

# **Verbal Humour in Coward's Relative Values: a Pragma-Stylistic Study<sup>1</sup>**

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# Verbal Humour in Coward's *Relative Values*: a Pragma-Stylistic Study

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## الخلاصة

أفرزت دراسة حس الفكاهة عاصفة من الدراسات و الأبحاث التي أنتجت عدداً من النظريات التي تجتهد في تحليلها و تأويلها للنصوص الفكاهية واقعية كانت أم أدبية وعلى أسس اجتماعية أو نفسية أو ثقافية أو لغوية. من بين تلك الدراسات و التي اعتمدت أسس لغوية براغماتية و دلالية، أسهم كل من راسكن (Raskin) و اتاردو (Attardo) بثلاثة نظريات و التي تتميز بعمق تحليلها و شموليتها النسبية لكل جوانب حس الفكاهة. تعتمد الدراسة الحالية التحليل الأسلوبية البراغماتي للفكاهة في مسرحية القيم النسبية لنويل كورد من خلال النظرية العامة للفكاهة الكلامية التي طورها راسكن و اتاردو و نظرية النصوص الفكاهية التي أضافها اتاردو فيما بعد.

## Abstract

The study of verbal humour has generated a multitude of research that yielded numerous and various theories that endeavour to analyze and interpret its mechanisms and structures. Among these researches, Raskin and Attardo contribute insightful and relatively exhaustive models of analysis in the form of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) which Attardo later supplemented with the Humorous Texts Theory. In the present study, Coward's *Relative Values* is analyzed and interpreted in terms of the (GTVH) along with Humorous Text Theory. Detailed analyses of the humorous instances in the play are carried out to investigate their structures, patterns of organization and narrative as well as thematic roles.

## 1. Introduction

Humour is one of these phenomena that trigger plenty of very intensive research. Scholars in different fields of knowledge endeavour to account for, explain and uncover the social, physiological, psychological, cultural and linguistic strategies that lie behind laughter and hence humour. In linguistics, humour has been extensively studied within semantics and then pragmatics. In the present research, humour is investigated as a stylistic device, which helps explain the peculiarities of literary texts that are largely built on the basis of humour. Accordingly, Coward's *Relative Values* is analyzed in terms of the humorous instances in an attempt to reveal the relation humour holds to the construction, progress and

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resolution of the plot not to mention its share in characterization and character's focalization. The study aspires to touch upon the following notions:

1. Verbal Humour and linguistic jokes play a paramount role in the development of the plot in comic drama.
2. This distribution of humour in literary texts is not haphazard, but thematically significant.
3. Humour and jokes have pragmatics and socio-psychological functions.
4. Characters evolve, develop and their world views are constructed and furnished through the humorous purport of the text.

It should be made clear that the purpose of this study is to penetrate the ludicrous nature of verbal humour together with its structure and functions. It seeks out to offer a brief discussion of humour as spelt out by its theories. Furthermore, the study involves an extended investigation of a literary dramatic text, *Relative Values*, with the aim of disclosing the common structural types of humour and jokes, i.e., ones that characterize the comic quality of the work as a whole.

## 2. Humour: an Overview

Humour is a multi-disciplinary field of research and one of the most important subjects not only in literature but also in other fields of knowledge such as, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. Being a multi-faceted phenomenon, humour is intensively utilized by most playwrights, poets, psychologists and novelists as an efficient device not only to trigger laughter or to evoke entertainment, but also to create comical as well as satirical atmosphere mixing between reality and unreality. Simultaneously, humour relieves society from tension and strain. It is one of the most powerful methods to help one overcome periods of crisis.

Humour seems to have such a diversity of flavours as dark, aggressive, benign or gallows humour. It is, besides, a realm embodied in so many phenomena and a class that includes different subclasses a matter that makes it difficult to delimit its boundaries. In fact, it works on three planes including "the verbal, the practical, and the fantastic." Humour is a blanket term for a multitude of verbal playing types such as pun, irony, wit, satire and joke. It is a universal art shared by all of people worldwide manifested in different linguistic forms that work primarily to evoke laughter and amusement.

Language is regarded as the most pre-eminent medium dedicated entirely for humorous activities, particularly verbally expressed humour. Attardo (1999: 7) defines humour as "a particular kind of language characterized by the negative or paradoxical value assumed by the sign." Besides, "language is so central to

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humour that it is often taken for granted that the word 'humour' refers to humour effected at least in part through language" ( Bergen & Binsted , 2006: 1). On the whole, the language of humour is an instantiation of creative language use.

For Polimeni & Reiss (2006:359), humour as a linguistic phenomenon comprises "a string of complex words and two concepts: incongruous and congruous." Incongruous words may be superficially similar; yet, dissimilar in the deep meaning since each one has its own connotation. This, in return, yields incoherence or discrepancy between the two conceptual structures (Steen, 2007: 280). So then, there could be a similarity between two recursive phrases or words, and the "humorous apparent juxtaposition of a congruous and incongruous idea" is produced (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006: 360). However, some psychologists maintain that it is not the incongruity that makes people laugh, but what resolves it represented by the punch line (Palmer, 2004: 94). Frequently, incongruity is eliminated by shifting the meaning of the reference from the common sense to a new, unexpected one (Steen, 2007: 280). Therefore, the original salient meaning of a word, an utterance or a phrase is abandoned in favour of the indirect and unexpected but appropriate meaning. Marin-Arrese (2008: 4) views incongruity as a clash between the frequent, interpretative or direct meaning and an alternative, uncommon and inferential meaning that causes the reinterpretation of the humorous text. Specifically, incongruity emerges from the "violation of the discourse expectation, the feeling of tension, anomaly, lack of coherence, simultaneous occurrence of two contradicting thoughts, concepts, discourses or frames of reference and from a mismatch between the expected content and actual utterance" (Miller, 2009: 3).

Remarkably, the effectiveness of incongruity lies in its capacity to conjure up a specific expectation in the mind of recipients, then violating it. Fundamentally, there are several ways whereby incongruity is induced and resolved. Many humour theorists agree that "surprisingness" is necessary to create incongruity, and thereby generates humour (Cisneros et al., 2006: sec.5). In simple terms, once the receiver becomes aware of the semantic contradiction of the verbal play and the subsequent event, s/he is surprised and then laughs (Sherzer, 2002: 4).

One of the important vehicles of humour is the joke, which is "a discourse unit consisting of two parts: the setup and the punch line" (Sherzer, 2002: 35). A joke is the most prominent class of linguistic and verbalized humour since it is "simple, short and easy to collect" (Attardo, 2001: 61-62). Further, Dynel (2009: 11) defines a joke as any humorous, short and repeated anecdote or remark with a funny climatic ending that is intended to provoke laughter or amusement. The key elements of a fully-fledged joke are the set up or the "connector" and the punchline or the "disjunctive" (Ritchie, 2004: 59). Unlike the punch line, the setup

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is the initial and the long portion of the joke. It is normally in the form of a one-liner, a narrative or a dialogue (Paakkinen, 2010: 19). The setup accords with the joke text and builds a certain expectation which is then subverted by the punchline (Binsted & Ritchie, 2001: 278). Specifically, the punch line is a short piece of text with relatively logical and linguistic information, though, humorous and unexpected one. It is the disrupting element that conjures up incongruity and generates "a feedback effect" which leads to the reinterpretation of the text and to identify its linguistic ambiguity (Chiaro, 2010: 37). It also "engenders surprise and reveals information that sheds new light on the situation presented in the set-up" (Dynel, 2009: 1285). The recognition and the unraveling of the joke is contingent on the connection between the punch line and the hidden assumptions, where humour lurks and the relation with the setup becomes apparent. Needless to say, the punch line is mainly placed in "the final position or a pre-final of the joke if followed by something inconsequential and anticlimactic" (Chiaro, 1992: 49).

