

T.C.
BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
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**ALAN AYCKBOURN'S COMEDY: EMBRACING AND
UPDATING THE CLASSICAL CODES OF COMEDY
VIA FUTURISM, FARCE, AND SCIENCE FICTION**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tezi Hazırlayan:

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YEMİN METNİ

Yüksek lisans tezi olarak sunduğum “Alan Ayckbourn’s Comedy: Embracing and Updating the Classical Codes of Comedy via Futurism, Farce, and Science Fiction” başlıklı bu çalışmanın, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere uygun şekilde tarafımdan yazıldığını, bu tezdeki bütün bilgileri akademik ve etik kurallar içinde elde ettiğimi, yararlandığım eserlerin tamamının kaynaklarda gösterildiğini ve çalışmamın içinde kullanıldıkları her yerde bunlara atıf yapıldığını, patent ve telif haklarını ihlal edici bir davranışımın olmadığını belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım. 20.05.2022

Ali Can ÇAKAR

T.C.
BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ
TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS SINAV TUTANAĞI

02/06/2022

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Türü ve Tarihi : Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2022
Alanı : İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Anahtar Kelimeler : Ayckbourn'un Komedi, Trajedi, Fars, Fütürizm, Bilim Kurgu

ÖZ

ALAN AYCKBOURN'UN KOMEDİSİ: KOMEDİNİN GELENEKSEL KAİDELERİNİ BENİMSEYİP, KOMEDİYİ FÜTURİZM, FARS VE BİLİM KURGU İLE GÜNCELLEMEK

Çağdaş tiyatronun komik trajedi yazarı Alan Ayckbourn, yazdığı diğer çok sayıda kısa oyun, gösteri ve uyarlamasının yanı sıra, seksendört uzun metrajlı oyun üretmiştir. Komedi ve Trajediye ayıran ince çizgi üzerinde yürüyen Ayckbourn, eserlerinde hiciv, parodi, basmakalıplar ve iğnelemeden, fiziksel slapstick komedisine varan çeşitli mizahi aygıtlar kullanır, Birini başkası sanma, gerçeküstüçülük, yineleme ve fars kullanımıyla karanlık ve trajik olanı aydınlık ve gülünç olanla ustaca dengeleyen Ayckbourn, izleyicisine komik bir katarsis sunar. Ayrıca, bu mizahi aygıtları ve dolayısıyla bu aygıtların yapıcı gücünü genç izleyici kitlesini eğitmek ve onları düşünmeye zorlamak adına kullanır. Aynı şekilde, uyarıcı öykülerinde komedi ve bilim kurguyu bir araya getirerek gerçekçi ve temellendirilmiş bir gelecek yaratmayı başaran Ayckbourn, izleyicisini yalnızca eğlendirmeyi değil, aynı zamanda onları çağdaş yaşamın tehlikelerine karşı uarmayı da amaçlar. Bu tez, seçili eserleri olan *Henceforward*, *Communicating Doors*, *Comic Potential*, *Whenever*, *My Sister Sadie* ve *The Divide*'da, Ayckbourn'un komedinin geleneksel kaidelerini benimseyişine ve komediyi fütürizm, bilim kurgu ve fars ile güncelleyişine ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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ABSTRACT

ALAN AYCKBOURN'S COMEDY: EMBRACING AND UPDATING THE CLASSICAL CODES OF COMEDY VIA FUTURISM, FARCE, AND SCIENCE FICTION

As a comic tragedian of modern theatre, Alan Ayckbourn has produced eighty-four full-length plays, as well as numerous other playlets, revues, and adaptations. Walking a fine line between comedy and tragedy, Ayckbourn employs various classical devices ranging from satire, parody, stereotypes, and sarcasm to slapstick physical comedy in his works. Masterfully balancing the dark and tragic with the light and comic via his use of mistaken identity, surrealism, repetition, and farce, Ayckbourn manages to provide his audience with a comic catharsis. What is more, he utilizes these comedic devices, and thus their constructive power, as a tool to educate his young audience and provoke thought. Similarly, in his cautionary tales, Ayckbourn manages to combine comedy with science fiction while creating a realistic and grounded future, seeking not only to entertain but also warn his audience against the dangers of modern technology. This thesis aims to illuminate Ayckbourn's embracement of the classical codes of comedy while updating comedy via futurism, farce, and science fiction in the selected works: *Henceforward*, *Communicating Doors*, *Comic Potential*, *Whenever*, *My Sister Sadie*, and *The Divide*.

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GLOSSARY

Altruistic: unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others.

Dominatrix: A woman who plays the dominant role in a sado-masochistic sexual relationship or encounter.

Hackneyed: Lacking in freshness and originality.

Incongruity: Lack of harmony, agreement, or appropriateness.

TV Mogul: An important, rich, and powerful businessman, especially one in the news, film, or television industry.

INTRODUCTION

Alan Ayckbourn is one of the most prolific British playwrights of the last sixty years. During that time span, he has written eighty-four full-length plays and a plethora of other plays, revues and adaptations. Going by some of his earlier works, however, one might be surprised by this success as his works ran the gamut from wildly successful to utterly disastrous. Today, however, Ayckbourn is second only to Shakespeare when we compare who is performed more. In the first subheading of chapter one, where Alan Ayckbourn's early life and career is detailed, how he began his career in the theatre when he was a teenager with little experience and has since become one of the most accomplished and successful playwrights of modern times is presented.

In the second subheading of the first chapter, various theories on why we laugh are discussed. In the light of the three theories of humour, the Superiority Theory, the Incongruity Theory, and the Relief Theory, the origins of laughter, and therefore comedy, are examined. This part of the study aims to present the arguments of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Ben Jonson, Hobbes, Kant and Freud regarding comedy and laughter in an attempt to find an answer to the age-old question, 'what is comedy?'

In the third subheading of chapter one, stages of types of comedy are examined. This part of the study aims to investigate the evolution of comedy over the ages, from the old comedy of Aristophanes up to the modern day. In that sense, the Classical Comedy, which is divided into Old Comedy and New Comedy, Comedy of Humours, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy, and the Comedy of Intrigue are observed.

In chapter two, the classical codes of comedy in Ayckbourn's selected plays are examined. *Henceforward*, *Communicating Doors*, *Comic Potential*, *Whenever*, *My Sister Sadie*, and *The Divide* have been chosen for their relevance to this study as these works contain the elements of science fiction, they cover a substantial period of Ayckbourn's writing career, and in these works Ayckbourn employs various comedic devices that could be found in both 'high' and 'low' comedy, ranging from physical humor in the form of slapstick to the witticisms of sarcasm.

Later in the same chapter, Ayckbourn's use of satire, spoof, and parody in his selected works are observed in an attempt to shed light on the points that Ayckbourn

makes about society. Therefore, in the first subheading in chapter two, Ayckbourn's use of these comedic devices, and thus their constructive power, as a tool to educate his young audience and make them think is discussed in the light of Eliot's objective correlative.

The second subheading of the same chapter deals with Ayckbourn's use of stereotypes, which serve as a way for him to build his characters quickly and humorously. What is more, Ayckbourn's masterful use of broken and unbroken stereotypes for his heroes and villains are presented along with their effects on the audience.

The third and the last subheading of chapter two observes how Ayckbourn's use of sarcasm gives his characters a personality and how it highlights the strange situations his characters are in. This part of the study also aims to examine the function of Ayckbourn's use of sarcasm as well as the absence of it in his selected plays.

Chapter three focuses on Ayckbourn's dark comedy along with his use of taboos as a common element and the purpose of his dark endings in his selected plays. This part of the study attempts to reveal why such darkness is necessary for Ayckbourn to educate his audience. A play tends to deviate from comedy to tragedy if the majority of the characters die at the end, or one character's hubris and obsession cause him to lose his whole family. In that sense, the first subheading of this chapter presents how Ayckbourn masterfully balances the dark and tragic with the light and comic via his use of mistaken identity, surrealism, repetition, farce, and slapstick in his selected plays. This part of the study examines how Ayckbourn manages to balance out tragedy and therefore he achieves his comic catharsis through his use of comedic devices.

Chapter four presents how Ayckbourn updates comedy via futurism, farce, and science fiction in his selected works. Even though science fiction and futurism are not typically associated with comedy nor farce, Ayckbourn also updates the codes of science fiction through his use of farce and his focus on people. This chapter mainly focuses on how Ayckbourn manages to depict a realistic and grounded future in his cautionary tales while walking a fine line between comedy and tragedy in his selected

works. Moreover, the second subheading of the chapter offers a comparison between Ayckbourn and his contemporaries. This part of the thesis aims to present how Ayckbourn stands out as a comic tragedian of modern theatre among his contemporaries, Harold Pinter, John Osborne, Samuel Beckett, Arnold Wesker, Tom Stoppard, and Peter Shaffer.



CHAPTER ONE

1. ALAN AYCKBOURN AND COMEDY

1.1. Ayckbourn's Early Life and Career

Alan Ayckbourn was born on 12 April 1939 in Hampstead. His father was the leader of the London Symphony Orchestra and his mother wrote stories for women's magazines (Allen, 2002, p. 9). With two such artistically-minded parents, Ayckbourn's penchant for the arts seemed to be guaranteed. His childhood was not just to shape his interest in anything artistic. When his mother remarried, Ayckbourn was exposed to the type of relationship that would shape his own views on marriage and which would be expounded upon in many of his writings. From the ages of twelve to seventeen, Ayckbourn attended Haileybury, an English public school, where his talent for writing would grow. While there, besides editing the house magazine, he wrote the house play at the end of every term. In addition, he acted in several plays, which is perhaps the most influential, as it not only got Ayckbourn started in the theatre, but through it, he met Edgar Matthews (Watson, 1988, p. 40). Matthews organized a Shakespeare tour, taking his actors, including Ayckbourn, to various countries to perform Shakespeare's plays. Matthews, who was a friend of actor manager Wolfit, gave Ayckbourn a letter of recommendation to Wolfit when Ayckbourn left school. This recommendation enabled Ayckbourn to gain a job as an Acting Assistant Stage Manager for Wolfit immediately after leaving school. He went on to work his way from Stage Manager to actor.

One year later, in 1957, Ayckbourn would join Stephen Joseph's Theatre-in-the-Round in Scarborough as both Stage Manager and actor. Another year later, Ayckbourn was acting in *Bell, Book and Candle* and did not like his part. He was vocal in his critique and Stephen Joseph said, "If you want a better part, you'd better write one for yourself. Write a play, I'll do it. If it's any good" (Billington, 1993, p. 4). Ayckbourn was only nineteen years old when *The Square Cat* was first performed in the summer of 1959. Ayckbourn, of course, was still acting, and so he played the lead role. A review of Ayckbourn's acting written in the *Scarborough Evening News* on 31 July 1959 states "Alan Ayckbourn, who learned to play the guitar for the occasion, although he does not play it for any length of time, gives his best performance of the

season” (Murgatroyd, 2000). Ayckbourn's acting was just as well-received as the play, as it was a tremendous success at the Scarborough Library Theatre when it appeared.

In the winter of 1959, Ayckbourn followed up this success with his second play, *Love After All*. It was part of a group of plays that were taken on tour and has been described as “a farce set in gay Edwardian days when love, folly and disguise cause a tangle of personal relationships” (Allen, 2002, p. 76). While in the *Evening News* Ayckbourn’s acting is praised once again as “a tremendous character acting hit,” the play itself was not as successful as its predecessor. The *Guardian* called it “lacking in wit” (Allen, 2002, p. 76). These mixed reviews and receptions of Ayckbourn’s plays would continue through the years of his early writing career.

After the success of *The Square Cat* in 1958 and the mediocre response to *Love After All* the following year, Ayckbourn decided to try his hand at a children’s play set at Christmas, *Dad’s Tale*, in 1960. It marks the first time that Ayckbourn shows the audience a single event from multiple character’s perspectives. It is a comedic tale that combines narrative and ballet. It never received an audience, however, as Ayckbourn said, “we were actually doing it at a time when there weren’t any children around” (Billington, 1993, p. 7). This lack of planning would result in yet another of Ayckbourn’s early writing failures two years later, with the production of *Christmas V Mastermind* in 1962. It was another children’s play set at Christmas, but audiences were once again lacking, due to both a lack of marketing to bring the audiences in and the lack of heating in the theatre itself. Those few who did come to the performances were wrapped so thickly in coats, scarves and hats that they were seemingly unable to hear the actors on the stage. Ayckbourn called it “the disastrous play I've ever done” (Billington, 1993, p. 12). But it was not only the weather that was the problem. The play itself was too complex for a children’s tale, which needs a more straightforward story with a clear message. Unfortunately, *Christmas v Mastermind* lacks both. Due to these two failures, Ayckbourn would not write another children’s play for more than two decades.

