood in the form of a thick liquid made by pressing and mixing fruit or cooked vegetables in a small amount of water" (OALD 'purée', https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/puree_1?q=puree, last accessed on November 8, 2022)

seaweed in the bellies of iguanas and his choice of wording. Moreover, in the last sentence, Vonnegut applauds humans for not killing iguanas for food anymore. He calls it an 'arrangement'. This time the incongruity arises between the fictional world of *Galápagos* and the real world, since the act of arranging anything presumes that humans and iguanas agree to this particular way of organizing food for humans, which both would find acceptable.

2

> At any moment we will be seeing Hood Island—the only nesting place in the world for the waved albatross, the largest bird in the archipelago. And so on.
> Those albatrosses, incidentally, are still around today and still nesting on Hood. They have wingspreads as great as two meters and remain as committed as ever to the future of aviation. They still think it's the coming thing. (Vonnegut 1985: 250)

Vonnegut is here describing the physical features of albatrosses and their behavior. The mechanism he uses here consists of first casually stating that these animals reside on the island, so as not to hint at what he is going to say next. He then gives information about their wingspan, which is known for a fact. This serves as a build-up for his ironical comment, which entails personifying a bird species as if albatrosses knew what aviation is and as if they had the possibility of deciding whether to remain committed to it or to abort it.

3

> His friend on the ground asked him what it felt like to give something like that its freedom. He replied that he had at last found something that was more fun than sexual intercourse.
> The young colonel's feelings at the moment of release had to be transcendental, had to be entirely products of that big brain of his, since the plane did not shudder or yaw or suddenly climb or dive when the rocket departed to consummate its love affair.
> […]
> And that was that.
> The only residue of the event in the stratosphere had to be in Reyes's big brain or nowhere. He was happy. He was humble. He was awed. He was drained.
> […]
> He didn't know all that much about how the machinery worked anyway. Such knowledge was for specialists. In war, as in love, he was a fearless, happy-go-lucky adventurer.

> The launching of the missile, in fact, was virtually identical with the role of male animals in the reproductive process.
>
> Here was what the colonel could be counted on to do: deliver the goods in an instant. Yes—and that rod which became a dot and then a speck and then nothingness so quickly was somebody else's responsibility now. All the action from now on would be on the receiving end. He had done his part. He was sweetly sleepy now—and amused and proud. (Vonnegut 1985: 188-189)

Vonnegut is using irony here to depict Lieutenant Colonel Guillermo Reyes' job of flying a fight-bomber. His job reminds him of sexual intercourse – this is what Vonnegut is here ironically commenting. In this example, Vonnegut employs the conceptual metaphor WAR = (MAKING) LOVE to show Reyes' relative (in)significance and lack of responsibility during the bomb release. Vonnegut achieves this by his choice of wording, usually connoted to sex one way or another: *consummate love*, *to be drained*, *adventurer*, *deliver the goods in an instant*, *rod*, *sweetly sleepy*.

Nonetheless, this may also be understood satirically. The fictional target of satire here is Lieutenant Colonel Guillermo Reyes, whereas the real-world target being criticized by Vonnegut are men indulging in irresponsible sexual behavior and/or fighting a war by blindly following orders. Knowing that Vonnegut participated in World War II, the analogy in this satirical example is that both actions require little time, may bear serious consequences, and are often ended by men avoiding taking responsibility for their actions.

4

> What made marriage so difficult back then was yet again that instigator of so many other sorts of heartbreak: the oversize brain. That cumbersome computer could hold so many contradictory opinions on so many different subjects all at once, and switch from one opinion or subject to another one so quickly, that a discussion between a husband and wife under stress could end up like a fight between blindfolded people wearing roller skates.
>
> […]
>
> The Hiroguchis, for example…were then changing their opinions of themselves and each other, and of love and sex and work and the world and so on, with lightning speed.
>
> […]

> Of what possible use was such emotional volatility, not to say craziness, in the heads of animals who were supposed to stay together long enough, at least, to raise a human child, which took about fourteen years or so? (Vonnegut 1985: 66)