Raskin (1985: 140), briefly, states five necessary components of the joke. First: "a switch for the bona-fide mode of communication to the non bona-fide mode of joke telling", second: "the text of an intended joke", third: "two (partially) overlapping scripts compatible with the text", fourth: "an oppositeness relation between the two scripts" and fifth: "a trigger, obvious or implied, realizing the oppositeness relation" (Attardo & Raskin, 1991: 326). Raskin considers the first one as a precondition of the joke in which the teller should divert a hearer's attention from seriousness to nonsense. The second component is often present in verbal jokes and it integrates the fifth one, the punch line. The third and the fourth components refer to the possibilities of the text current in the joke. That is, a joke may incorporate either two matched utterances that are intertwined or two incongruous concepts (Attardo & Raskin, 1991: 326).

## Theories of Humour

The pursuit of unraveling what is humour and what it consists of has engaged a wide variety of scholars. The mainstream theories of humour seek to consider not only the social, psychological, cognitive and structural details of humorous language but also the production and understanding of its utterance. In spite of their dissimilarity, the three classical theories, namely: the incongruity-based theories, the relief-based theories and the superiority-based theories intermingle with one another in that they can work together in analyzing whatever funny in a given situation (Little, 2009 :1251). These labels are also generalized into: Cognitive, Psychoanalytical and Social theories respectively (Attardo, 1994 :47). It is worth noting that these theories concentrate on three essential themes: first, "humour reflects a set of incongruous conceptualizations." Second, "humour involves repressed sexual or aggressive feelings." Third, "humour elevates social

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status by demonstrating superiority or saving face" (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006: 349).

Among the linguistic theories of humour, the present study adopts Raskin and Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) which is based on the Semantic-Script Theory of Humour developed originally by Raskin in addition to the Humorous Texts Theory which is an expansion of the GTVH professed by Attardo to account for lengthy stretches of humour. Therefore, a detailed account of three is provided below:

### **Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH)**

SSTH is the first formal theory of verbal humour that is systematized by Victor Raskin in 1985 using jokes as the basis of his theory. It is thought to be "a variant of incongruity theories" because its formula borders on concepts of incongruity and incompatibility in that script oppositeness is analogous to incongruity and compatibility is identical to appropriateness (Attardo & Raskin, 1991: 331; Attardo, 1997: 395; Oring, 2011). SSTH is a script-based theory since Raskin (1985: 81) uses the term script to refer to "a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it ." Cognitively, "a script is an organized complex of information about something (typically, a lexical item, but not exclusively, since there are obviously non-lexicalized concepts)." Scripts are, then, the mental representations of a large amount of cognitive structures or information relevant to a given lexical item or situation stored in the mind of native speaker (Raskin, 1979: 325).

Raskin asserts that scripts are correlated to, and elicited by "lexical items". Typically, scripts are either encyclopedic or lexical. Each one of the two kinds represents a semantic network of interrelations connected by links of various semantic characters such as "synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy and correspondingly labeled." The set of scripts, whether lexical or non-lexical along with their links and all the other connectors between the two sets of scripts would form "the semantic network which contains all of the information a speaker has about his/her culture." The main hypothesis of the SSTH theory as postulated by Raskin (1985:99) is:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the [two] conditions are satisfied :

- (1) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts .
- (2) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite.

Raskin (1985: 57) avers that the purpose of his SSTH is to answer the question, "What semantic properties of the text make it funny?" Script opposition "is necessarily binary in nature and Raskin indicates the basic opposition to be actual/non-actual, normal/abnormal, and possible/impossible." These three classes

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stand for "the basic opposition between real and unreal situations in the texts" (Attardo, 1994: 204). From the hypothesis of the semantic theory, it is concluded that verbal humour rests on ambiguity that is deliberately and unexpectedly created.

Fundamentally, SSTH was the first to bring forward the fact that "all humor involves a semantic-pragmatic process . . . [since] it includes a semantic opposition between the scripts (frames) activated by a (fragment of a ) text and a violation of the maxims of the principle of cooperation" (Attardo, 2003 : 1287).

In spite of its fame, the SSTH has its own limitations. Besides its being applicable to jokes only rather than other types of humorous texts, it is restricted almost to the semantics of the joke and does not include other linguistic subfields. Another drawback of the theory is that "it can not tell how similar two jokes are" (Attardo, 1994 : 208) . Not to mention, the focal point of the SSTH is on the notion of "COMPARISON", the clash between the apparent sense and the hidden sense, dubbing it as "script opposition" without any explanation of how such an opposition performs. It also incorporates the concept of "INAPPROPRIATENESS" into script opposition equating it with the first interpretation [more obvious meaning], rather than regarding it as "inherent properties of the less obvious meaning [second interpretation] " (Ritchie, 2004: 80).

### General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)

The GTVH is a general and essentialist theory of verbal humour that originally evolved from SSTH and is designed by Attardo and Raskin in 1991. It is a combination of the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor and Attardo's Five-Level joke representation model. The scope of this theory is enlarged by the Knowledge Resources (KR) and the focus of the theory is on joke similarity to extensively include any information concerning the processing and generating of humorous texts (Kyratz, 2003: 2).

In order to enlarge the GTVH, Attardo and Raskin add five knowledge resources or parameters to be utilized when seeking out the structural homology of jokes. Thus, besides the script opposition of the SSTH, the GTVH includes: "logical mechanism (LM) , the target (TA) , the narrative strategy (NS) , the language (LA), and the situation (SI)" (Attardo, 1994 :223). Attardo and Raskin (1991: 313) posit "a hierarchical model of joke representation consisting of six Knowledge Resources" :

- **Script Opposition (SO):** It is the most abstract KR. It deals with script opposition presented in SSTH. Attardo defines the script in the GTVH as "an interpretation of the text of a joke" that incorporates the "encyclopedic knowledge into the lexicon" (2001:27). According to the main hypothesis of GTVH, a text

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can only be humorous if it possesses a script opposition where there is compatibility or overlap between the different scripts. Raskin (1985: 108) believes that the opposed scripts are "local antonyms" which appear when two linguistic entities differ from each other or are mismatched only for the sake of humorous purposes and discourse. In Attardo's position (1997: 403), "scripts are collections of semantic information pertaining to a given subject. As such, they embody the sum total of the cultural knowledge of society, which can be represented as a set of expectations and/or weighted choices."

- **Logical Mechanism (LM):** This resource is the "distorted, playful logic" which does not stand out in a real world but is limited only to the realm of the comic. It justifies "the way in which the two senses (scripts, isotopies) in the joke are brought together." and corresponds to the resolution phase of the incongruity/resolution model. It is responsible for engendering a humorous outcome and relies on such principles as "the figure-ground reversal, the paralogical elements, false priming and the faulty logic."

- **Situation (SI):** This parameter concerns with the situation of joke. It is considered the "props" of the joke including the "objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc." It is the KR that does not belong only to humorous text, but it is motivated by all the scripts of the joke that are not necessarily funny.

- **Target (TA):** This resource refers to any individual or group from whom humorous or stupid behavior is expected. Target is the only optional parameter among the six KRs. Attardo (2001: 23-24) revises the concept of target to designate the butt of the joke and holds that a joke in which there is no aggression has no target.