Between *Dad’s Tale* and *Christmas v Mastermind*, Ayckbourn wrote *Standing Room Only*, first performed at the Scarborough Library Theatre in July 1961. Stephen Joseph commissioned a story of overpopulation from Ayckbourn, but where Joseph

wanted a cautionary tale, Ayckbourn gave him a tale of human adaptability and survival against all odds. The play was a success in Scarborough and more shows were added due to its popularity. A review in *The Stage*, written by Joan Macalpine, who was part of the production team, posed the question, “Will no one drive this bus to Shaftesbury Avenue?” (Allen, 2002, p. 85). West End impresario Peter Bridge read the review and immediately made his way from London to Scarborough to see the play. He liked it so much he took out the option on it and wanted to bring it to the West End. It was the first of Ayckbourn’s plays to be optioned for the West End and it most certainly would not be the last. However, the play never made its way out of Scarborough. The play was written in Ayckbourn’s style of an ensemble cast of characters, each vitally important to the story. When it comes to West End productions, however, plays are more often based on one-star actor in a lead role with the remainder being relegated to supporting roles. This necessitated many rewrites on Ayckbourn’s part to make the play more palatable to a West End audience. Sadly, it was all for naught, as the play never did premiere in London. Ayckbourn did, however, learn that he is not a fan of rewrites and rarely does so to this day.

Two years later, in 1963, an Ayckbourn play would finally make it to London. *Mr Whatnot* is yet another experimental work, with Ayckbourn making the “attempt to translate the techniques of silent-screen comedy to the theatre” (Billington, 1993, p. 13). The play was a great success at Stoke-on-Trent and Peter Bridge was so delighted with it that he wanted to take the play to London, full cast included. He chose the Arts Theatre near Leicester Square. It was not a theatre-in-the-round, but it was not too big as to overshadow the stage or the actors. The run would not be a success, however. Despite Bridge wanting to bring the whole cast to London, only Peter King, playing the lead, was kept. Everything else, from director on down, was replaced, and while Ayckbourn had written the play to best showcase young and disciplined actors, the actors in London were seasoned and more practiced. Not only that, but gone were the quirky sound effects that Ayckbourn had used, which fit the more energetic tone of the original. These were instead replaced with “charming, melodious English tunes” (Allen, 2002, p. 101). The London reviews were uniformly bad, with Alan Brien in *The Sunday Telegraph* writing that it was “a nursery hallucination of Christopher

Robin after a debauch of cream buns and a matinee of *Rookery Nook*” (Billington, 1993, p. 13).

Ayckbourn, however, did not allow these ups and downs to stop him from writing. On the contrary, his next attempt would be the one that finally gave him his success in London. He would write *Meet My Mother* in 1965, again for Stephen Joseph. Joseph offered Ayckbourn the advice that if he was going to “break all the rules in future it might be good to write a play which kept them first, so that he knew what they were” (Allen, 2002, p. 108). When it premiered in Scarborough on 8 July 1965, it was now called *Meet My Father* and cut out quite a bit of what Ayckbourn had written, but it was a success. Peter Bridge and director Nigel Patrick declared “it was great” (Allen, 2002, p. 109). They in turn changed the name to *Relatively Speaking*, and it took nearly two years for it to premiere in London. And it did, opening on 29 March 1967 at Duke of York’s. It was a resounding success, running for 355 performances and establishing Ayckbourn as “the kind of popular comic writer for whom the West End had long been ravenous” (Billington, 1993, p. 19). The actor, playwright, composer and singer Noel Coward himself sent a telegram to Ayckbourn, saying, “All my congratulations on a beautifully constructed and very funny play. I enjoyed every moment of it” (Allen, 2002, p. 113). It would not be long before Ayckbourn was himself being compared to Coward, Coward being the only standard by which Ayckbourn’s future successes could be measured.

Overall, Ayckbourn would produce six plays of varying successes before finally making his mark with *Relatively Speaking*. His early plays are a mixture of well-received (*The Square Cat*, *Standing Room Only* and *Relatively Speaking*), poorly-received (*Love After All*), mixed reception (*Mr Whatnot*) and no reception (*Dad’s Tale* and *Christmas v Mastermind*). Yet, following the success of *Relatively Speaking*, he has gone on to be one of the most performed British playwrights over the last six decades.

1.2. Why Do We Laugh?

Comedy has been a part of our lives since human civilization began. One might say it is a characteristic that makes us distinctly human. The study of comedy can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

Why do we laugh? What makes something funny? The answers to these questions have been sought many times over the millennia, with varying answers and varying rationales. What at first appears quite simple is in fact quite nebulous. Myriad philosophers, scholars of literature, psychologists and sociologists have spent their entire careers looking for an answer to the riddle, ‘What is comedy?’

With so many ideas and theories, how does one categorize them in order to achieve a better understanding of the questions and their answers? Like the theories themselves, there are multiple methods of categorization. David Hector Monro, in his 1951 book, *Argument of Laughter*, cites eleven different categories of theory. Several decades later, in the 1985 edition of *Collier’s Encyclopedia*, he narrows them down to three: Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory, and Relief Theory.

The Superiority Theory is the oldest of the three theories of humour, and its earliest proponent was the Greek philosopher Plato. The superiority theory is based on the idea that laughter is a result of the feeling of superiority brought about by the “loss of self-control and the breaking of social rules” (Morreall, 2009, p. 4). Plato felt that if a person were to give in to laughter, he or she would no longer have self-control and cease to behave in a rational manner. This irrationality was problematic for Plato because he believed that laughter was born from feelings of hostility toward or superiority over the person being laughed at. He associated these feelings of superiority over others with aggression and this aggression combined with a loss of self-control had the potential to then lead to the breaking of the social rules stated above. These social rules were of course necessary for the function of society and if citizens and guardians of the state were to give in to these feelings, it could lead to violent forms of protest. As Plato stated in the *Republic* when referring to the populace, “they must not be prone to laughter. For ordinarily when one abandons himself to violent laughter his condition provokes a violent reaction” (Plato & Ferguson, 1957, p. 388). It was for this very reason, this “violent reaction,” that Plato wanted to restrict who could perform in a comedy and who should witness a comedy. In his *Laws*, he stated “that such representations be left to slaves or hired aliens, and that they receive no serious consideration whatsoever. No free person, whether woman or man, shall be found taking lessons in them” (Plato & Ferguson, 1957, p. 816). He considered comedy and laughter to be fit only for slaves and foreigners, while proper citizens must not

entertain it, for fear of losing their self-control, leading to problems in the social structure of the state.

Nearly two millennia later, English playwright and poet Ben Jonson would revisit Plato's ideas of laughter and superiority. Jonson would agree with Plato that laughter is brought about by a feeling of superiority over another, but he would argue that this was not necessarily always for the worse. These feelings of superiority can be useful and have value for those observing the comedy and laughing at it. When looking at the criticism that "comedy is steeped in drunkenness, lechery, lying, cowardice, etc.," one only has to look at the way they are regarded (Morreall, 2009, p. 8). In comedy, these immoral characteristics and behaviors are not being shown in order to be praised, but rather to be censured. Writers like Jonson wrote in order to point out and correct these defects in humanity, rather than hold them up as the ideal (Morreall, 2009, p. 94). He showed that Plato's argument against laughter may have had merit, but it did not necessarily mean that laughter was entirely negative in nature.

Writing at the same time as Jonson, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes was also a proponent of Plato and the Superiority Theory. Like Plato and Jonson, Hobbes was of the belief that laughter is a result of the pleasure one person feels when confronted with an imperfection or inferiority in another. Hobbes added to the argument that people laugh when a feeling of superiority comes over them because they are "naturally individualistic and competitive" (Morreall, 2009, p. 6). Because of this, he believed that we feel superiority over another when we perceive ourselves to be "winning" over that person. Our competitive nature revels in seeing the other person "losing." This is especially true when we "witness their ignorance, weakness, or failure" (Moland, 2019, p. 5). Like Plato, he believed laughter to be rather negative and problematic. Prior to the Enlightenment, superiority theory was the most widely studied understanding of laughter. When looking at Plato, Jonson, and Hobbes, one sees that all three of them viewed laughter to be a response to a feeling of superiority of one person over another.

The next theory of laughter and comedy to come about was the Incongruity Theory. It is based on the idea that expectations stem from past experiences and therefore we laugh when these expectations are thwarted and something unexpected

or incongruous happens. These expectations arise from our own experiences; what we have experienced leads to certain expectations as to what will happen in the future. When these experiences and expectations do not happen as expected, laughter is the result.

The first discussion of incongruity comes from Aristotle. As he said in his *Rhetoric*, “one way for a speaker to get a laugh is to set up an expectation in the audience then violate it.” One example he cited from a comedy was “And as he walked, beneath his feet were - chilblains” (Morreall, 2009, p. 11). He believed that people needed the occasional rest from work and other serious activities and one way to gain that rest is from humor and laughter.

Another famous ancient scholar who was a proponent of the incongruity theory was the Roman Cicero, who stated in chapter 63 of *On the Orator* that “the most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing, and another is said; here our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh” (Morreall, 2009, p. 11). In that same text he discusses several different types of humor that all depend on some type of incongruity. All of them are dependent upon the audience expecting one outcome but receiving one completely different.

It was not until the eighteenth century when thinkers like Immanuel Kant came along that the ideas of Aristotle and Cicero came to the forefront once again. It was Kant who, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, said that “Laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing” (Kant, Guyer, & Matthews, 2007, p. 332). Simplified, Kant’s theory is that laughter occurs when our expectations do not match with reality.

The final standard theory on laughter, generally attributed to Freud, is the Relief theory. The Relief theory dictates, unsurprisingly, that humour and laughter exist to offer humans literal relief. The theory arose during the 18th century and is a product of the biological theories of the time. Scientists had begun to solve the mysteries of the nervous system. They knew, for example that nerves connected the brain to the muscles, organs and sensory organs which of course, is correct. How the nerves worked, however was still a mystery, the predominant theory not being by electro-chemical impulses but by gases and liquids. These gases and liquids were

called “animal spirits,” and it was mostly believed these spirits consisted of blood and gases. John Locke described them as “fluid and subtle matter passing through the conduits and nerves” (Morreall, 2009, p. 16). According to the Relief Theory, laughter acted as the release valve for these animal spirits to protect the nervous system. Whilst largely focusing on Freud’s version of the Relief Theory, it is important at this juncture to give credit to Lord Shaftesbury and to a larger extent Herbert Spencer. The first two theories largely present humour and laughter as something negative whereas Spencer and Lord Shaftesbury depict them something much more positive. Spencer believed that all emotions take the form of nervous energy and in *The Physiology of Laughter* he states, what is it that always begets? “always tends to beget muscular motion, and when it rises to a certain intensity, always does beget it” (Morreall, 2009, p. 299). “Feeling passing a certain pitch habitually vents itself in bodily action” (Morreall, 2009, p. 302). With anger this can be the clenching of fists, maybe the clenching of the jaw or at one’s boiling point, a physical attack. For Spencer, laughter is a path to eliminating unwanted or useless excess energy before it becomes explosive, much like a pressure valve. Morreall offers a great analogy here by quoting *Waste*, a poem by Harry Graham:

I had written to Aunt Maud
Who was on a trip abroad
When I heard she’d died of cramp,
Just too late to save the stamp (Morreall, 2009, p. 17).

As Morreall states, the first three lines are meant to elicit pity from the reader for the poor bereaved nephew. This feeling of pity and empathy for the nephew is morphed into a feeling of anger at a mean, penny pinching little man, too miserly to buy a stamp. The reader’s nervous energy for the nephew is now useless and needs to be exhausted, this is done through laughter. In this way laughter works for the nervous system much like passing wind does for the gastric system, entirely necessary and positive for the body. In addition, there is an element of Incongruity Theory here owing to the fact that one does not expect people to die from cramp. In that sense, there is some humour to be found in the manner of Aunt Maud’s death as well.

As far as Freud is concerned laughter in the Relief Theory is shown to be less positive, which is a shame since Freud's version is the most well-known. In Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, laughter is connected not only to aggression but also lust. This version of the theory is broken into three separate types of laughter, each with its own reasons: joking (der Witz), 'the comic' and 'humour'. Whereas the theories of Spencer and Lord Shaftesbury focused on laughter as a kind of physical release, Freud focuses on the psychological relief laughter offers. Joking (der Witz), apparently, releases energy from repressed feelings. Freud classes a joke as either a prepared fictional statement meant to be funny (an Englishman, a Frenchman and an Irishman walk into a bar), spontaneous wit (such as sarcasm) or repartee (modern 'banter'). Freud believes most prepared jokes are about hostility and sexuality because these are feelings society urges us to repress. Over time this repression leads to a kind of mental pressure which is then released via laughter when we joke about them. Sometimes, it feels good to say things that society does not approve of, the same way you might find a child giggling after catching them whispering a swearword. For example, a joke of a sexual nature releases any repressed lust while a joke at the cost of a group one dislikes helps vent any repressed hostility. Secondly, there is 'the comic'. This is a release of excess mental or 'thinking' energy. A basic analogy would be the reaction to slapstick comedy. When an audience watches a comedian such as a clown failing at a simple task that they themselves could easily do, the brain summons extra energy. The brain uses more energy to simulate and understand the clown's exaggerated movements compared to simulating our own. This extra energy, which has no practical use is expelled through laughter.

Finally, there is 'humour' the final section of Freud's theory. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud argues that

humour occurs if there is a situation in which, according to our usual habits, we should be tempted to release a distressing affect and if motives then operate upon us which suppress that affect in the process of being born, the pleasure of humor comes about at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur, it arises from an economy in the expenditure of affect. (Freud, 1976, p. 254)

To put it simply, ‘Humour’ mirrors the simpler earlier Relief Theories except in his book, Freud uses an example from Mark Twain, rather than the poem by Harry Graham.