In this example Vonnegut uses overstatement to exaggerate Trout's feelings towards the Hiroguchis' contradictory ways of thinking about one's significant other – he does so by comparing unreasonable quick shifting of emotions from positive to negative ones, and vice versa, to blindfolded people fighting on roller skates, whereby the similarity of these two situations is the lack of control of verbal and nonverbal actions and the lack of purpose of the whole situation. Since it cannot be concluded from the text alone whether Vonnegut is here simply expressing that such quick emotional fluctuations exist, or whether he is criticizing this human personality trait, this example may be considered both ironic and satirical. However, having ended his thought with a rhetorical question, it seems more likely that Vonnegut just wanted to humorously point to the fact that these things happen in human communication rather than wanting to be critical of it.

Overall, *Galápagos* employs several linguistic mechanisms of humor that contribute to its satirical tone. Vonnegut most frequently uses irony to highlight the absurdities and contradictions in human behavior and societal norms. For example, the idea that human evolution has led to a species with oversized brains that cause more harm than good is presented ironically to critique human intelligence and its supposed superiority. Furthermore, he often uses understatements to emphasize the ridiculousness of certain situations. By describing catastrophic events or profound concepts matter-of-factly or trivially, he underscores their absurdity and invites readers to reflect on their true significance. In more than one instance in the novel Vonnegut attributes absurdities and societal norms to the "oversized human brain". He therefore also employs repetition as one of the mechanisms, which adds to the humor and reinforces the satirical elements. For instance, the repeated reference to the "oversized human brain" in combination with "little did he/she/they know" serves as a constant reminder of the novel's critique of human intelligence on the one hand, but also further reinforces the absurdity of the concept of progress and the unpredictability of evolution. Vonnegut thus pokes fun at human pretensions and the randomness of life. Having said that, *Galápagos* for the most part adheres to the Superiority Theory of Humor. By combining these linguistic mechanisms, Vonnegut is not only humorous but also deeply satirical, offering a critical examination of human nature, societal norms, and the concept of progress. It is therefore safe to claim that

Galápagos also provided Vonnegut with a way of releasing built-up tension from his war experiences and other troubles in his private life.

7. Conclusion

This thesis investigated linguistic mechanisms of humor used by Kurt Vonnegut in his novel *Galápagos*. Vonnegut depicts in *Galápagos* a fictional setting in which there are only a few humans left to save humanity from going extinct. Portraying a ghost who is there only to witness what is going on, Vonnegut used this novel to give his readers a piece of advice that we as humans should always bear in mind – that we are supposed to be of more developed mental faculties than animals and that we should always try to act accordingly. By ironically describing various situations the novel's characters find themselves in, Vonnegut for the most part applies linguistic mechanisms of irony to raise awareness of some of the humans' ill characteristics to get the message across without being disrespectful or too disdainful while at it. The first aim of this master's thesis is to show from a linguistic perspective that humor in literature can be an effective means of achieving more than just a humorous effect. In this regard, Vonnegut uses fiction to criticize fictional humans, and thus also humans in the real world. This shows that Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos* is a prime example of a satirical novel, which was the second aim of this master's thesis. In addition to politely pointing at some moral eccentricities of humanity, *Galápagos* clearly shows that employing humor in literature can serve a deeper purpose as well. Knowing what Vonnegut's childhood was like and because he is known to have participated in a war, humor gave him a powerful way of giving some relief to deep emotional traumas from his past. Furthermore, irony, sarcasm, and satire sometimes lead to confusion because they often entail saying one thing and meaning something completely different. Consequently, having used irony, sarcasm, and satire, Vonnegut left some things unsaid and unclarified so that readers could interpret the written word as they wished. We can therefore conclude that sometimes context and our knowledge of the world are indeed enough to help us come to the right conclusions. Nevertheless, at other times, these two parameters are insufficient, so it is more prudent to simply ask the interlocutor for additional clarification – unless we just crave laughter.

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