- **Narrative Strategy (NS):** It is the "genre" of the joke and the rhetorical structure of the text that takes various forms such as "expository, question and answer, a simple narrative, a dialogue, a pseudo-riddle, an aside in a conversation." This parameter is responsible for casting the joke into a narrative organization. The important feature of this parameter is the frequent use of "non-redundancy in the unveiling of the joke." So, the joke is conveyed implicitly to the audience who must provide the missing information so as to understand it.

- **Language (LA):** This parameter represents "the actual lexical, syntactic and phonological choices at the linguistic level that instantiate all the other choices." LA is responsible for the position of the punchline and for the expression of the contents of the joke. It determines both the casual and non-casual meaning of the joke content and all other KRs are intertwined within it. LA also carries all the information necessary for the verbalization of the text and accounts for the variations in the paraphrase of humour.

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Having all six Knowledge Resources defined, a joke, according to (Attardo, 1994: 226 and 2001: 27), can be looked at as a "6-tuple, specifying the instantiation of each parameter. Two jokes are different if at least one parameter of these six parameters is different in the jokes. Virtually, ranking the various KRs is devoted to determining "which ones affect more directly the perception of similarity among jokes. The final ranking is (from most to least significant) SO, LM, SI, TA, NS, LA" (Attardo, 2005: 5).

Attardo (1994: 227) says that the "interdependence and/or independence among the KRs have allowed the determination of the hierarchical organization." That is, the order of the knowledge resources influences and also decides the selection of the parameters in the hierarchy. This implies that each parameter determines the choice of the one below it in the hierarchy and is in turn determined or constrained by the parameter above it. The benefit of such determination is to restrict or to lessen the alternatives available for the instantiation of the parameter. Above all, this theory emphasizes that all the KRs must be present simultaneously except TA because not every joke has a target. Identically, the LM is an optional resource because it is equated to the resolution phase which may also be absent in some humorous texts (Attardo, 1997: 409).

GTVH makes several claims about the Knowledge Resources of jokes (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 321-28; Oring, 2011):

- (1) the KRs identify the relevant components of the joke.
- (2) the KRs can be hierarchically ordered, and SO  $\hat{+}$  LM  $\hat{+}$  SI  $\hat{+}$  TA  $\hat{+}$  NS  $\hat{+}$  LA represent the order of these KRs in terms of their degree of abstraction.
- (3) jokes will be regarded as more similar when they share lower-level KRs, and they will be considered less similar when they share only higher-level ones.
- (4) the selection of a higher-order KR is more likely to influence available choices of a lower-level KR than vice-versa.
- (5) the order of the KRs is a model of joke generation in a logical, linguistic sense but is not a representation of the stages of joke production.

Attardo suggests that the concept of resolution can be identified with the logical mechanism of the GTVH, except that the LM explains one undefined notion in terms of another. Alternatively, the incongruity phase appears to be tantamount to the script opposition Knowledge Resource. In fact, the LM and SO KRs are very significant to the incongruity and its resolution. SO indicates the two opposite scripts that intersect with each other to create the incongruity whereas the LM refers to "the cognitive rule, how an incongruity has to be resolved in order to understand the joke" (Samson, 2008: 15).

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To conclude, the advantages of the GTVH can be recapped in the following points (Attardo, 1994: 227-229):

- 1- Since it has a parameter for language, it can easily specify the required peculiarities of the text at this level.
- 2- The GTVH can handle the issues involved in determining the degree of similarity between any two jokes. Jokes are predicted to be more identical in relation to the number of parameters they have in common. That is, the more the number of parameters two jokes share the more similar they are and the less the number of parameters they have, the more different the jokes are.
- 3- It is capable of generating an infinite number of jokes by combining the various values that each parameter involves.

Significantly, Attardo (2001: 60) claims that "the GTVH/ SSTH are not semantic theories . . . , but are semantico-pragmatic theories which encompass all effects of meaning." He also affirms that the analysis of the theory of humorous texts is "non-intuitive or objective." It is an ordered process in that "each increasingly complex level of analysis is justified on the basis of the immediately preceding level and the bottom level, that of the individual line, is justified via formal semantic analysis" (Attardo, 2001 :104). In general, the basic foundation of the GTVH/ SSTH is that "all [humorous] themes and their various jab and punch lines can be handled individually by the idea of script opposition and overlap and are ultimately examples of incongruity and resolution" (Attardo, 2001: 101).

### Humorous Texts Theory

Humorous texts theory is, in fact, grounded in the GTVH. Attardo (2001: 28) expands the GTVH to embrace not only short humorous texts exemplified by jokes but also all longer literary texts irrespective of their types, length and genre such as "narrative texts, dramatic texts and conversations texts in which there is no narrator." The theory assumes that the text is a vector or "physically linear and directed only in one direction. Along the text occur one or more instances of humor" (Attardo, 2002: 23). These humorous instances are termed as jab lines and punch lines. Longer humorous texts are distinct from a joke in that where a final punch line is an indispensable element of the joke, longer humorous texts such as comic plays incorporate "instances of humour distributed throughout the text" (Corduas et al., 2008: 245). In essence, Attardo rests his classification of comic lines on the criteria of "formal or thematic similarity" (2001: 37).

Fundamentally, Attardo (2001) bases his model on the premise that long humorous texts are exclusively linear structures which can be classified into two classes: those that are identical to joke structure in that they end with a punch line

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and those which "consist in non-humorous narratives, but display somewhere along [their linear structure] one or more humorous components [known as] jab lines" (Attardo, 2001: 29; Ermida, 2008: 108). In brief, the study of humorous texts boils down to "the location of all lines (jab& punch) along the text vector, i.e. its linear presentation" (Attardo, 2001: 37). The main goal of this model is to prove the fact that the distribution of humour along the text is not random but is meaningful, though it is distinct from one text to another (Corduas, 2008: 255).

### Lines and their Configurations

In conformity with the new extension of the GTVH, and to handle texts that have instances of humour in the plot, central concepts are provided, notably, jab/punch lines strand/stack and bridge/comb:

#### Jab/Punch lines

Jab lines are essentially "humorous instances that can occur in any position" in the text not necessarily final and are "fully integrated in the narrative" (Attardo, 2001:37). Semantically, the jab lines are similar to the punchline except that the former does not disrupt the continuity or the interpretation process of the text, but allows it to persist "while still producing incongruity in which humor resides" (Corduas et al., 2008 :255). The punch lines, on the contrary, are humorous lines which adjust and break "the interpretive flow established" in the set up (Attardo, 2001: 89). Usually, humorous texts locate the jab lines in strategic positions that will retain in memory while the punch lines are placed in prominent final positions (Attardo, 2001:59). More than this, jab and punch lines are "semantically and pragmatically marked in the text, they attract attention to themselves. Then, jab and punch lines differ only in their textual positions and functions.

#### Strands and Stacks

A strand is a group or "a sequence of three or more punch or jab lines that are thematically or formally linked", but not necessarily adjacent. For instance, all the humorous lines that share a targeted individual, situation and narrative strategy are said to form a strand. Strands may have connections along the same lines with other strands. A strand of strands is called a stack. A stack is "a group of strands that are thematically or formally linked." They appear in different macronarratives, or larger intertextually related texts corpora (Attardo 2001: 83-86). A dichotomy is made between strands that are textually established and those that are inter-textually established. Textually established strands are three or more related humorous lines that occur in a specific text while inter-textually established strands are associated lines that appear in different texts (Attardo, 2001: 83). Moreover, strands are divided into "central strands" and "peripheral strands". The former is "central to a given text" in the sense that it occurs

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throughout an important part of the text. Contradictorily, a peripheral strand is one "which occurs only in one (or few) instance(s) in the text" (Attardo, 2001: 86).