As one studies the theories of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Ben Johnson, Hobbes, Kant and Freud, one thing becomes clear: there is no unifying theory on what comedy is. Worse still, these philosophers do not seem to value comedy. They paint it almost completely in the negative, or in the cases of Spencer and Freud the positive effects are shown but laughter becomes something almost mechanical. Spencer and Freud also fail to mention comedy. Furthermore, each theory has large gaps that fail to account for certain forms of comedy. Thus, perhaps instead of looking solely at these philosophers and their theories, the stages of comedy and the types of comedy must be examined to find out what comedy truly is.

1.3. Stages and Types of Comedy

After answering, or at least attempting to answer the age-old question, ‘What is comedy?’ how comedy has evolved over the ages must be examined. Comedy is fluid and has evolved and adapted over the centuries, ranging from the old comedy of Aristophanes up to the modern day. Perhaps history may succeed where philosophers failed in explaining the nature of comedy.

To begin with, in Ancient Greece, the Classical Comedy is divided into Old Comedy and New Comedy. It is difficult to discuss Old Comedy without focusing on the plays of Aristophanes, of which there are only eleven surviving examples. The earliest surviving example of Aristophanes work is *The Acharnians*, produced in 425 BCE. At first, Old Comedy was slow to gain traction in society as its merits were not necessarily clear at the time and Tragedy was in favor. However, by the time of Aristophanes work, Old Comedy had become more and more popular. Old Comedy can be described as basic; there is very little plot, and its only goal appears to be mocking the political. In that sense, it must be rich in satire with an aim to fix society. A prime example of this aim would be in *Clouds*, where a parodied Socrates corrupts the youth and denies the existence of the Gods. In a similar vein, the social commentary is clear in *Lysistrata*, in which the title character seeks an end to the Peloponnesian War. This is done by persuading women from both sides not to indulge in sexual

congress with their partners until there is peace. Obviously, these kinds of plays were seen as dangerous for society due to their crude language, bawdiness and use of song and dance. Those in power decided that this kind of comedy was “too rough and low in its language and too free in its use of invective against living public figures” (Calder, 1996, p. 2). There was a concern that this freedom and open criticism of those in power could lead to violence and thus the comedy had to be checked by law. Whilst Old Comedy was soon replaced by New Comedy, its effects can still be felt in comedy to this day. Features of Old Comedy can be found in the political sketches of *Saturday Night Live* and their lampooning of political figures like Donald Trump. Two other examples from the UK are *The Thick of It* or *Yes Minister*, both of which are set in the halls of power and mock the political elite. If the biggest danger Old Comedy posed was the fact it loved to vilify and mock those in power, then New Comedy is the result.

In New Comedy, which is seen from around 336 BCE, the focus shifts from the real lives of public figures to the private lives of fictional men and women, this focus often being of an amorous nature. The lives of Athenian people were shown through a rose-tinted lens so as to avoid any kind of comment, or worse, critique of society as a whole at the time. New Comedy can perhaps be seen as more sophisticated but less actively humorous. New Comedy is all about the plot and telling a story, rather than ridiculing those in power. More often than not these plots are romantic schemes and intrigues. The humour in New Comedy is often derived from satire rather than outright ridicule or the use of farce. Examples of this satire can be seen in *Aulularia* of Plautus, in which an old man is loath to spend his money. His over abundance of caution leads to his losing everything. Or in the *Adelphi of Terrence*, in which a father’s strict rules cause his son to turn out worse than the son of a father who spoils his offspring. Both of these plays rely on twists. These twists then can be related back to the Incongruity Theory which argues that the humor is derived from the audience expecting one eventuality but receiving another. New Comedy’s influence can be felt all the way through to the 18th Century and beyond. During the Renaissance, moral lessons were taken from these early plays and adapted in accordance with the sensibilities of the time. Common themes were how young men in love should act and what kind of women they should avoid. New Comedy acted as the basic framework for comedy for centuries, as can be seen in Molière’s works in the 17th Century.

Even though Moliere's plots often used the same tried and tested plots as New Comedy, he chose to focus less on romance. He often portrayed his antagonists as greedy and selfish; this makes his work much more critical. His characters are not witty. The audience is supposed to laugh at them and their machinations, not with them. Calder, for instance asserts that Molière's plays are not set in a romantic world like those of New Comedy, but are rather set in a world of self-love where not everything is alright in the end (Calder, 1996, p. 221). Furthermore, New Comedy's legacy can still be found in modern comedies. This type of comedy can be described as a 'safe comedy' where a studio wants to produce content which will be successful without risking alienating large parts of society. For example, 2000's *Meet the Parents* features the lives of a middle-class American family. While it is indeed funny and much of the comedy is of an amorous nature, there is no attempt in the slightest to make any kind of political statement. An English example would be the earlier seasons of *The Vicar of Dibley*, which debuted in 1994 and revolves around the life of a female English priest. Her stories were never political, but again much of the comedy was often amorous and she would have learned some kind of moral lesson by the end of each episode.

It is clear that Old and New Comedy formed the basis for much that would follow. The Comedy of Humours, for example, originates in the late 16th Century and is most often associated with Ben Jonson who explained his theory on the humours in *Every Man Out of His Humour*. It was believed the human body consisted of four liquids which should exist in equilibrium. For a healthy mind and body, "blood, phlegm, yellow bile (choler) and black bile (melancholy)" had to be in balance (Jonson, 2001, p. 13). An imbalance of any of these would result in anomalous behavior, which is where the Comedy of Humours derives its humour. Jonson uses the humours to change his characters' dispositions. His characters are represented by a singular humour which leads to an imbalance and causes them to act inappropriately. Furthermore, his characters represented two different types of humour. First is genuine humour, in which a character is truly possessed by a specific quality or trait. For example, in *Every Man in His Humour*, Kiteley represents 'genuine humour,' a man driven by suspicion and distrust of his wife. Second is adopted, in which a character would mimic a trait in excess that they believed was flattering, this could be by

adopting certain clothes or mannerisms or habits. In *Every Man in His Humour*, Mr. Mathew is a prime example of adopted humour, by the end of the play he is revealed to be a fake poet who has been carrying around other men's works to appear intelligent. In *Comedy of Manners*, the influence of New Comedy can be clearly seen. Jonson's drawing of his characters seems to be derived from New Comedy's playbook. This can be seen in the way he satirizes the reality of everyday people. As Andrew Calder states, Jonson's theory on the humours can be seen at work in many of Moliere's characters.

Jonson's analysis fits the behavior and make-up of Moliere's monomaniacal characters: the melancholic, atrabilious misanthropy of Alceste (*Le Misanthrope*), the melancholic hypochondria of Argan (*Le Malade imaginaire*) and the bilious irascibility of the jealous Arnolphe (*L'Ecole des femmes*) all act as central qualities around which the feelings, reasoning and behavior of each of these characters revolve. (Calder, 1996, p. 13)

When looking for a more modern example of this type of Comedy examples in English comedies can be found. Two English sitcoms adhere to this type of comedy. The first *Fawlty Towers* which debuted in 1975 and ran through to 1979 centers on the character of Basil Fawlty, a man consumed and controlled almost completely by his anger and general irritableness. Much of the comedy in the show is derived from Basil's rage leading him into unlikely /embarrassing situations. His wife Sybil can also be seen to represent Adopted Comedy as she affects a professional demeanor towards guests but is described by Basil as 'the dragon' a 'piranha fish' and his 'little nest of vipers'. The second slightly later example is *Keeping Up Appearances* which first aired in 1990 and ran until 1995. This comedy is centered upon Hyacinth Bucket who is a prime example of adopted humour. Hyacinth, who was born low working class, marries well and spends the entire series pretending to be upper-middle class but is brought back down to earth at every juncture. An example of this would be her constant insistence that her name be pronounced as 'Bouquet', not 'Bucket' or the fact that her working class family have a habit of appearing at the worst possible time.

Comedy of Manners is similar to Humours in that it is satirical, it is also heavily inspired by Jonson. Whilst it dates back to the Roman satirists of the first century BC, Comedy of Manners only really became popular during the restoration period of 1660-

1710 and can be seen as an evolution of The Comedy of Humours. However, whereas Humours focuses on a character trait, a Comedy of Manners focuses on a section of society, namely the elite upper class and their manners. The goal of this satire was to bring about societal change, and these plays were especially popular during the restoration period. This form was often seen as High Comedy as it used sophisticated wit and preferred dialogue over physical comedy. This type of play was often aimed at the same level of society as the author's. The audience was watching a play that satirized them, the upper class. This satire often focusses on the materialism, gossip and hypocrisy of the middle and upper classes. *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, for example, rails against puritanical ideology. The play is based on several of Moliere's works. Unlike Moliere however, Wycherley uses coarse language and sexual plot points (a man pretending to be impotent so he can lay with married women for example) to challenge puritanical thinking. In this way, it can be seen as a continuation of New Comedy wherein imaginary characters, often of the upper class are satirized. However, there is a clear difference between a Comedy of Manners and New Comedy. Whilst the stories depicted in Manners may be similar to those in New Comedy, the mission attributed to the playwright is different. Unlike Old Comedy, New Comedy did not seek societal or political change. Yet, the Comedy of Manners inspired by New Comedy stood as a blending of the two. Of all the forms of comedy mentioned so far, the Comedy of Manners has perhaps been the most successful within English society, and its focus on sophisticated wit over physical comedy is often associated with the English sense of humour. In the 19th Century, the tradition was continued by Oscar Wilde in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The former revolves around infidelity in upper 19th Century society and was first shown in an upper-class theatre. It follows the tradition of satirizing the class of the audience while the latter features the upper-class protagonists who assume false personas to avoid social engagements. In the early 20th Century, the tradition was continued by playwrights such as Noel Coward with *Hay Fever* and Somerset Maugham. The tradition soon found a home on English television sets. The *Carry On* films can be seen as a continuation of the Manners films, which are full of not just witty dialogue but risqué humour. Later on, in the late 20th Century *Absolutely Fabulous*, which aired in 1994 would carry many of the hallmarks of the comedy of

manners. The show revolved around two ageing, morally reprehensible London socialites and their refusal to grow old gracefully and once again much of the comedy came from the dialogue rather than the physical action.

Sentimental Comedy, an 18th Century form of comedy, came about as a reaction to the Comedy of Manners and the immoral tone of the plays written during the English restoration era. The focus here was on the characters' sentimental and emotional characteristics rather than their class. Sentimental Comedy is almost the antithesis to Comedy of Manners. Whilst main characters are still from the middle classes, they are shown as virtuous and without sin, heroes who overcome moral trials. In that sense, the plays of Sentimental Comedy depict an idealistic view of humanity. Plots usually revolve around the domestic lives of a middle class couple and their private, often romantic woes. The heroes are faultless and moral while the villains are thoroughly evil and reprehensible. Sentimental plays focus on the emotional stress of the characters' woes to elicit the maximum sympathy from the audience. This means that the goal of these 'comedies' was not laughter, but tears. By seeing the misery of the character, it was hoped the audience would learn their lesson and go on to live virtuous lives. Perhaps the most well-known example of this genre is *The Conscious Lovers* written by Sir Richard Steele in the early 18th Century. The plot of the play, a young and destitute heroine facing moral trials until she reaches her happy ending, serves as a useful mascot for these plays as a whole.

The focus of the Comedy of Intrigue is almost solely on plot. The complex plots and subplots often revolve around hidden conspiracies or misunderstandings which become more and more outlandish, verging on the farcical from which the humour is derived. First developed in Ancient Rome by Plautus and Terence this form of play became increasingly popular in the 16th and 17th Centuries with examples ranging from Shakespeare with *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* to Machiavelli and *The Mandrake*. Simply, *The Merchant of Venice* begins with a character securing a loan in exchange for a pound of flesh and from there the plots twists and turns until it culminates in Portia cross dressing and pretending to be a lawyer so that she can save the other protagonist. Shakespeare's is a prime example of farce. Meanwhile in *Much Ado about Nothing* the plot revolves around misunderstandings. Firstly, whether or not Hero is unchaste after Claudio is deceived into believing so. Secondly, later when she faints and is believed to be dead. The

comedy here is found in cases of mistaken identity and cases where characters misunderstand what they have heard.

Last but not least, farce specializes in low comedy. The goal is less to make comment and more to make the audience laugh. This is achieved by putting an incompetent, one-dimensional character into increasingly ridiculous situations for maximum effect. A classic example of farce can be found in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Of all the different forms of comedy, farce may be the one most focused on the eliciting of laughter. It aims to make a mockery of real life through the use of the absurd. Farce can actually be traced back to medieval France where actors would improvise during religious plays. This improvisation then evolved into comedic interludes during the 15th and 16th centuries. The earliest farces date back to between 1450 and 1550, yet it is a form of comedy that has only grown in popularity during the 20th and 21st centuries. In Moliere's works characters often show elements of farcical comedy. As Calder points out, Moliere normally saves farce for his lowest characters who are "all both socially low and markedly morally inferior" (Calder, 1996, p. 6). Moliere's early works consist of several one act farces, such as *La Jalousie du Barbouille*. Calder claims Moliere wrote these plays when he had one goal, simply to entertain his audience with "an easy and fluent mastery of the stereotyped characterization, earthy dialogue and ritualized stage business which were the hallmarks of the French farcical tradition" (Calder, 1996, p. 220). However, as his career progressed, Moliere's writing was increasingly influenced by New Comedy which Calder describes as "lively, fast-moving, elegant and good-humoured comedy" (Calder, 1996, p. 221). Later, Moliere would combine the two forms in some of his most well-known plays. In these plays he combined the pure entertainment value of Farce with the moral commentary of New Comedy to create plays that were not just good fun for the audience but might teach them something too, or as Calder puts it, "the more telling his portraits, the more they amused. One might also add: the more they amused, the more they informed" (Calder, 1996, p. 222).