### Bridges and Combs

Humorous lines may occur in a noticeable special typology to compose either combs or bridges. A bridge is a type of strand in which two related lines- most commonly jab lines, occur far from each other. A comb, on the other hand, is "a type of strand that shows the occurrence of more than three lines (punch or jab)" in close proximity (Attardo, 2001:88). As such, bridges and combs represent the configurations of occurrence of the comic lines within a strand and throughout the text (Attardo , 2002 : 236).

### Narratives (Micro and Macro) and Metanarrative

Micro and macro-narratives are very critical concepts in narratology and in the analysis of humorous texts. Micro-narrative is the simplest possible narrative that constitutes only one action or event which may be caused either by a person or nature. A macro-narrative, in turn, is "any combinations of micro-narratives." However, not all jokes are instances of micro-narratives. Metanarratives are jumbles of embedded narratives that occur as narratives within the macro-narratives, for example, "a character in a text may initiate a narrative within the narrative" (Attardo, 2001:80-81).

Attardo's model is remarkable because it is the first attempt that gives rise to the inception of "the disciplinary sub-area of narrative humor studies." Above all, Attardo makes a crucial reference to "the hierarchical organization of the humorous text, thus hinting at the relevance of such an approach. For example, the distinction between micro narrative [a simple narrative with one action or event] and macro-narrative [any combination of micro-narratives], the vertical correlation between strands and stacks and the notion that a humorous plot may evolve around a so-called central script opposition" (Ermida, 2008: 110).

### 3. Humour in Coward's Relative Values

*Relative Values* is a biting critique written in 1951 and premiered at Savoy Theatre in the same year in London. This play represents a watershed in Coward's career for the success it has achieved. It also marks Coward's return to comic writing and revives his flagging reputation particularly after the World War II. It is a comedy of manners in three acts; the first two of which are divided into two scenes each. The first act covers nearly half of the play whereas the second and the third act are comparatively short. The action presented in the play covers the time from Saturday afternoon after lunch until Sunday morning. *Relative Values*, in essence, focuses on the class distinction between lower-class and upper-class societies. Its serious plot, dotted along with humorous lines, orbits

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around the failure of the upper-class society to accept the postwar social revolution and radical changes where all social barriers are swept away. The whole play is organized in a joke-like construction where it involves an introduction that builds up an informative background for the subsequent events and the closing punchline which constitutes the resolution of the problem.

Set in the drawing room of a country manor, the play begins with the news that Nigel, the Earl of Marshwood, is engaged to a Hollywood movie star, Miranda Frayle. When the action sets off, the domestic staff is busy discussing the forthcoming marriage, including Frederick Crestwell, the comic sarcastic butler, Alice, the naive housemaid and Dora Moxton, Felicity's personal maid and confidante. Alice is very excited because she will meet a famous actress while Crestwell seems to be unenthusiastic and cynical. On the other hand, Moxie is more preoccupied with the issue and decides to leave the Marshwood house before the arrival of the couple not only because Nigel's future wife belongs to a different class but also because Miranda is her estranged younger sister. In order for Moxie to stay in the manor and be on a par with her sister in case Nigel marries Miranda, Felicity, Crestwell and Peter persuade her to play the role of an heiress who lives in the house as a member of the family. As Miranda invents fake stories and sordid disclosures about her past childhood and her mother, Moxie finds it harder to suppress her rage so that she reveals her identity and exposes Miranda's lies causing a state of shock. To complicate the issue, Don Lucas, Miranda's ex-lover and fellow film star, arrives at the manor in order to reclaim Miranda. Finally, the story is wrapped up neatly with Miranda's going back to America with Don Lucas and Moxie's staying at the Marshwood mansion.

Applying Attardo's model of the Humorous Texts Theory (2001) to *Relative Values* and drawing upon the stylistic analysis of text, all the humorous jab/punch lines are picked and catalogued along the linear structure of the play. The GTVH analysis of the text reveals that a total number of (294) humorous lines are identified in the text as clear in Table (1) below.

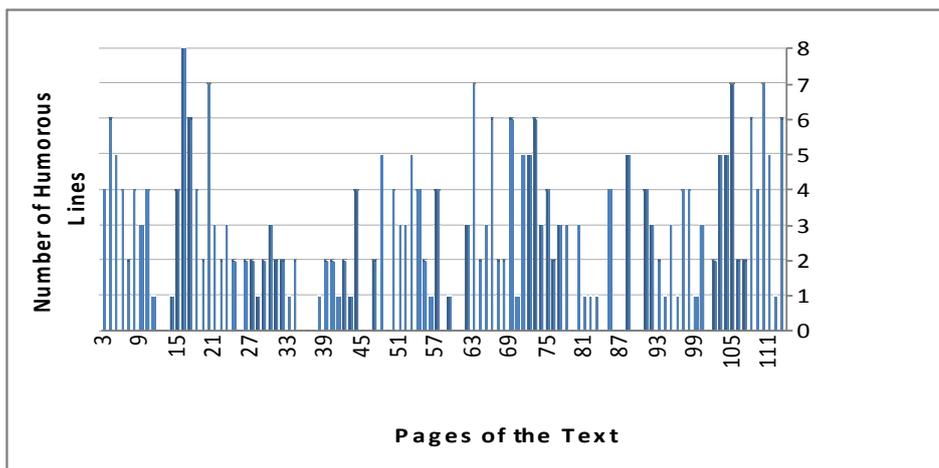
The distribution of the humorous lines in the text is found to be random, rather than uniform; it is ranging between one to seven lines per page. Since the occurrence of humour in the text is random, therefore, the bars, in Figure (1) below, do not cluster together, beyond what a random distribution of the lines would predict. A significant stretch of (segments 10-14); (segments 34-38) and (segments 58-62) without much humour at all have been singled out as a case of "serious relief" ,i.e., a stretch of text that presents little or no humour in an otherwise humour-rich environment in other segments as a case of "comic relief."

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The most significant aspect of the distribution of the humour in the text is that it appears to roughly follow a wave pattern in that it increases in density in some areas and declines in others. Seemingly, the distribution of humour is asymmetrical in all acts. Coward begins with plentitude of humour in each of Act I and II, but ends up in very little of it in Act III. According to the statistical findings, Act I forms about (37.755) % and Act II about (35.714) % while Act III constitutes about (26.530) % in proportion to the total number of the humorous lines. Consequently, Act I and Act II take up almost three quarters of the text as seen in Table (1) below.

**Table (1): The Distribution of Humour in *Relative Values***

NO	Category	NO	%
1	Total Page number	113	-
2	Act I	111	37.755
3	Act II	105	35.714
4	Act III	78	26.530
5	Jab lines	268	91.156
6	Punch lines	26	8.843
7	Total	294	-



**Figure(1): Segmentation Chart of *Relative Values***

In relation to the characters and their contribution to the humorous thrust of the play, the statistical findings, in table (2), illustrates that Miranda and Nigel contribute the largest part of the humorous lines compared with the other characters. Nigel, on the other hand, is next in degree to Miranda; together with her, the pair embody the central problem of the play, i.e. the class struggle and the

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desperate attempt to reshuffle its rules. Further, the humour achieved at their expense exposes the playwright's ridicule of triviality, awkwardness, and pretension. While a plebian character, as the butler Crestwell, are admirably portrayed and expressed, the cream of society people are sketched cursorily as trivial and lacking in insight. The class reshuffle is a very rich source of humour and so are the English-American opposition and Miranda's screen career. From the English side, Miranda is snubbed as a gutter-dweller and a Hollywood doll, hence the many funny, intertextual cinematic references; from the American, the Marshwoods embody outdated snobbery and arrogance:

-DON: *If that high-hat English louse said anything to make you cry I'll poke him in the nose* (p:108).

-NIGEL: Well, meeting her and falling in love with her and asking her to marry me. It was, *like a sudden flash of light*.

FELICITY: *She must have been used to that, having been photographed so much*

NIGEL: I t all happened at Cap d'Antibes. We found ourselves alone together on at raft—

FELICITY: Like *the Kon Tiki expedition*. (p: 53)

**Table (2): Humorous lines Targeting Characters**

No.	Characters	Humorous Lines	Percentage
1	Miranda	69	23.46 %
2	Nigel	29	9.86 %
3	Felicity	23	7.82 %
4	Don Lucas	20	6.80 %
5	Alice	17	5.78 %
6	Moxie	11	3.74 %
7	The Haylings	11	3.74 %
8	Crestwell	10	3.40 %
9	Peter	9	3.06 %
10	Maureen	6	2.04 %
11	Mr Clifford	4	1.36 %
12	Sylvia	4	1.36 %
13	Joan	2	0.68 %
	Total lines	294	—

The other most frequently targeted characters are Felicity, the countess of Marshwood and Don Lucas, the American film star. Felicity is the locus of a contradiction, which the playwright exploits to yield humour. The fact that she is

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a member of the upper class sets the limits of the contradictions between the aristocracy and plebeians:

-FELICITY: [ . . . ] Crestwell, please sit down too. This is a family conference and it can't possibly be dealt with satisfactorily if everybody is standing about.

FELICITY: Peter?

PETER(sitting) : All right. *I feel as though we ought to have pencils and papers* (p:40).

-MIRANDA: She[Felicity] says she's going to live in this house—with us—is that true?

NIGEL: Of course it is. She's always lived here.

MIRANDA: Nigel!

NIGEL: Now do calm down, darling! You won't have to see much of her, except in the evenings. She has a tremendous amount to do during the day [ . . . ] *She's practically an institution.*

Miranda: Do you expect me to sacrifice my whole life, my career, everything, *to live with an institution* (p:106).

Don Lucas is the stereotype of the American womanizer whom Coward targets to jeer at the American way of living:

FELICITY: You might show him [Don] old Mrs. Dunlop's house while you're at it[the church]. It isn't far.

PETER: I don't mind the church *but I draw the line at old Mrs. Dunlop.*

FELICITY: Oh, she's much better. *She's been happy as a sandboy since her husband died.* Run along, both of you.

Don: okay, ma'am—Felicity.

FELICITY: *Ma'am Felicity sounds so domestically American, doesn't it ? like Grandma Moses, or mother Goddam* (p: 95).

- NIGEL: *Is that lachrymose oat* [Don] going to stay with us?

FELICITY: *He's not an oat, he's perfectly charming—and if you had any sense of noblesse oblige you'd ask him to be you best friend.*

NIGEL (bitterly): *Thank you for everything, Mother. you've been a great comfort to me* (p:100).

Other characters like Alice, Moxie, the Haylings, Crestwell and Peter are the least targeted. The last two, in particular, employ humour to imprint their own personal marks on the play. As targets, they share only in small portions of the instances of the humour in the text. In comparison, the other humorous instances targeting the other characters reinforce and refine the observation that *Relative Values* is all about Miranda Frayle. Other unseen or minor characters including: (Maureen, Mr Clifford, Sylvia, Joan) take only a hair's breadth of the humour in the play. This indicates that minor characters are associated with the humorous

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examples that target them and rarely are themselves emitters of humour. In this sense, it can be said that the playwright scoffs more at a given character only if that character is present or seen in the play. Above all, the more the character is ridiculed, the more the humour is allocated to him/her.

As to characters that elicit most of the humour in the play, table (3) lists the most prolific producers of humour. Both Felicity and Crestwell have the lion's share of the humour leaving very little to the other characters. Felicity is selected by Coward to be the joker of the play, a matter that reinforces the claim that Felicity is the most interesting character. She is the stereotype of the British higher-class society who has a heavy hand in bringing her son's engagement to Miranda to the final break-up and thus resolving the play.

**Table (3): Jokers in *Relative Values***

NO	Characters	Humorous lines	%
1	Felicity	115	39.115
2	Crestwell	52	17.687
3	Peter	38	12.925
4	Moxie	29	9.863
5	Nigel	18	6.122
6	Miranda	17	5.782
7	Don Lucas	9	3.061
8	Alice	5	1.700
9	The Haylings	4	1.360
10	Total	294	—

Crestwell comes next only to Felicity; he is the representative of the down-the-stairs society. He cleverly manages to contact with his employers and gains their confidence via his philosophical, witty manners and caustic satire. Crestwell together with Felicity, are the persons who really steer the Marshwood mansion. Peter and Moxie feature very importantly as jokers followed by Nigel and Miranda. Comparatively, minor characters seem to utter a very small number of humorous instances, which reflects the fact that the more influential and manipulative the character in the play is the more comic degree s/he gains.

To investigate the correlations among the humorous lines, central and peripheral strands are identified and patterns of occurrences of combs and bridges are shown in relation to other humorous lines within the same text or globally in the text as follows:

### Strands and Stacks

The correlation among the humorous lines of *Relative Values* results in eight strands, five of these strands are central while three of them are peripheral. Each

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one of these strands concerns itself with introducing a particular character and simultaneously contributes to the development of the plot. On the other hand, the relations between serious/shallow, Miranda Frayle and equality-consciousness strands result in one stack because all of them discuss Miranda's character as the future countess of Marshwood House. Ultimately, every strand concerned is interpreted in the light of the whole play in terms of plot, themes and characters as well as in regard to the social and psychological functions of humour and jokes:

### A. Central Strands

#### Equality-Consciousness Strand

According to the GTVH analysis, the equality-consciousness central strand is created by the related humorous instances that share symmetrical contents of the parameters, namely SO (serious/ironical), TA (Moxie) and LA (irony). The dramatist attempts to depict Moxie's character and also prepares the ground for a series of events that will justify her strange behaviour. In addition, equality-consciousness strand creates the ambiguity which is a significant factor for the production of humour and establishes the incongruity that will be resolved in the end of scene one.

Being a maid and belonging to the downstairs society, it is odd that Moxie is so conscious of class distinction. Crestwell is puzzled by Moxie's attitude and attempts to convince her of the social revolution, however, he makes fun of the false dream of social equality. Moxie suffers excessively from the upcoming marriage and intends to leave the Marshwood estate as soon as the couple arrive. Though she belongs to the lower class and is supposed to be delighted, not to mention enthusiastic about the post-war social changes taking place in Britain as prophesied by Crestwell, she contradictorily seems displeased and content with her status as a servant at Marshwood House:

MOXIE: Why couldn't he pick someone of his own class.

CRESTWELL: Class! Oh dear, I've forgotten what the word means. *Remind me to look it up in the cross-word dictionary.*

MOXIE: You may have forgotten what it means but I haven't.

CRESTWELL: That, Dora, is an admission of defeat. *It proves that you have willfully defeated yourself to the clarion call of progress.*

MOXIE: *Clarion call of fiddlesticks* (RV:8).