In this aspect, Alan Ayckbourn does something very similar with his works, embracing the classical comedic devices, combining them and updating them via futurism, farce and science fiction. In doing so, Ayckbourn copies Moliere's style and dramatic techniques, seeking not only to entertain but also inform the audience through comedy.

CHAPTER TWO

1. THE CLASSICAL CODES OF COMEDY IN AYCKBOURN'S WORKS

As stated earlier, Ayckbourn has written 84 plays so far. Since writing an in depth analysis of all 84 plays is beyond the scope of this thesis, five of his works have been chosen for their relevance to the thesis. These works span over two decades of Ayckbourn's career, and all include aspects of science fiction. The works are:

Henceforward, debuted in 1987 and is Ayckbourn's 34th full length play. Most notably, it was his first piece of science fiction. The play is a combination of sci-fi and farce which revolves around Jerome, who tries to prove that he is responsible enough to see his daughter. The second play is *Communicating Doors*, debuted in 1994. The plot spans three different time periods 1974, 1994 and 2014. Much like in *Henceforward*, the play is also set in a near dystopian future, and it shows-parts of London engulfed in civil unrest. Third is *Comic Potential*, premiered in 1998. Once again set in the near future, *Comic Potential* leaves behind domestic settings and is set primarily in a TV studio. *Comic Potential* is mostly a Romantic Science-Fiction Comedy but makes use of slapstick, farce and parody. The fourth play featured is *Whenever*, premiered in December 2000 and is a musical parody of *The Wizard of Oz*. Like *Communicating Doors*, *Whenever* is another time travel comedy, however with much more focus on science fiction. The final play featured is *My Sister Sadie*, premiered in 2003. The play, much like *Whenever*, is family friendly compared to Ayckbourn's other works. Unlike the earlier plays, *My Sister Sadie* does not really fit into any one comedy category or genre, being much closer to a typical family adventure.

These plays have been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, they all have elements of science fiction, which will be discussed in this thesis. Secondly, they cover a substantial period of Ayckbourn's writing career. Thirdly, and most importantly, not only is each play a slightly different genre from the other, but each specializes in a different comedic device. *Henceforward* is a farce, *Communicating Doors* is a dark comedy, *Comic Potential* is a Romantic Comedy, *Whenever* is a musical Parody, and *My Sister Sadie* is a family adventure. In these plays, Ayckbourn employs various

comedic devices that could be found in both ‘high’ and ‘low’ comedy, ranging from physical humor in the form of slapstick to the witticisms of sarcasm.

1.1. Satire, Spoof and Parody in Ayckbourn’s Selected Plays

Along with Ayckbourn’s use of satire in the selected plays, this study will focus on his use of parody, primarily in *Whenever*, before going on to his broader use of satire in his plays. These three comedic devices are closely related and the lines between them are easily blurred, and thus, they can be easily confused. Of the three, satire is the most prevalent in these works. Satire dates back to Ancient Greece and primarily focuses on social and political commentary with actual humor becoming a secondary concern. Parody also has its origins in Ancient Greece. In ancient Greek literature, a ‘parodia’ is a narrative poem that mimics the epics in their style. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a parody is “a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule,” which could be used quite effectively to describe *Whenever*. Of the three forms then, parody is the most focused, usually taking aim at a single work and lampooning it. Spoof, on the other hand, is defined as “to make good-natured fun of something.” Even though the two terms are similar in meaning, a parody normally takes its inspiration from one real life source or piece of artwork while a spoof is much broader, usually taking aim at an entire genre opposed to just one work. Of the three, spoof is often the least respected form. This is due to the fact that a spoof is rarely interested in making any kind of social political comment, rather focusing on being ‘funny’. This means that Ayckbourn does not often use spoof in his plays. As will hopefully become clear throughout the course of this chapter, Ayckbourn does everything for a reason, and the reason is rarely just to be funny. When Ayckbourn uses satire, parody and stereotypes, he is always making a point, normally a socially satirical one. This does not mean that Ayckbourn does not challenge genre conventions, he absolutely does. However, when he challenges these conventions, he does so to make wider points, and it normally takes the form of satire.

Whenever is quite clearly inspired by *The Wizard of Oz*; It also to a great extent parodies it. In the play, Emily is clearly inspired by Dorothy. Emily is listed as “a nine-year-old girl” in the cast list for *Whenever* whilst in *The Wonderful Wizard of*

Oz Dorothy is described as “a mere child” and a “little girl” (*Whenever* 60). This clearly puts the two characters within a similar age range. Ziggi is the tinman, Oscar is the scarecrow, and Hoombean is the Lion. Both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Whenever* feature strong young female leads who go on fantastic journeys of self-discovery. *The Wizard of Oz*, however, uses a fantastical setting while in *Whenever* Ayckbourn opts for science fiction. It is commonly thought that a parody should ridicule the original work that inspired it. In that sense, one might suppose that *Whenever* should ridicule or make fun of *The Wizard of Oz*. However, in the twentieth century, parodies developed a new function, not to target the original text but instead to use that text to target something else. For example, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* uses Homer’s *Odyssey* to talk about 20th-century Ireland. Ayckbourn is clearly inspired by modern parodies and does something similar with *Whenever* by targeting *The Wizard of Oz* less and targeting modern society more. *The Wizard of Oz* can be seen as a cautionary tale about those who hold power while the film can be seen as a parody of 1930s’ society. The script mocks the idea that power comes to those who deserve it. In the film, Dorothy accidentally defeats two of the wicked witches, but she is hailed as a heroine, just as the Wizard was upon his arrival in Oz. This warning about those in power was especially poignant in the 1930s. *Whenever* features a similar warning. Lucas, Emily’s uncle and a war profiteer, becomes increasingly powerful as time goes on despite the fact that he has never been anything other than a cheat, which he admits in the song *Deal*:

Lucas: I need to deal - To wrap my fingers around that pack. I need to feel whilst I’m distributing the pack, as other players hope to win, I’ll fix the odds and rake it in- I love to deal. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 49)

Thus, in both works there is a parodying of society and those in power. However, Ayckbourn goes one step further and uses the parody to make a couple more important points about society. Firstly, *Whenever*, like much of Ayckbourn’s work, is a feminist piece, as Ayckbourn stated,

She [Emily] makes a small 'feminist' journey. She grows up in the play: she becomes strong. At the end of the play she resists her cousin who bullies her. She's stronger, she's more independent and there's a bit at the end when her

uncle says: "You can't help me with this, you're only a girl." Right at the end there, and you know she's going to go on and become Amelia Earhart or something. She's going to fly the first aeroplane! (Glaap, 2004, p. 32)

Although it is most commonly stated that *Whenever* is inspired by, and thus, is a parody of *The Wizard of Oz*, it can be argued that *Whenever*, unusually for a parody, has more than one target. Instead of only being concerned with parodying *The Wizard of Oz* it can be seen as a satire of sexist genre conventions of the traditional children's fairy tale. Specifically, the idea that powerless women need a prince charming to save them. Ayckbourn does this by parodying traditional tales like *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. In this analogy, Emily is Cinderella / Snow White / Rapunzel, Clara is the ugly stepsister, Charity fits the wicked stepmother role, while Lucas is the evil Queen's stand in. Similar to Cinderella and Snow White, Emily loses the people close to her and those meant to care for her turn out to be villains. At the start of the play, *Whenever* follows this genre quite closely as Charity and Clara are abusive towards Emily. In the opening song Emily describes Clara as a "twelve-year-old monstrosity" and a "relative from hell" who will "torture me by turns with fingers twists and Chinese burns." Meanwhile, Charity can be seen as the wicked stepmother role in the way she favors Clara over Emily. Despite the fact Emily is the victim and Clara the bully, Charity describes Emily as "a very naughty girl" and a "thoughtless, inconsiderate child." Even worse for no good reason Emily is sent to bed without dinner and locked in her room. This all mirrors how Cinderella is often portrayed as being treated. Uncle Lucas is the worst of the three Lashmores which makes him the Evil Queen. His innate cruelty is shown in his first scene when he threatens Emily:

You do not come of age for another twelve years. Which may seem in the scheme of things very little time at all, but I can promise you, if your unruly behavior continues, as far as you are concerned it could well seem an eternal lifetime. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 25)

Later, in the play, Lucas is seen chasing down Emily to kill her and steal her inheritance, a move straight out of the Evil Queen of *Snow White*'s playbook. The Evil Queen covets Snow White's beauty much like Lucas is covetous of Emily's wealth. So, who is Emily's Prince Charming? This is where the satire can be seen. One can

nominate Uncle Martin as a satire of Prince Charming. Emily clearly loves him dearly and worships the ground he walks on. The fact they are related is problematic. However, it must be remembered that young children often confuse romantic feelings. For example, children often say they will marry their parents when they grow up. Martin, as a moral man, makes an excellent parody of Prince Charming. Prince Charming is normally portrayed as a moral hero and Martin's morals can be seen when he states that the time machine "cannot be used for personal gain" and when he describes Lucas as a "profiteering rogue who's preparing to exploit everyone he meets purely for his own personal gain" (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 29). These morals however are compromised by his obsession with his work. He clearly states here that Lucas is a bad man but when Emily comes to Martin for help, complaining about her mistreatment at the hands of Lucas she is told, "I'm sure it's all in your imagination" (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 20). Martin is a terrible hero. Emily expects him to be her savior and rescue her from a situation he himself got her into, but instead he is too busy to listen to her or heed her warnings. Martin is defeated in combat by Lucas, and therefore Emily is forced to save herself. This defeat sends her on her feminist journey and by the end of the play Emily is a force to be reckoned with. Ayckbourn satirizes the conventions of traditional children's fairy tales to create a modern re-telling, turning it into a feminist tale of a young girl's self-awakening. The fact that *Whenever* is a children's play makes this feminism even more noteworthy. Ayckbourn is telling his young female audience that they do not need a man to save them and that they should not rely on men, which is an important and very different message from traditional children's tales.

Secondly, the play acts as a warning as it features an incredibly bleak and pessimistic view of the future. In the time of Ziggi, humans have somehow become all but extinct and by the end of the play, all that is left is the sub-human Hoombean. Indeed, Ayckbourn described the play as "a moral lesson about thinking about the future now and not leaving it till it's too late" (Yorkshire Post, November 2000, via *Alan Ayckbourn's Official Website*), and in another interview described Hoombean as "a strange creature that turns out to be the human race when left to its own devices" (Glaap, 2004, p. 33). In his parody of *The Wizard of Oz*, he hopes to warn of what will happen if things do not change. Ayckbourn makes this message clear at the end of the

play when Emily manages to bounce back in time and sees that she has created a more positive timeline. Hoombean becomes more human and hails from a time where humans inhabit half the galaxy, Oscar is a Major and England is thrashing Germany, and Ziggy is a clown who entertains thousands of humans at a time. The apocalyptic future has been averted. Again, it is no accident here that the target audience for the play is children. Emily is a child who saves humanity's future, and Ayckbourn is showing his young audience that they can do the same. Since the adults have ruined it, it is down to the next generation to fix it. To conclude, when Ayckbourn uses parody, his aim is not to attack the source material, be it *The Wizard of Oz* or *Cinderella* or *Snow White*, but instead to use it as a tool to educate his young audience and make them think. Ayckbourn's allusion to the texts and the characters mentioned above could be inspired by T.S. Eliot's objective correlative. Eliot, in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems," suggests that

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (Eliot, 1998, p. 58)

Since Ayckbourn's target audience for *Whenever* is children, he creates 'situations' and 'a chain of events' that can provide children with cognitive experience in order to provoke an idea. By his objective correlative, Ayckbourn intends to make his young audience feel that not only are they capable of saving humanity's future, but they must do it before it is too late.

As shown above, parody often acts as a form of social satire in Ayckbourn's works. Positively dripping in satire, *Comic Potential* is probably the most satirical play of the selected plays in this study. In *Comic Potential*, Ayckbourn turns his satirical eye to the world of television. Michael Billington, writing for *The Guardian* described the play as "a satire on the world of television: a place where actors are androids, where original ideas go through a Kafkaesque development process and where accountants sinisterly rule" (Murgatroyd, 1998). For example, the play's depiction of television production is clearly a satire of modern day production values, something Ayckbourn

is sure to know about as a prolific playwright. Chandler describes his audience as “subnormal,” and the whole production process as “the whole process bypasses seven the smallest, most insignificant scrap of creative achievement. It’s no longer a dying art boy, it’s dead” (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 32). It is modern society that Ayckbourn is satirizing, Ayckbourn is telling his audience that TV is no longer about the art but all about profit. He does this through his representation of the poorly made in-world media of *Comic Potential*. Studios are like factories where machines churn out mass produced rubbish. There are two main examples of this: Firstly, the drama/ soap opera Chandler is directing is terrible in how formulaic it appears. Secondly, Jacie’s former roles which she repeatedly reverts back to are good examples. The best two examples are during the brothel scene, first in her argument with the prostitute,

Jacie: Look, you just stump in your own cradle, sis, and stop trying to molly me cause I fend me own square, right? (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 97)

And later during the fight with Turkey,

Jacie: You are well and truly nicked, mister! If I see you in here again, you’ll be talking out of some alternative orifice, all right? You listening to me, sunshine? (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 102)

Both examples serve to show the kind of hackneyed stereotypes poor Jacie has been forced to play, both entirely unoriginal. The first appears to be a stereotypical east-end prostitute, the second a stereotypical TV cop.