In fact, all ironic utterances uttered by Crestwell, imply a criticism to the aristocratic society's refusal of the social revolution that happens in post-war England. The play covertly gives away the illusions and pretensions of the ostensible social changes through Crestwell's comic remarks:

MOXIE: What were you doing in my room?

CRESTWELL (with dignity): You asked me to fetch your work basket and *with my inherent chivalry, which all the disruptive forces of social*

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*revolution have been powerless to destroy*, I nipped up three flights and got it for you (p: 7).

Notably, these comic references form a part of the equality-consciousness strand which reinforces the action of the play where the plot gradually evolves via thematic links and turn-taking mechanisms. The ambiguous language and sarcasm employed by Crestwell, let alone his self-derision, are part of Coward's characterization of him as a discreet person and intelligent butler. On the surface, Crestwell pretends that he believes in possibility of social equality, but deep down he knows that it is impossible and undesirable.

### Miranda Frayle Strand

On the basis of the GTVH analysis, the humorous jab lines that setup Miranda Frayle central strand are interwoven together since they have similar SO (good/bad), TA (Miranda), NS (statement) and LA (sarcasm) parameters. What is centrally shared among these lines is their concentrating on Miranda's character. As a central character in the play, Miranda's image is presented through a series of macro-narratives in which the class distinction is the main storyline. Miranda is a beautiful woman, but she is reckless and untrustworthy. The description of her appearance itself reflects incongruity and hence humour: **Her appearance is impeccable. She is wearing a simple dinner dress, her jewellery is discreet and she is carrying a large chintz work bag** (p: 60). Her real name is Freda. Long time ago, she eloped to America with a theatrical agent called Greenberg to become a thoroughly American actress. Despite the fact that Miranda is of British roots, she is not accepted in the English upper-class society and is considered as an American intruder. She has been satirized and censured cryptically and subtly by exploiting several humorous forms like pun, satire and irony. The language used is that of derision. Irony and satire are mainly produced by comments and verbal attacks where there is an infraction of the maxim of manner. Further, a number of embedded scripts are emerged to successfully yield an indirectly summoned image of Miranda Frayle such as, natural/artificial, good/bad and beautiful/ugly. All these humorous elements are clustered into one neat grid to form a full picture of Nigel's future wife and simultaneously elicit laughter:

-CRESTWELL: There is no sense in bellyaching about it. The only thing is to look at it philosophically and hope for the best.

MOXIE: *A common, painted hussy from Hollywood flaunting herself as the Countess of Marshwood*, and you talk about hoping for the best! (p:9).

-LADY H. : You [Felicity] know as well as I do that *if Nigel is allowed to marry this synthetic, trumped up creature it will be just one more nail in all our coffins* (p:16).

Seemingly, there is an implication of the disapproval of the aristocratic class of the radical changes, taking place in England after the war, which shows the

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instability of the social changes. Using metaphor and proverb to satirize Miranda, Cynthia implies that Nigel's marriage to Miranda means that the class distinction will no longer exist as social barriers will be abolished. The purpose of her rhetorical irony is didactic and essentially directed towards showing Miranda's superficiality. It also encodes the upper class alarm, if not fear, of the possible social change.

The highlight of Act II is the dinner scene, where Miranda fabricates fictitious details about her family in a rather long dialogue. In spite of her perfectly respectable upbringing, Miranda claims that she lived a very terrible childhood. Above and beyond, she humorously concocts false, slanderous stories about her mother, painting her as a bawdy alcoholic and depicting Moxie as a drunk sister who had died in horrid, sordid circumstances. Humour is triggered because Miranda keeps on telling lies unconscious that Moxie, her elder sister, is still alive and among her audience:

-MIRANDA (with a gay little laugh): [. . .] *I was a regular little gutter child— One of my earliest memories was making a doll's house out of an old card board box I'd found in the dustbin* (p: 63).

-MIRANDA: [. . .] on a Saturday night with the crowds and the lights— *I used to get mother her pint of bear at the pub and bring it home in a jag. One night there was a barrel organ and I danced to it—* (p: 63).

In fact, Miranda's false stories about her childhood reflects her inability to come to terms with her family as well as her tendency to victimize herself in pursuit of popularity and acceptance. Above all, it stresses Moxie's belief and Felicity's hunch that Miranda is not suited for the role of the Marshwood countess. It corroborates the lack of authenticity in her as well. While she intends to become a member of aristocratic British society, she paradoxically fabricates a sham past of her family. Thus, Miranda unwittingly contributes, to a great extent, to prompting Moxie to uncover the hidden secret, which prepares the ground for the end of her relationship with Nigel.

### The Earl of Marshwood Strand

The Earl of Marshwood central strand develops from the GTVH analysis of the humorous instances which are thematically pivoting around a particular target and language, namely Nigel and sarcasm parameters. These humorous lines focus on serious/playful and sensible/fool script oppositions. Nigel is a pleasant fellow, however, a whimsical, immature man of childish behaviours and a weak character. Nigel's characterization is furnished by other characters in the play particularly, his mother who often dubs him mockingly as "fool", "idiot" and a coward:

- ADMERAL: It's fairly obvious to me that Nigel must have been tricked into this in some way. After all, he's no fool.

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FELICITY: *But, John dear, he is.* He's my own son and I ought to know.

PETER: I agree that *Nigel has always been fairly idiotic about women.* (p:16-17)

- FELICITY: Nigel [...] like his father before him [...] *has one ingrained temperamental defect. He loathes disharmony, detests scenes and runs like a stag at the first sign of a domestic crisis.*

In reality, Felicity exerts much effort to conceal her real feelings via wit, irony and rather ambiguous language. Some of the clearest indications of Felicity's vagueness occur in her conversation with Nigel on the phone. The incongruity resides in the mismatch between strategy and context at the level of character-to-character interaction. The phone conversation ridicules covertly the sham education of the upper-class which is portrayed as surreal and cliché-like. It also reflects Felicity's attitude towards her son. Nigel is an adult on the outside, but still that truant school boy deep inside or at least so his mother perceives of him:

FELICITY: Nigel ! Oh dear [. . . .] Hall-hallo- Nigel?[. . . .] What? . . . . Speak louder. I can't hear a word . . . . WHERE ARE YOU? How are you-both? . . . . No, dear, I said ARE YOU BOTH? . . . . *I'm doing my best, I'm screaming like a Banshee . . . . BANSHEE, darling. . . . B for bottle , A for Andalusia, N for Nebuchadnezzar . . . . No . . . . NEBUCHADNEZZAR-N for nobody* (p: 23).

### Felicity's Strand

In relation to the analysis of the GTVH, the central Felicity's strand is used to make fun of Felicity's superiority. It comprises the humorous lines that have identical TA (Felicity) and LA (irony) parameters. Felicity, the protagonist in the play, is **a well preserved woman in the fifties. She has obviously been a beauty in her day, indeed a vestige of the maligned, foolish 'Twenties still cling to her** (p:10). Felicity is a stereotypical old-fashioned figure. She has a good comic timing and her utterances are generally short humorous exchanges that pivot on irony or witticism:

MIRANDA (beginning to lose her temper): Well, I'll tell you here and now. Before I set foot in this house as Nigel's wife, she's [Moxie] going to be out of it for good.

FELICITY: *On the contrary, she will receive you at the front door. We might even prevail upon her to drop you a curtsy. The press photographers would love it!* (p:104).

Most the humorous jab lines are produced by the ironic remarks uttered by Peter in his attempt to console Felicity as well as make fun of her:

FELICITY (crossly): You have forced me to say something that I have been valiantly trying not to admit, even to myself. It's very unkind of you.