The satire then becomes more pointed when the characters themselves are examined. Chandler is an alcoholic egotist who hates his work. He is a satire of the kind of jaded artist who complains that art is dead and that nobody cares but does nothing about it. He is the kind of man who is happier to complain than to try and fix the system that provides his paycheck. It can be imagined that Ayckbourn has met his fair share of Chandlers over the years. Carla, on the other hand, is a one-dimensional villain and acts as a satire of the kind of people who really pull the strings in media today. Carla does not care about anything as long as the studio is profitable,

Carla: I hate downsizing meetings. All those tears and recriminations. Why can’t people just accept that they’re no longer wanted? Bleating on about their pension schemes. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 36)

and she is respected,

Carla: I am overall Regional Director Adam and things are done my way. And I don't care if you're the chairman's mistress you can bloody well toe the line like everyone else. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 39)

Finally, Lester Trainsmith is a satire of real-life TV moguls like Rupert Murdoch, who might appreciate old fashioned values but are more concerned with keeping their media empires profitable. This approach to business is best summed up during Carla's firing,

Lester: Do you know what the motto of this company is, Mrs. Pepperbloom? Do you recall it at all? I'm sure you do. It's on our notepaper, it's on every office wall. It is gold letter inscribed on our boardroom wall in Seattle. Two words Mrs. Pepperbloom. Nothing – Personal. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 108)

It is ironic that even though art is deeply personal, Trainsmith's company produces art and yet his company's motto is 'Nothing-Personal.' In her book, *A King and a Fool?: The Succession Narrative as a Satire*, Virginia Miller suggests that irony arises from "an incongruity, a contradiction or an incompatibility" (Miller, 2019, p. 33). In that sense, the irony here arises from the fact that the company's motto, 'Nothing-Personal,' is contradictory to the very personal nature of art. Miller also notes that when used in "a sustained manner", irony can function as a means "to critique and reform society through the power of language" (Miller, 2019, p. 30). Therefore, with his successfully conducted ironic dialogues, Ayckbourn intends to use the constructive power of language for the sake of society.

Besides *Comic Potential*, Ayckbourn uses several other near-future settings to satirize modern society and make prophetic warnings. Firstly, In *Henceforward*, Ayckbourn satirizes modern consumer culture and the materialism of the 1980s. John Wu argues in *Six Contemporary Dramatists* that "it is typical of Ayckbourn's disillusionment with the materialism of the late 1980s that he can write with such intensity about its essential inhumanity" (Wu, 1995, p. 126). In particular, Ayckbourn takes aim at materialism in relation to technology. This materialism is best presented in the way that Jerome attempts to defend Nan to Zoe, even though her sister model is responsible for the death of a baby. In Jerome's mind, the convenience of having a

robotic nanny far outweighs the minor inconvenience such as killing an infant. Worse still, if the robot does kill one's infant, it is probably one's fault,

Jerome: It wasn't the machines fault- the mother had her kitchen moved around and never told the machine. I mean, how can you expect a machine to know any better? (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 89)

Later, Mervyn is introduced, a man who is not just obsessed with the latest technology but uses it to increase his own sense of self-importance,

Mervyn: (rather proudly) I've got a few wires about my person, yes, I have to admit it. (He finds his answering machine and switches it on. The beeping stops. Producing items from various pockets and holding them up to show them). (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 78)

It can be argued that Ayckbourn shows his disapproval of Mervyn's materialism in the scene during which he gets tangled up in all the wires, humiliating himself. Besides materialism, Ayckbourn has other comments to make about society's obsession with technology. He paints modern technology as having an isolating effect by arguing that:

It makes us ask whether we are, literally, enthralled by our word-processors and domestic computers, whether we do actually prefer rational machines to irrational human beings and whether the streets of our towns and cities are becoming as bogey-haunted as the woods in a Grimm fairy-tale. (Billington, 1993, p. 199)

Jerome would rather sit at home playing with his recordings than actually spend time with real people. This is best represented in his relationships with Lupus and Nan. Throughout the play Jerome listens to, but largely ignores Lupus's many voicemails even when Lupus's situation appears to become increasingly desperate,

Jerome: He's alright. That's always happening to Lupus. Nothing out of the ordinary. (On screen, the phone booth topples on its side. Lupus goes with it.) (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 80)

Jerome completely misses the fact that his former friend finishes the play in hospital as Ayckbourn states in the second act of the play that "Jerome fails to notice any of it. Lupus is on some sort of Hospital trolley." The degree of separation that the technology

offers allows Jerome to ignore his friend's plight without feeling any guilt. His relationship with Nan is also unhealthy. Jerome talks to her as if she is another human, "Look what I've bought for you. Who's a spoilt girl then?" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 15); he even goes as far as attempting to reprogram her to make her seem more human. Jerome may choose to cloister himself away, but deep down, he is obviously quite lonely. In this future, people use technology to hide from the world and so the outside world has gone to hell. Jerome's house is covered in shutters and much of his communication with the outside world, such as with the 'Sisters of Darkness', is through his video screen. Mervyn and Corinna are chauffeur driven around in an armored car, and Mervyn has wired himself into a personal alarm system. But does this technology actually keep them safe? By the end of the play, Jerome's home is under siege and his family is left for dead. In his representation of both the 'Daughters of Darkness' and 'Sons of Bitches,' Ayckbourn seems to imply that this obsession with technology and the isolating effect it often has can lead to a moral and societal decay. In the case of *Henceforward* this has led to men and women choosing to separate themselves from each other. Interestingly, he delves into the separation of sexes in his first novel, *The Divide*.

In *Whenever*, on the other hand, Ayckbourn tackles a different aspect of society. Rather than targeting technology or materialism, he takes aim at society's inability to plan ahead. He claims that *Whenever* is "a moral lesson about thinking about the future now" (Murgatroyd, 2000). Ayckbourn is referring to modern society's reluctance to combat pervasive issues such as pollution and climate change which, in his work, leads to a world where humans are all but extinct. It can be argued that *Whenever* satirizes modern technology to an extent as well. In a future where humans are almost extinct, all that is left are robots which have only one directive, to keep humanity safe. In both the futures of *Henceforward* and *Whenever* humans have hidden behind technology with arguably disastrous results.

In *Communicating Doors*, even more social satire can be found. This time Ayckbourn takes aim at the upper classes and their disconnection from the rest of the society. In the world of *Communicating Doors*, London is falling apart and the rich, like Reece, have cloistered themselves away in expensive buildings, leaving the lower classes, like Poopay, to suffer. Ayckbourn never provides a specific explanation for

the dystopian state of London in this near future setting, yet his use of satire and the potential warning it serves may provide one. In both the 1974 and 1994 settings, the rich have already separated themselves from the lower classes, this is well before the civil war raging in the 2014 timeline. When Ruella first meets Poopay in the first act of the play, Poopay appears completely alien to her: “A dominatrix? I don’t even know what that is. Something sexual, isn’t it?” Ruella’s first reaction is to judge Poopay “Are you on drugs or something?” and call for security. It is clear, initially at least, that she has very little sympathy for Poopay’s predicament. “Pull yourself together, you’re a grown woman.” If this distance between the classes is not clear enough, Ruella’s complaint that, “this is not something I expect from a five-star hotel” sums it up. Ruella and Reece are paying good money to be separated from people like Poopay. Later, Ruella is similarly treated poorly by Jessica when Ruella in turn travels back to 1974 “You’re mad and loopy.” She even talks down to Ruella as if she is a child,

Jessica: (affected by her tone, gently as if to a child) Look. I don’t think you actually mean any harm, do you? I really don’t. I just think you’re a bit – well – funny in the head. But you must stop this now. You mustn’t do this sort of thing.

(Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 83)

Jessica clearly believes that Ruella is from a different class and condescends down to her. In both scenes, people of the higher classes mistreat those whom they see as the lower class. It could be supposed that such mistreatment toward the lower end of the social spectrum by the upper could lead to up-rising and in turn, civil war. It is not a coincidence that in the altered timeline where Ruella adopts Poopay and so arguably the gap between the two sides is being bridged, the civil war is no longer apparent.

Finally, there are two examples of social satire in *My Sister Sadie*. Much like *Henceforward*, *My Sister Sadie* satirizes society’s obsession with technology. In this case, however, it is society’s obsession with scientific and technological advancement, no matter the cost (represented by Thora) and its repercussions (a deadly murder robot being let loose among unwitting citizens). Thora’s lack of morals can be seen when she threatens Luke,

Thora; One little warning. I've got very good at knowing when people are lying to me. Or even knowing when they are not telling me the whole truth. You understand, Luke? (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 28)

My Sister Sadie also satirizes society's habit of perverting potentially altruistic technology for profit. Sadie should be a technological marvel but is instead reduced to being yet another weapon of war. Sadie is far more financially lucrative as a killing machine than as an innocent teenager, and when she overwrites her original programming, she instantly becomes of no interest to Thora or the military.

The verdict, Captain, is that from our brief cursory analysis, the thing is now completely useless. It's no longer a viable weapon. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 81)

Thora's disinterest in anything altruistic is best summed up when she explains to Lennox that

a virus cancelled out its programme of violence and aggression. Replacing it – I don't know- with a sub-routine of concern, understanding, sympathy, affection consideration for others - you know, all that sentimental nonsense. It could be described as love I suppose. - It plays havoc with all our systems. Best Avoided. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 82)

This attitude towards technology is also apparent in *Whenever*, during the argument between Lucas and Martin. As a scientist, Martin only cares about the good his work could do, while Lucas, the future war profiteer and capitalist, only cares about selling the potentially dangerous time machine,

You have a discovery worth millions of pounds, and like the idiot you are, you are prepared to throw it all away. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 28)

As a result, Ayckbourn satirizes the rottenness in modern society through his successfully conducted ironic dialogues in order to critique and reform society. Jerry Camery-Hoggatt defines irony as “a medium with which the community can interact with its tradition, evaluating and shaping its contents, and appropriating them for new and different circumstances” (Camery-Hoggatt, 1992, p. 33). In this regard, Ayckbourn uses the constructive power of satire and irony in order for the “community” to “appropriate” itself.

1.2. Stereotypes

Several of Ayckbourn's characters represent different stereotypes. According to Meriam-Webster dictionary, a stereotype is "a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment." For example, Ayckbourn satirizes young teen romance in the relationship between Luke and his girlfriend, Lisa, and he largely does this through the use of stereotypes. Luke is a stereotypical teenage boy. From very early on in the play it is apparent that like many young men, Luke is fascinated by the military and also that he is a braggart, too:

You don't have to have been in them to know about them. There's a lot of things I haven't been in that I know about. I haven't been in a hot-air balloon neither, but I know all about them. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 8)

He is also stereotypically impressed by pretty girls, as he is described soon after as 'gawping' at Sadie. A third teen stereotype is moodiness, something also attributed to Luke.

Luke: (sulkily) Alright! Alright! Where am I supposed to sleep, then?

Avril: Down here in the chair.

Luke: The chair? Don't know why I have to sleep in the chair, why doesn't she sleep in the chair? I am never going to get to sleep in this chair, and that's for sure. No way. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 12)

Lisa is represented in a similar light: a jealous, moody teenage girl. Beyond satire, Ayckbourn's use of stereotypes in *My Sister Sadie* serves a second important purpose. The stereotypes help to highlight how surreal and absurd the situation is and how odd Sadie truly is. Ayckbourn does this by juxtaposing Sadie, who is incredibly atypical, with Luke and Lisa who are both standard teenage stereotypes. There is no better way to show the audience how different Sadie is than to surround her with stereotypes. A final teenage stereotype can be found in *Henceforward* with the character of Geain. Geain represents a slightly different teenage aspect to Luke, and this is rebellion. Geain has rebelled to an almost farcical level, not only by joining a gang but by joining a hermaphrodite gang at that,

In the flesh, she looks if anything slightly more grotesque. She wears a not unfamiliar parody of male work clothes circa 1955. But hers are carried to some extreme. The back of her jacket is studded with the words: SONS OF BITCHES. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 87)

While Ayckbourn's representation of Geain's sexuality, and the fact that he uses it for laughs, might make modern audiences uncomfortable, it is at least another example of the teenage stereotype.

These stereotypes also serve as a way for Ayckbourn to build his characters quickly and humorously without relying on the kind of exposition which might be seen in a novel. Luke is a stereotypical teenage boy in several ways, except one. Teenage boys are usually represented as lazy and irresponsible, but Ayckbourn makes several references to Luke helping his mother around the farm. The teenager stereotype quickly teaches the audience much about Luke but this second piece of information, which breaks the stereotype, informs the audience that deep down Luke has a heart of gold. When Ayckbourn breaks this teenage stereotype, it serves to endear Luke to the audience. Similarly, Lennox is painted as a stereotypical military man. He is no-nonsense and follows his orders to the letter. This is shown during his acronym heavy introduction which is full of stereotypical military speak, "Get the chaps up and organized, will you, sergeant? Just had a call. Copter down. TSSMMOD, apparently." (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 6). For much of the play, the audience feels relatively indifferent towards him. However, towards the end of the play Lennox is insubordinate and orchestrates Sadie's escape. He is also shown to have a sense of humour, dryly responding to Thora's diatribe on love, "Better not tell my wife that" (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 82). Much like in the case of Luke this breaks his stereotype and endears him to the audience. In comparison, Ayckbourn never breaks the stereotype with Lisa, and therefore the audience never really warms to her. *Communicating Doors* has similar examples of broken stereotypes which are used to build up characters quickly and which are used to endear them to the audience. This second use of broken stereotypes, to endear characters to the audience is especially important in *Communicating Doors*. As the play is partly a thriller the audience really needs to care for the protagonists, or any sense of tension would be lost. Furthermore, much like his use of satire in *Whenever*, Ayckbourn's

use of stereotypes in *Communicating Doors* has feminist undertones. At the beginning of the play, Poopay appears to be a fairly standard stereotype of a prostitute who is depicted as not terribly intelligent. The second she walks in, she is down to business and upon believing she is expected to service two men, she is only interested in getting paid more.

If this turns out to be a group booking, the rates are very different - Where are you going to be? If you intend on watching, it still counts. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 14)

Like many portrayals of sex workers in media, she is also shown to be a victim whose circumstances have led her into sex work unwillingly. However, throughout the play Ayckbourn breaks this stereotype by showing her to be more intelligent than first hinted at and also much braver. By the end of the play, she is a fighter, who, with the help of Jessica and Ruella, manages to defeat Julian. Meanwhile, Reece's ex-wives also prove to be broken stereotypes. At first, Jessica appears to be the standard trophy wife: she is young, attractive, and shown not to be terribly bright. When Ruella first attempts to warn Jessica about Reece and Julian, Jessica is not interested at all, she just wants to enjoy her honeymoon. It is infuriating to watch as Ruella tries and fails to warn Jessica who remains obstinate in her denial.

You are mad, aren't you? You're really quite, quite loony. You're like those people who bang on doors with Bibles. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 79)

Due to this obstinacy, it is hard for the audience to feel for Jessica when it seemingly becomes clear that Ruella has failed, and Jessica is doomed. Jessica seemingly sticks to her dumb trophy wife stereotype, and thus, the audience does not really care for her. Ayckbourn's masterful twist towards the end of the play shatters this dumb trophy wife stereotype. Jessica comes to her senses, leaves Reece and saves the day. Similarly, Ruella is portrayed as a stereotypically snobbish, prudish upper-class middle-aged woman. This is observed through her initial interactions with Poopay as well as her distaste for Poopay's profession:

I don't even know what that is, I'm sorry. Something sexual, isn't it?

her assumption that Poopay must be on drugs:

Well, you can't do it in here, whatever it is. Are you on drugs or something?
and her generally judgmental demeanor:

Poopy, What's the matter with you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.
Now, sit down there and be quiet, this minute. Pull yourself together, you're
a grown woman. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 31-32)

Just as Poopy is growing on the audience, Ruella's stereotype serves to make Ruella seem cold and harsh. Therefore, the audience feels increasingly defensive towards Poopy. Soon, however, Ayckbourn goes about dismantling Ruella's stereotype too. This leads to Ruella acting increasingly motherly towards Poopy as they form a formidable team. No longer a snob, Ruella is shown to be much more open-minded than initially indicated and much more caring. Ayckbourn's breaking of these three stereotypes leads to one more important sexist stereotype being broken. Since women in media are often depicted as in-fighting and taking each other down, some level of animosity between the two ex-wives in a play like *Communicating Doors* is expected. Instead, Ayckbourn once again smashes this sexist stereotype and provides us with three strong female leads who work together to take down the villain. What is more, they manage this while building each other up, rather than tearing each other down. Their sense of newfound camaraderie is shown with Ruella's toast, "Here's to.. life" and the way they begin to tease each other like old friends.

Poopy: I'm not coming back to warn her. She's had her chance.

Ruella: She may just be one of those women that drive men to murder. Poor thing. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 115)

This humor also serves to show the audience how strong the three women are. Only minutes after fighting for their lives they are joking about it as if nothing has really happened. Indeed, in each of these plays, Ayckbourn over-rules the traditional gender stereotypes to produce strong heroines. In *Henceforward*, Zoe has enough sense to escape Jerome's toxicity and it is clear that Corinna is in charge. In *Communicating Doors*, the leads are three female heroines. In *Comic Potential*, Jacie is the hero, not Adam. *Whenever* upturns traditional stereotypes by doing away with Prince Charming, and finally in *My Sister Sadie*, Sadie is the heroine, a literal

killing machine stronger than any man. In each play Ayckbourn plays with the stereotype that women need to be saved and men are the ones who do the saving.

Further stereotypes are found in *Comic Potential* and *Henceforward*. Interestingly, they are similar stereotypes but are used to produce differing results - the frustrated artist, a stereotype that as a playwright Ayckbourn must be familiar with. Jerome in *Henceforward* is a once great composer struggling with writer's block. In *Comic Potential*, Chandler is a once great director reduced to directing straight to TV rubbish that he despises. Both are self-pitying and both blame everyone but themselves for their predicaments. Jerome blames his wife leaving him, "my wife is a selfish, vindictive, unforgiving bitch" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 29), whilst Chandler blames producers and his audience. Both men are completely self-absorbed. They also follow the trait of failing to look after themselves, Jerome and his apartment appear quite slovenly,

The living area is in fair chaos. Remnants of instant meals, old tea and coffee cups. The sign of someone who lives alone and has stopped caring much" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 1)

while Chandler may well be an alcoholic,

Trudi: A little liquid refreshment. Thirsty work, directing.

Prim: Don't follow him. He always drinks alone. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 14)

Finally, both men are loners who secretly desire the company of others. This is observed through Jerome and Nan's strange relationship and Chandler's strained relationship with Prim and Trudi. Yet, even though both men are toxic and share a similar stereotype, Chandler is endeared to the audience. The audience never really feels for Jerome and his self-serving plot. This is because his stereotype is never broken, Jerome learns nothing throughout the play and finishes it the same selfish man he was at the start. Chandler, on the other hand, experiences some character growth throughout *Comic Potential*. He learns to care about people other than himself and rediscovers his passion for his work, "I still believe I have it in me to create something unique" (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 114). This character growth shatters his stereotype and by the end of the play Chandler is a better man. Much of the humor in *Henceforward* is derived from Jerome's exaggerated character flaws,

enhanced by his stereotype and as such the play can be read as a Play of Humors. However, Jerome is not the only stereotypical/ deeply flawed character in the play. In *Henceforward* Ayckbourn uses stereotypes rather than just relying on specific character traits like in a more traditional play of Humours. Besides Zoe, every character in the play is uniformly unlikable and each is defined by a specific negative character trait. As mentioned earlier, Jerome is a stereotypical struggling artist while Geain is an extreme stereotype of an unruly teenager. Mervyn is a stereotypical public servant who goes to great efforts to stay politically correct and makes all the right sounds about child welfare, “Think of the youngster. We must think of the youngster, Mr. Watkins” (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 73).

Yet, he is also shown to be a little pompous and completely ineffectual. Although he is supposed to prioritize Geain, he seems much more interested in his own self-importance. Similarly, Corinna fits the estranged wife stereotype as she is strong and independent, but she soon becomes jealous when she sees any potential happiness on Jerome’s behalf. Similar to Lisa in *My Sister Sadie*, the characters in *Henceforward* never really break their stereotypes. Ayckbourn never provides them with any redeeming features, and therefore, they are never endeared to the audience.

As discussed in chapter one, in a Sentimental Comedy, the heroes are faultless and moral while the villains are thoroughly evil and reprehensible. Although Ayckbourn’s heroes are not stereotypical of a Sentimental Comedy, his villains are. Every Ayckbourn play so far mentioned features a stereotypical villain to whom he never attempts to add any extra dimensions. Much like with Jerome and Lisa, he uses the unbroken stereotype to ensure the audience’s hostility towards them and lack of sympathy towards them during their eventual downfall. In *Communicating Doors*, Julian is a stereotypical villain who is greedy, cunning, and morally reprehensible. In *Comic Potential*, the villain is Carla, who again is defined by her cunning, greed and predatory nature towards young men,

Prim: The Pepperbloom babes. She gets older, they get younger. Just be careful how you say not to her. She doesn’t like it. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 15)

Whenever features Uncle Lucas, who is incredibly like Julian, an amoral businessman willing to kill to get what he wants. Finally, in *My Sister Sadie*, the

stereotypical villain comes in the form of Thora, who is again completely amoral and willing to do anything to get Sadie back. Thora is defined by her lack of humanity and empathy. In fact, she sees humanity as an irrelevance, “Humanity, were you about to say? You mustn’t get sentimental Captain” (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 79). Each of these villains forms a separate stereotype on their own, but each fits the stereotype of a villain from a Sentimental Comedy. When it comes to his villains, Ayckbourn purposely never breaks stereotype and never gives them any redeeming features so that his audience always feels hostile towards them. Furthermore, Ayckbourn’s villains never win, however dark the play may be. Their comeuppance is often ironic. In *Henceforward* Jerome finally finishes his masterpiece but this is in no way a victory, “(already feeling rather anti-climactic) That’s it. Yeah! That’s it then. He sits all alone. And realizes how alone he is” (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 98). His masterpiece may be finished but it has cost him everything. Ironically his masterpiece is on love, but he has lost everything he claims to love. In *Comic Potential* Carla suffers a brutal dressing down from Trainsmith and is summarily fired. To add insult to injury her position is given to Jacie, the android she was so awful to. In *My Sister Sadie*, Thora is forced to go back empty handed, and it is clear that she will face repercussions.

Thora: I must get back too. Start trying to justify how several million pounds’ worth of research has just gone up in smoke. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 81)

In *Communicating Doors* Julian is killed by the three women whom he has worked so hard to murder and even better falls off the very balcony he planned to throw Ruella off. Furthermore, Julian is supposed to be a frightening figure, from his first introduction he is menacing but he is almost literally scared to death by Jessica. Finally, in *Whenever* Lucas is thwarted by Emily and her companions. Much like Julian, Lucas has been a menace throughout the play but is finally shown to be small and terrified,

Lucas stands for a moment, then, dropping to the knife, falls to his knees.

Lucas: (with a terrible cry) Oh, God help me! Help me.... (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 105)

1.3. Sarcasm

The problem with stereotypes is that while they are often used to represent large parts of society, they are often false. Not all English people drink tea, not all Americans are loud, women do not necessarily talk more than men and not all men love football. However, one stereotype tends to be true. English humor is full of sarcasm, and this is true of Ayckbourn's works. Much like his use of stereotypes, Ayckbourn uses sarcasm to build up his characters and quickly give them a personality, often a stereotypically British personality. Luke is a prime example of a character in Ayckbourn's play who makes heavy use of sarcasm. Luke uses sarcasm in *My Sister Sadie* to both lighten the mood and show how absurd his mother's plot is,

Sorry about your daughter getting drowned. Here you are, here's another one.

It doesn't work like that Mum; you know it doesn't. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 21)

And after discovering Sadie's tattoo:

You don't have your own name tattooed on you. What'd be the point of that?

Oh, I forgot my name. Let's have a quick look to remind myself. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 30)

Not only do these examples highlight the strange situation the characters find themselves in, but they help give the characters a personality while also fitting the unruly teenager and British humor stereotypes. In *Henceforward*, there is a similar use of sarcasm. Even though one might expect the first example of sarcasm to come from the perpetually grumpy Jerome, it actually comes from Zoe:

Jerome: It could have been worse but - I put in a good word.

Zoe: (sarcastically) Lucky I met you, really. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 20)

This is not just a classic example of English humor; it serves to provide Zoe with depth. Not only does she have a sense of humor, but the sarcasm adds a sharper edge to the desperate and nervous girl she first appears to be. Furthermore, Zoe tends to use sarcasm when she is feeling angry or frustrated, such as when she is quizzing Jerome for details and he is unforthcoming,

Darling, doesn't he drive you mad the way he whistles in the nude at breakfast?
No not at all dear, I love it, I find it totally refreshing or to show her annoyance
with Nan, (drily) Mrs. Danvers is up bright and early I hear. (Ayckbourn, 1995,
p. 37)

Sarcasm is such a common form of British humor that it can be conspicuous in its absence. When characters do not use it, it also helps build up their character, and serves to tell us something about them. In *Whenever*, there is not a single example of Emily using sarcasm. One could argue that this is because the play is aimed at children and children favor simpler forms of comedy. However, Ayckbourn does not shy away from other adult themes in the play. Emily is shown to be an incredibly serious and humorless little girl. In situations where other Ayckbourn characters might make a sarcastic comment, Emily does not. Similarly, in the case of Zoe's sarcasm in *Henceforward*, it serves to highlight Jerome's seriousness. Any humor derived from Jerome is usually from his dead-pan delivery and his understating of surprising or disturbing facts rather than the making of sarcastic comments. On the other hand, Zoe, who is more of a free spirit with a clear sense of humor, is much more likely to make sarcastic comments. Similarly, Sadie and Jacie, the androids, never use sarcasm. This lack of sarcasm can be attributed to their innocence as they do not share the world-weariness of their human peers, despite their burgeoning sentience and humanity. Ayckbourn uses the sarcasm of the characters around them to highlight their strangeness and innocence.