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PETER: *Never mind. Press on, Felicity. You are doing splendidly.*

FELICITY: Don't laugh at me. It's all quite beastly, and you know it. (p: 21)

Felicity blends cunning with joking, for instance, when she insists that Don should spend the night at the estate hoping to hit the right targets in the end despite Miranda's protests against the invitation. To Felicity, Don's presence at the mansion presents a plausible solution for the Marshwood's dilemma as he could lure Miranda away from Nigel:

MIRANDA: But, Lady Marshwood . . . really . . .

FELICITY(gaily): Dear Miranda—you really must allow me to have my own way. *You're not married to Nigel yet, you know—I am still the mistress of this house and I intend to rule you all with a rod of iron until the last possible moment* (p: 81).

### Ex-Lover Strand

On the basis of the GTVH analysis, ex-lover central strand develops from the connected humorous lines that have analogous SO (real/unreal), TA (Don Lucas), NS (pun) parameters. Ex-lover strand is crucial because the turn of events that will lead up to the climax and the resolution of the problem becomes impending. In addition, the sudden arrival of Don, Miranda's ex-boyfriend, in the middle of dinner complicates the situation further and drives a wedge between Nigel and Miranda. This action also gives a new insight into the nature of the love affair between Miranda and Don. What is more, this strand manifests the sharp contrast between the British and the American cultures as demonstrated by Hollywood movie stars:

DON: [. . .] I want to talk to you as man to man.

CRESTWELL: *Any other approach, sir, would be curious*, to say the least of it.

DON: This Earl of yours. Is he really planning to marry Miranda—Miss Frayle—or is just a publicity stunt? I want to know what's cooking.

CRESTWELL: *If you're hungry, sir, after your long drive, I am sure I could rustle up a little cold chicken and salad.*

DON (showing signs of irritation): Lay off the comedy a minute, will you? (p: 76).

The conversation between Crestwell and Don abounds with inventive humorous utterances and witticism. Crestwell has a flair for comic language and his humour is characterized by its being spontaneous and improvisatory. Very often, there is a wry sense of humour in his dialogues with others. These witty remarks, which are at times pure wordplays, embody his verbal virtuosity in an interactional mode. Crestwell deliberately twists the conversational implicature

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involved in Don's question, thereby subverts the maxims of manner and relation in order to invoke humour.

The author uses the mechanisms of character-sketch and dialogues among characters of the play to delineate the chain of events and the central ideas of each situation. For instance, the sketch of Don Lucas is different from that of Nigel. His image is generally portrayed by his outward appearance, speech style as well as his conducts and manners which reflect the American culture itself. Don Lucas suffers a lot after being separated from Miranda; therefore, he arrives at the Marshwood House in a drunken stupor. After meeting Miranda alone, Don tries to convince her not to marry Nigel, but he fails and his dialogue with her is full of sarcasm and metaphor. Miranda's responses, on the other hand, are humour proper though they signal out an unconfessed inclination towards reconciliation:

DON: I'm crazy about you. I've been crazy about you for three whole years.

MIRANDA(contemptuously): Crazy about me! What about Beejie Lemaire, and Zenda Hicks, and that phony Polish princess that Daryle Zanuck gave the party for?

DON: [. . .] *They were just ships that pass in the night.*

MIRANDA: Maybe they were, but *they certainly passed through your beach house in Santa Monica on their way to the open sea* (p:78).

### B. Peripheral Strands

#### Serious/Shallow Strand

This strand relies basically on the contrast between Crestwell, the shrewd butler and Alice, the silly maid (see the Appendix). The topic is Miranda's screen characters which Alice Adores and believes in utterly. The GTVH analysis demonstrates that the humorous examples of the serious/shallow central strand are related. They are based on the same KRs, notably SI (the film acted by Miranda) and TA (Alice). The main script oppositions are real/fictional, serious/ironical and serious/shallow which correspond with the opposition between Crestwell/Alice. From the early beginning, Coward builds up a hierarchy of contrasts and incongruities among the characters of the play. He starts the story by delineating the sharp contrast and gap that exist between the immature younger domestic staff portrayed by Alice and the mature older generation portrayed by Crestwell and Moxie. Alice and Crestwell belong to a different interpretative and discourse community in the sense that they do not share similar values, ideas and thus hold divergent world-views. Through Crestwell, Cowards figuratively evens the scales in terms of classes by creating a butler whose shrewdness, wit and sense of humour prevail over any other character. No wonder that Alice finds it difficult to communicate with and understand the philosophizing Crestwell who himself acknowledges, humorously, this truth to Dora Moxton:

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- *That is a cross I have learned to bear with fortitude, Dora No one understands half of what I say* (p: 6).

Alice, on the other hand, is depicted as shallow, silly, inexperienced and incurably romantic. She is impressed by Miranda Frayle and other screen actors. Crestwell, in contrast, is serious, worldly-wise, experienced, philosophical, clear-sighted and cynical whose speech is interspersed with jokes and irony. Accordingly, there is a situation of presuppositional conflict between the two opposed personalities. Alice, namely, operates within a conversational schemata while Crestwell is operating within an expertise schemata. Hence, the two characters are incapable of reaching a form of common ground, and Crestwell always pokes fun at Alice who confuses screen stories with reality:

ALICE: "Love is my Religion" is on in Deal all this week [. . .] I went on Thursday afternoon. She's this nun, you see . . . .

CRESTWELL: Which nun?

ALICE: The one that gets captured by the Japanese.

CRESTWELL: *Hurry up with those ash-trays or we shall be captured by the Japanese* (p: 4).

Crestwell, indeed, mocks the make-believe world of Miranda's last movie where she has played the role of a nun captured by the Japanese. He also ridicules the triviality of Alice who takes fiction for reality. Alice expects that Crestwell will share her interest and excitement, but Crestwell's obscure reply is a non-bona fide mode of communication where the maxims of quality and manner are violated. Thereupon, humour originates from the breaking of the conversational maxims and the ambiguities that are deliberately employed by the author.

### The Haylings Strand

On the ground of the GTVH analysis, the comic lines of the Haylings' peripheral strand are tied in well with each since they share similar SO (serious/ironical), TA (the Haylings), NS (statement) parameters. Cynthia and Admiral John Hayling are old friends of the family. They belong to the aristocratic society and are discontent with the social revolution that eliminates class discrimination. The Haylings openly disapprove of Nigel's plan to marry a film star, Miranda; therefore, they are pestering Felicity to thwart this marriage. Though they are minor characters in the play, they add much humour to it as targets:

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LADY H: It's no good trying to discuss anything seriously with you, you're quite hapless.

FELICITY: Do take Cynthia away, John. *She is getting quite hoarse from barking up the wrong trees* (p: 17).

### Mischievous Nephew Strand

The analysis in terms of GTVH indicates that the mischievous nephew peripheral strand results from the humorous instances based upon symmetrical parameters like TA (Peter), NS (statement) and LA (wit) parameters. This strand depicts Peter whose dialogues are interspersed with witticism and humour particularly static-inherent humour prompted instantaneously. He is Felicity's cynical nephew 'with an impeccable appearance and a quizzical gleam in his eyes' (p:10). Peter constantly exchanges light-hearted badinage with other characters. Teasing is a function of humour used to attack personal foibles in addition to its role as a genuine criticism that serves to increase or maintain the speaker's power:

-ADMERAL: You know you can rely on us to back you up, Felicity, in Whatever line you choose to take.