CHAPTER THREE

1. AYCKBOURN'S DARK COMEDY

Sarcasm can be a quite dark form of comedy as its primary use is often to tear down, attack or mock what another person has said or done. Sarcasm is not Ayckbourn's only use of the darker aspects of comedy, and his plays are actually full of dark comedy. In *Henceforward*, for example, much of the comedy comes from Jerome's dead-pan delivery and understated delivery of disturbing information. This is first evidenced upon his meeting Zoe when he casually explains to Zoe how badly she has upset the local gang, the Daughters of Darkness. As he informs Zoe of the dire situation she is now in, it is all done both in a very matter of fact and in an understated way, "Well. When you want to get back, they may not let you back" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 14).

Later, Zoe enquires as to how Jerome came to be in possession of Nan. The story begins quite dully. It turns out that Nan was given to Jerome as a gift by his neighbor. Gradually the audience becomes overwhelmed with Ayckbourn's dark sense of humor: why are there not more Nans running round? Why has Zoe never seen one before? Is it because one of the robots microwaved a child during its initial testing? There is no doubt that there should be nothing funny about children being microwaved, yet Ayckbourn absolutely plays this scene for dark laughs. Jerome's understated delivery in conjunction with Freud's Relief Theory ensures that the audience laughs. The humor here is pitch black; the audience knows that there is nothing funny about dead children. They know that they should not laugh and thus, they do. Indeed, Ayckbourn intended the dark comedy to be disturbing, as he stated that "the play's meant to be a comedy, but people can find it disturbing too" (Murgatroyd, 1987).

In effect, Jerome's story about why Nan was discontinued is a dead baby joke, a taboo form of comedy. However, Ayckbourn is not afraid of the taboo and taboos are a common element in his dark comedies. *Whenever* includes a similarly dark/ taboo joke:

George: I had a dog called Lucas.

Oscar: And what happened, then, love?

George: He was run over by rubbish cart. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 36)

The understated delivery of these death facts also plays into Incongruity Theory. According to Kant, laughter arises from “the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing”, whereas Schopenhauer argues that humor stems from “the unexpected subsumption of an object of a concept” (Brown, 2005, p. 16). Therefore, the sudden perception of the incongruity in the situation above creates the feeling of bewilderment in the audience, which paves the way for laughter. Characters are expected to act a certain way when talking about dead children or dearly departed pets. Instead, in these examples, they act insensitively, understating this disturbing information, which makes the audience laugh, albeit uncomfortably.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a taboo is “a prohibition imposed by social custom or as a protective measure” and “something that is not acceptable to say, mention, or do.” The taboo is something that makes us feel uncomfortable because it is seen as socially unacceptable. *Henceforward* features at least two taboos. The first is used less for comic effect and more to further enlighten the audience as to Jerome’s character. Jerome breaks an important social taboo by recording people without their permission and what is worse, he violates their privacy as he records them (getting changed, in the bathroom, and during coitus). In doing so, Ayckbourn shows us not only the depths of Jerome’s obsession but how detached he has become from the norms and rules of society. The most disturbing thing is not that Jerome breaks this important social taboo, but that when challenged by Zoe, he can see nothing wrong with it. In Jerome’s mind, the ends justify the means. His work is everything,

Zoe: I am considerably more important than your bloody music.

Jerome: Why? What makes you so bloody important? (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 51)

This obsession with these recordings contributes directly to the play’s dark ending. The second taboo Ayckbourn challenges is gender identity. As mentioned earlier, Geain’s representation in *Henceforward* can be seen as problematic. The discussion around gender identity is much bigger now than it was in the 80’s, and therefore, Geain’s representation must be seen as a product of its time. Still, even in the 80’s

Ayckbourn was challenging a taboo not just by featuring a trans main character but an underage adolescent trans character at that. Ayckbourn uses this trans taboo to challenge the audience of the time and make them feel uncomfortable.

Comic Potential features a similar use of social taboos. The taboo in *Comic Potential* is the burgeoning romantic relationship between Jacie and Adam. Romance between a human and an android is shown to be a taboo and looked down upon in the world of *Comic Potential*, to the point where the two leads are hunted down. Of course, in the real world, romantic feelings between humans and robots have not exactly become widespread yet, and so the real taboo Ayckbourn is taking aim at is inter-racial relationships. Jacie and Adam's relationship can be seen as allegory of such relationships:

They [Jacie and Adam] become emotionally involved and it's like a mixed race marriage of a few years ago. It's looked on slightly askance by some people, the idea of a human man taking up with a mechanical woman... (Murgatroyd, 1998)

The strength of this taboo is best represented during the restaurant scene. At first, the couple are having a pleasant evening and Jacie does a good job hiding who she really is. Eventually, Adam has to leave briefly, and the audience finally sees how their relationship is truly viewed. As soon as Adam leaves, Jacie is accosted and verbally abused by an android waiter who tells her to leave. It is important to note that it is not Adam who is told to leave but Jacie, who of course represents the 'racial' part of this inter-racial relationship. It is not just the treatment of the couple which has racist overtones, however. A direct parallel can be drawn between Lester Trainsmith and his treatment of androids and how minorities have been treated in the past. Marmion states that "it's not Mr. Trainsmith's custom to speak to Androids" (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 105). His attitude towards Androids is very much like a slave owner that refuses to speak to his slaves. Similarly, Lester later states that "at one time I never liked your things" (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 110). This again has racist overtones. However, he soon states that his attitude towards Androids has changed, and he has become less of an "old luddite at heart" (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 110). Trainsmith's changing attitude towards Androids can be compared to how racist attitudes have changed over time.

Much like in his representation of Geain, Ayckbourn uses a taboo here to challenge his audience. This racial allegory challenges his audiences own potential prejudices. The more time Trainsmith spends around androids, especially Jacie the more he begins to change his attitude. In fact, by the end of the play Trainsmith is somewhat of an advocate stating, “If you support greater freedom for them, you have to start by respecting their decisions” (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 112).

This use of taboos to challenge social prejudices is also apparent in *Communicating Doors* and *Henceforward*. through Ayckbourn’s use of sex workers / escorts. Socially, sex work is something usually looked down upon, especially in the case of Poopay and her specific specialty. Sex is not normally something talked about in polite conversation, especially when in regards to fetishes. In *Communicating Doors*, Ayckbourn challenges this taboo by making Poopay increasingly likeable as the play goes on, painting her as a human first, dominatrix second. Ruella’s evolving opinion of Poopay is meant to mirror the audience’s own reaction to Poopay. At first, the audience is meant to judge Poopay and look down on her for her choice of profession before second, falling in love with her. Similarly, in *Henceforward*, the only truly likable character is the fledgling escort, Zoe. In the beginning, the audience is fooled into thinking Jerome has a proclivity for using escorts and they judge him for it. However, it is the last thing the audience judge him for by the end of the play. In both plays, Ayckbourn challenges the sex worker stereotype to challenge the entire taboo around sex workers.

Beyond his use of the taboo to create dark humor, the endings of Ayckbourn’s plays are similarly dark or can be interpreted as such. While the characters’ fates in *Henceforward* are never explicitly stated, it is clear that they do not come to a pretty end, as Ayckbourn states:

His [Jerome's] family almost certainly dies as a result [of his decision not to leave with his family. (Murgatroyd, 1992)

What is darker than the majority of the characters dying at the end of the play? Or the fact one man’s hubris and obsession could lead to him losing his whole family? Or the irony that Jerome finally gets to finish his piece on love, but it costs him everyone he supposedly loves? Dark comedy is a balancing of the comic and tragic, and of the plays

mentioned, *Henceforward* may be the bleakest. However, it is not necessarily the only dark comedy or the only Ayckbourn play which features a tragic ending. The majority of *Comic Potential* is relatively upbeat in that it can be seen as a story of awakening. However, Ayckbourn intended the ending to be dark:

[Regarding the apparently happy ending] I think they [the humans] should feel very frightened. They will have good and bad days; she [Jacie the android] never will. She can outstay and outperform humans. (Murgatroyd, 1999)

Much like *Henceforward*, this dark ending comes with a heavy dose of irony. In trying to help Jacie and in a way, fighting for android rights, he may have unleashed something dangerous. Jacie is not just much more confident now, but comfortably taking charge, “All right people let’s go to work. (incisively) Action!” (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 119) Her use of the word “people” here is potentially loaded as she is speaking directly to android actors. If Jacie sees her fellow androids as people too, everything could be about to change.

Communicating Doors can also be described as a dark comedy, featuring many thriller-like elements. Ayckbourn described the play as:

It's hard to nail it down because it's not farce, it's not comedy, it's not drama. It's actually a comedy-thriller. (Murgatroyd, 1995)

While *Henceforward* and *Comic Potential* feature dark endings, Ayckbourn takes a different tact with *Communicating Doors*. In doing so, he strikes a more equal balance between the light and dark elements. Although the basis for the play is dark (Julian killing his bosses’ wives for profit) the play also features one of Ayckbourn’s happiest endings:

When it was first done, a friend said, "Oh My God, you’ve written a play with a happy ending!" It's my first truly happy ending, but a lot of people die in making a happy ending though! (Murgatroyd, 2010)

Ayckbourn knows that a dark ending needs to have a purpose. Depriving characters of their happy endings may make the audience angry. However, as all his characters “have flaws and are pock-marked,” they have earned their unhappy ending in *Henceforward* (Dukore, 1986, p. 25). The main characters of *Comic Potential* deserve

their personal happy endings. The play is meant to act, at least partially however as cautionary tale and so a little bit of a dark ending is necessary. In *Communicating Doors*, the ladies fought hard and deserve their happy endings, anything less would not do. However, Ayckbourn is a realist and knows in real life even the happiest endings are tinged with sadness, and so Ruella passes away before Poopay's return to her own time. Similarly, *Whenever*'s happy ending is one tinged with sadness. Emily must say goodbye to her new friends and is still an orphan. She may have saved the future, but somethings cannot be changed. Another important life lesson for Ayckbourn's young audience.

Ayckbourn does not relegate his dark comedy to only his adult plays. Both *My Sister Sadie* and *Whenever* feature dark themes. In *Whenever*, Emily first suffers child abuse at the hands of her guardians and then witnesses her uncle's murder. Emily is later kidnapped and almost murdered. Later still, she discovers that humanity will become all but extinct and will devolve into Hoombean. *My Sister Sadie*, on the other hand, features a childlike robot who first develops sentience and then attempts suicide when it discovers that its primary function is to kill. These themes may all be considered too dark or disturbing for children, but Ayckbourn would disagree:

The trick with writing for children is understanding they like a very strong plot, and for a story to be quite scary. When you look at all the great children's writers, from Roald Dahl to Philip Pullman, there's always a dark element. (Murgatroyd, 2003)

In that sense, Ayckbourn does not treat his young audience with kid gloves. It is clear that Ayckbourn respects his younger audience in the way he never condescends them. Much like in Sir Philip Pullman's novels, the darkness in Ayckbourn's children's plays serves a further role than just 'children can handle scary stories.' He uses this darkness to educate the audience. As mentioned at the start of this study, Ayckbourn uses *Whenever* to teach his audience about sexism and their important role in the future. In *My Sister Sadie*, he uses Sadie to encourage his young audience to question what it is to be human.