PETER: *Anchors a weigh* (p: 17)

-FELICITY : [ . . . ] I've had Cynthia Hayling *rasping my nerves like a buzz saw*, and an sufferable letter from Rose Eastry telling me to stand firm.

PETER: What's it to do with her?

FELICITY: Go and ask her. She's your aunt too.

PETER: *Only in a roundabout way.*

FELICITY: If I heard that word again *I shall shriek.*

PETER: *Calm down, dear, and concentrate on the problem in hand* (p:20).

Peter indeed, adds a touch of finesse and humour to the play in the midst of the dilemma. He also proves to be an essential character throughout the play, mediating between the others and offering critical and sarcastic remarks at crucial points in the play.

### Jab/Punch Lines

The GTVH analysis along with the statistical findings reveal that jab lines form (268) or about (91.156%) out of (294), the total number of humorous instances. Further, jab lines occupy more than three quarters of the text of Act I. Jab lines act as significant transitions in the body of the text between scenes and

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contribute to the dialogues. They make the events move gradually from one state of affair or an activity to another. In comparison, jokes-punch lines constitute only (26) or about (8.843%) of total humorous instances. Punch lines serve as a tool to disrupt and distract from the dialogues, however, they end each micro-narrative with humorous situation:

- CRESTWELL : What's up?

MOXIE : Nothing's up. I must take this in—Her Ladyship's is waiting for it.

CRESTWELL: Ever since the news came *you've been behaving like a tragedy queen*. It can't matter to you all that much (p:7). [Jab line]

- CRESTWELL: A horse's neck will soon put you right, sir.

DON: *It'd take a giraffe's neck to make me even able to walk, let alone drive a car* (p: 91). [Jab line]

- FELICITY: I do wish you'd sit down, Peter! Nothing can be achieved by *you charging about the room like a sort of Dodgem* (p:30). [punchline]

- Felicity: She[Cynthia] also played Bolingbroke in Richard the Second and *her wig fell off*.

PETER: *She seems to have put it back* (p: 18). [punchline]

### Combs and Bridges

Since some humorous lines are in close proximity, interesting patterns occur creating combs. Namely, the "Nebuchadnezzar" jab lines which appear four times in Act I constitute a comb. Also, five more bridges emerge. For instance, the bridges of true/false and alive/dead scripts that occur twice at the beginning and at the end of Act II. While the "dance to the barrel" jab lines appear two times at the beginning of Act II and once at the end. Not to mention, the scripts "Japanese" and "Pete" which emerge three times in Act III constitute bridges. In fact, the recurrence of the humorous instances throughout the play is significant as they reinforce and enhance humour. One interesting example is the several references to Miranda's last movie which are employed effectively to induce humour. They result in a bridge that casts light the postwar thinking:

- CRESTWELL: Which nun?

ALICE: The one that gets captured by the Japanese.

CRESTWELL: *Hurry up with those ash-trays or shall all be captured by the Japanese* (p: 4).

- ALICE: *I couldn't help it, really I couldn't! Seeing her tortured by the Japanese on Tuesday and handing her carrots on Saturday sort of took my breath away* (RV:72).

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- FELICITY: *Please don't be belligerent, Don. It's quite unnecessary. You're not rescuing anybody from the Japanese now, you know.*

PETER (to Felicity): *You see, he does think we're the Japanese. It's a sort of occupational neurosis* (p:110).

Analogously, irony is invoked in the fact that *Pete* seems to be the nickname Miranda shares with Nigel; the many occurrences constitute a bridge:

- MIRANDA: [. . .] I think being married to Pete [Nigel] will be a whole-time job.

FELICITY: *Pete?* (p:67).

- DON: Listen, *Pete* . . . (He breaks off.) Oh God ! . . . (p:91).

- DON (delighted): Okay Come on, Pete!

NIGEL: *Pete* ! . . . (p:109).

## Script Oppositions

Among the Knowledge resources, Script Opposition is found to feature very prominently in *Relative Values*. The (GTVH) analysis yields numerous script oppositions which fathom out and comment on characters' personalities, social fabric, psychological barriers, naivety and mental/intellectual sophistication. As shown in Table (4) below, the statistical findings of the script oppositions exhibit that serious/ironical, which encompasses about (25.170 %), and real/unreal about (13.945 %) out of the total number of the humorous instances of the play, are the most prominent types of the scripts employed. The prevalence of these two script oppositions go hand in hand with the dominance of irony in the play and the reliance on the contrast between reality and fiction or real world and the film world. On the other side, good/bad SO comprises (8.843 %) and it portrays the misbehaviours, distaste, absurdities and irrationalities as betrayed by the main characters especially Miranda and Nigel. The serious/ironical; real/unreal and good/bad script oppositions occur in all of the three acts of the play, so they are identified as central. They compose the main structural framework of the play. True/false SO refers basically to Miranda's false childhood stories. Actor/ex-lover SO serves as a cryptic reference to the relationship between Miranda and her co-star Don. Literal/figurative SO covers a very small part of the text, however it is crucial as it emerges in all acts and is encoded mainly in the humorous examples that serve as a pun.

**Table (4): Frequent Scripts Oppositions in *Relative Values***

<b>Frequent scripts</b>	<b>Humorous lines</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>serious/ironical</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>25.170</b>
<b>real/unreal</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>13.945</b>
<b>good/bad</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>8.843</b>
<b>true/false</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5.782</b>
<b>actor/ex-lover</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2.721</b>
<b>literal/figurative</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.380</b>
<b>subordinate scripts</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>16.67</b>

The other subordinate scripts oppositions embrace about (16.67 %) of the total humorous instances, but they do not run through all the text. Some of these scripts can be listed under the central scripts. For instance, serious/sarcastic, serious/cynical, serious/sardonic and serious/playful can be submerged within serious/ironical SO. Normal/abnormal, possible/impossible, natural/artificial, animate/inanimate and real/fictional can go under real/unreal SO. While, good/bad SO involves sensible/foolish, alive/dead, beautiful/ugly and generous/mean script oppositions.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The inspection of the humour in *Relative Values* according to the GTVH and Theory of Humorous texts proves that verbal humour lies at the essence of the play and its main vehicle. The events commence, develop, complicate and are even resolved via humorous lines, specifically jab lines. Jokes represented by punch lines are a rarity. As they disrupt the narrative and serve as episode closures, their use is kept to the minimum. Further, characters are constructed and their mentalities are portrayed through humour that targets them, revealing, for instance their foolishness and shallowness; or else, they contribute humour that sketches their attitudes, emotions and beliefs.

The distribution of the humour in the text is found to be random. This leads to the conclusion that the causal factor that determines the non-random placement of the humour in the text is the author himself, intuitively guided by his taste and previous experience with similar texts and genres. In addition, the plot and events

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involved not to mention the presence of characters are responsible for the abundance of humour in certain parts and its scantiness in others.

Upon analysis, it is clear that Coward dedicates most of humour in the play to the major characters. In the case of Miranda, she is the one who is targeted most by humour as almost every other character in the play pokes fun at the pretentious movie star. After all, Coward does not seem to deviate from the general mainstream of stereotypes where American ( or semi-American) and show business people are not taken very seriously. In terms of jokers, Felicity comes on top followed by Crestwell, a matter that reflects Coward's attempt at a compromise between the two conflicting classes. All in all, the entire play is built on a joke structure where humour dominates from beginning to end. humour is the vehicle exploited to couch in social criticism and commentary where the playwright seems to disbelieve in and even ridicule the possibility of radical changes. *Relative Values* runs a full circle and ends where it exactly begins where everything remains status quo.

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