1.1. Balancing Comedy and Tragedy

Ayckbourn is a master of balancing the dark and tragic with the light and comic. He largely goes about balancing the dark with the light through his use of mistaken identity, surrealism, repetition, and farce. These all serve to add fun to what could otherwise be overly serious and somber plays. As mentioned in chapter one, mistaken identity is a comedic device that dates back to Ancient Greece and Ayckbourn makes good use of it. The enjoyment for the audience that stems from cases of mistaken identity is twofold. Firstly, the audience loves knowing more than the characters they are watching. Secondly, cases of mistaken identity usually cause a downward spiral in the quality of the decisions made by the characters. Therefore, the misunderstandings begin to stack, which is again enjoyable to watch as they often culminate in increasingly farcical situations. In Ayckbourn's plays, cases of mistaken identity can be either major or minor plot points, often taking the form of humorous misunderstandings. *Henceforward* is a good example of the former while *Communicating Doors* is a good example of the latter. In *Henceforward*, the second act hinges almost completely upon a case of mistaken identity. In many ways, the use of mistaken identity makes the play a Play of Intrigue. Will Corinna figure out Jerome's plot? Jerome's initial plot to get his daughter back is to dress up an escort as his fiancé and trick his wife into thinking he has turned over a new leaf. When this fails due to Zoe's departure, Jerome hatches a new plan. He molds Nan into a copy of Zoe in a new bid to trick his wife. However, Nan is in no way made for this job and therefore she is wholly unsuitable for this situation. While the majority of *Henceforward* is grim, it is truly hilarious to watch Corinna and Mervyn be taken in by such a ridiculous ruse. Firstly, Corinna, who is rightly suspicious, overthinks the entire situation. Rather than realize that 'Zoe' is in fact 'Nan,' her jealousy towards Jerome's new fiancé makes her overthink 'Zoe's' eccentricities. Unable to realize the truth, Corinna believes at first that 'Zoe' is a weak idiot, "you might just come back in the next life as a shoe-cleaning kit. You'll enjoy that" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 73). Later, she believes that 'Zoe' is truly better than her, which is seen in a jealous outburst, "I thought for one glorious moment she was actually very dim. But then of course, it turns out she isn't" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 82). Mervyn, on the other hand, is so taken in by 'Zoe's' exaggerated proportions that he is smitten, and as a result, he spends the entire

scene attempting to flirt with the malfunctioning robot. “Well, I must say. In all my years, I’ve – What a remarkable woman. Quite remarkable” (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 81). In doing so he makes a complete fool of himself, much to Corinna’s chagrin. This is all compounded by the fact that Corinna and Mervyn are clearly presented as people who think themselves to be intelligent, yet they cannot see through Jerome’s obvious use of code phrases to elicit certain behaviors from ‘Zoe.’ Finally, there is Geain’s reaction to ‘Zoe.’ It is made clear that Geain hates everyone equally, but she soon becomes attached to ‘Zoe.’ Ironically, all the adults in her life are so dysfunctional Geain forms the strongest relationship with the malfunctioning robot due to its Nanny programming. It is in her interactions with Nan, and her refusal to leave her, that the audience can see the pleasant girl that Geain could have grown up to be if it was not for her parents,

Geain: I want Zoe to say good-bye to me. Bye, Zoe. See you again.
(Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 95)

This is the most well behaved and civil Geain acts in the entire play. Besides the characters’ reactions to ‘Zoe,’ the humor in this scene is also derived from Jerome’s constant attempts to cover for ‘Zoe’s’ strange behavior. He is desperate to get her out of the room and is repeatedly foiled. The fact that this case of mistaken of identity is twofold, Nan is not Jerome’s fiancé or even human makes the whole thing even more absurd.

Much like *Henceforward*, *My Sister Sadie*’s plot also hinges on a case of mistaken identity involving an android. This time the case of mistaken identity is Avril and Luke trying to convince both the military and Thora that Sadie is part of the Pickett family. Much like Nan, Sadie is not really up to the job and the ruse does not last anywhere near as long as Jerome’s. When Luke tries to tell Lisa that Sadie is his sister, Lisa of course sees through his lie straight away. Indeed, the only character who seems to fall for the plot is Sergeant Jipton and this seems to be primarily due to his attraction to Sadie. Instead, the case of mistaken identity in *My Sister Sadie* is actually inverted. Luke and Avril think they are tricking Thora, yet in reality, they are the ones mistaken (Sadie is not a normal girl) and Thora is the only one who, initially at least, knows who Sadie really is. The comedy of this situation is partly balanced by the tragic fact that

Avril also appears to be attempting to trick herself. She is obviously still mourning her first daughter and seems desperate to replace her with Sadie. This can be seen in the way she violently refuses to give Sadie her daughters room,

Avril: (angrily) Nobody sleeps in that bed, not ever. Never. Nobody even goes in June's room, you know that. No one but me. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 12)

However, later on, she gives it to Sadie without a second thought. She even goes as far as to state that Sadie is a replacement for June,

You know the saying, 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.' Well, he's taken away from us, hasn't he? He took away our June. In his infinite wisdom. He took her away. Well now he's giveth instead. He's giveth back. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 21)

Not only does Avril see Sadie as a replacement for June but she mistakes her for a gift from God. The final and lesser example of mistaken identity in *My Sister Sadie* is between Sadie and Lisa. Lisa may be bright enough to realize that Sadie is not Luke's sister, yet much like Corinna, her jealousy leads her to the wrong conclusion. Lisa mistakes Sadie for a romantic rival which in turn leads to Sadie almost revealing her true purpose when she almost breaks Lisa's wrist over the locket.

Communicating Doors includes several examples of mistaken identity. The first occurs during the very first scene between Poopay and Julian during which Poopay confuses Julian for her client. Mistaken identity here serves two uses. Firstly, it provides some comedy and adds to the initial perception that Poopay may not be very bright.

Now, what's this I've been hearing? You've been a very naughty boy, haven't you? So I've been told. Don't try and deny it. You've been very, very bad, haven't you? Well. We'll soon see about that, won't we? We'll soon put a stop to that. Just wait and see what Poopay's got for you in here, my lad. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 3)

She is so busy going through her rote dominatrix script that she is completely oblivious to Julian's protests. The scene also serves to show how cold in demeanor and dismissive Julian is in his treatment of Poopay.

Julian: She's here. The tart's here. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 3)

Later in the play, when Ruella and Poopay first meet, Ruella mistakes Poopay for another guest who has gotten lost. This misunderstanding leads to security being called. Later still, when it is Ruella's turn to go back in time, Jessica mistakes her for a crazy woman. The enjoyment in watching these misunderstandings comes from the audience's feeling of knowing more than the characters. It also serves to highlight the confusing nature of time travel stories. The case of mistaken identity that holds the most weight for the plot, however, is between Julian and Jessica. Towards the end of the play, a disguised Jessica comes to the rescue and Julian mistakes her for the ghost of his mother. He is so terrified that he falls off of the balcony. It could also be argued that there is one final case of mistaken identity which is a result of time travel. At the end of the play, it is revealed that Ruella and Reece adopt Poopay. This means that throughout the play Poopay is actually interacting with her mother, and therefore, Ruella is interacting with her daughter. However, neither character knows the truth as it has not happened yet.

Finally, *Comic Potential* and *Whenever* include rather minor examples of mistaken identity. In *Whenever*, the first time Emily uses the time machine, she is transported to World War 2 era London. The case of mistaken identity here occurs between Minnie, George and Bill on one side and Emily on the other. At this point, Emily is in effect a Victorian time traveler, but the three adults mistake her for a little girl telling tall tales and they condescend down to her.

Oscar: Very good. Well done. You make that up yourself love, did you?

Minnie- Was that your party piece? Very good. I should just try and speak a bit slower next time, dearie. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 37)

One can imagine that Ayckbourn included this scene because he knew his child audience would easily empathize with Emily's predicament of condescending adults not listening to her. It must also be noted that the adult groups reluctance to believe Emily directly leads to her kidnapping by the Green's. This may be an attempt by Ayckbourn to tell the adults in the audience to listen to the wisdom of children. Finally, in *Comic Potential* two examples of mistaken identity can be observed. The first occurs

upon Adam's arrival in Chandler's studio. During their first meeting, Chandler initially assumes that Adam is an accountant brought along by Carla to tighten the purse strings:

A new young executive accountant, no doubt'. Then, upon learning Adam's full name he assumes Adam is there to replace him, 'Has he come to take over, or what? Come on kid, sit down take my chair. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 10)

This case of mistaken identity serves not only to inform the audience of Chandler's distrust of Carla and the other executives, but it also highlights how jaded Chandler's character has become. When confronted with a fan, he immediately becomes defensive and assumes the worst. The second and final example of mistaken identity comes towards the end of the play. Jacie and Adam go into hiding and Adam sends Jacie to hide in a hotel that serves as a front for a brothel. In this scene, a pimp mistakes Jacie for a freelancing prostitute and attempts to attack her. This leads to Jacie overpowering him and Adam being stabbed. There is little humor here, and thus, the audience's enjoyment comes from the anticipation of waiting to watch Jacie reveal her true self to beat the pimp. The audience enjoys watching the pimp, who mistakenly thinks that he holds all the cards, getting his comeuppance. The whole scene also serves to add to Jacie's loss of innocence as she becomes increasingly 'human' throughout the play. As mentioned earlier, Ayckbourn felt that the ending of *Comic Potential* held a dark fate for mankind as a kind of eventual robot revolt is hinted at. If Jacie ever comes to see humans as a threat that needs to be eliminated, it could be traced back to her initial confrontation with the pimp and her mistreatment at the hands of his prostitute.

Ayckbourn's use of mistaken identity often leads his characters into surreal and farcical situations which help to balance out the darker/tragic elements of his plays. However dark Ayckbourn's plays might be, and however heady the themes might get, Ayckbourn will often balance them out with farce. *Henceforward* is perhaps the darkest of the featured plays in this study, yet it is also the most farcical. Jerome's initial plan to use Zoe as a fake fiancé is not that convoluted or farcical. It does of course, have one pretty major plot hole. What would he do for the rest of his life if his plan had worked? Corinna and Geain might notice that his fiancé had disappeared. While his plot does not begin farcically, even early on its potential for farce is clear. It is in the second act that *Henceforward* and Jerome's scheme really devolve into a farce.

If a farce can be described as having an improbable plot, what is more improbable than a man using a malfunctioning robot to imitate an escort who in turn was pretending to be his fiancé? All so that he can have access back to his thirteen-year-old daughter who is a hermaphrodite gang member. What is even more improbable is that his wife and Mervyn actually fall for the ruse. Towards the end of the play Corinna describes Zoe as “very intelligent, shrewd, cool sexy, wonderful with kids, a great actress, singer, dancer, terrific in bed” (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 82). For a second, it looks like Jerome has succeeded. As Jerome’s plan becomes more convoluted, the play becomes more of a farce. It also becomes increasingly surreal. By the end of the play, what should be a relatively routine meeting with a social worker involves androids, secret recordings, and gang warfare.

In fact, Ayckbourn’s other plays make similar uses of farce towards their ends to balance their darker themes. For much of *Communicating Doors*, the play feels more like a time travelling Hitchcockian thriller than a comedy. Furthermore, for most of the play, comedic moments are few and far between. Towards the end of the play Ruella and Poopay are both attacked by Julian which results in Ruella dangling from the balcony and Poopay being incapacitated. This scene is not particularly farcical until a time travelling Jessica (dressed as Julian’s mother) arrives and terrifies Julian (the big bad serial killer) to such an extent that he falls off of the balcony. The scene then devolves further into farce and surrealism as Jessica accidentally pushes Ruella off the balcony, only seconds after saving her.

The result is very nearly what Julian planned to do. Ruella, still shrouded in the bedspread, staggers back, sits on the edge of the balcony, teeters back and forward, then topples off and disappears. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 106)

Jessica and Poopay must then pull Ruella up, all three bickering between themselves the entire time.

Poopay: What did you do that for?

Jessica: Sorry! She just sort of went.

Ruella: I am hanging several feet up here just to remind you.

Jessica (irritably): Yes, we know we know. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 107)

Ayckbourn himself describes this scene as a surreal farce:

Communicating Doors, for example, it's a blend of quite a lot of things. On one hand, it's a very dark thriller, a Hitchcockian piece. And on the other hand, it's also a comedy. When one character falls off the balcony, it definitely becomes a farce. For a moment, it even becomes a bit surreal. (Murgatroyd, 1998)

Comic Potential includes a similar use of farce. The first use of farce comes during the scene where Jacie attacks Carla with a cream pie. This should be a relatively serious scene on the merits of modern comedy, but Ayckbourn masterfully brings it back down to earth with a pie to the face. Later on, Jacie and Adam find themselves on the run and attempt to have dinner in a fancy hotel restaurant. Adam's plan resembles Jerome's in *Henceforward* - he plans to dress Jacie up and pass her off as a human. Much like in Jerome's case, this plan also ends in farce. The scene begins quite seriously, Jacie is struggling with her increasing realization that she does not really have a past, and that 'she' may just be an amalgamation of her earlier roles. Just as the play reaches a point where it may be taking itself too seriously, Ayckbourn injects a hefty dose of farce. Jacie announces her 'waste unit' needs emptying, and she is not able to do it by herself. Worse still, it cannot be done somewhere more private because Jacie "might spill-over." Thus, Adam is forced to go under the table and empty the waste unit himself. Of course, the waiter and nearby couples misinterpret what is going on under the table, with one female patron remarking: "That was so romantic. Why can't you do that sort of thing?" (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 83). This use of farce serves as a little comedic light just as the play is becoming increasingly dark. Adam's plan further devolves into farce after they leave the restaurant, and Jacie is forced to hide in a cheap Hotel that turns out to be a front for a brothel. This scene begins dark as Jacie is miserable and argues with Adam. However, Ayckbourn injects farce to lighten the mood at just the right time. The farce here starts when Jacie gets into an argument with a prostitute and reverts back to one of her former (badly written) roles which causes the prostitute to flee and fetch her pimp, the amusingly named 'Turkey.' The ensuing humor stems initially from the fact that 'Turkey' is a ridiculous name for a pimp which is not remotely intimidating. What is more, the fact that Jacie reverts back to a former role once again, this time a stereotypically written TV cop, is also farcical. At one point, Jacie even goes as far as to reach for a pair of imaginary handcuffs.

Another comedic device used by Ayckbourn is repetition. In *My Sister Sadie*, Ayckbourn presents a character called Honeycliffe, whom is never actually seen on stage. Honeycliffe is portrayed as a clown who is incapable of doing his job properly. Throughout the play, he makes several foolish mistakes and Lennox's frustration with him is apparent. "Honeycliffe you dozy little bastard!" (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 23). Every time Honeycliffe is mentioned, the joke becomes funnier as he becomes increasingly inept. Ayckbourn could easily have left Honeycliffe as a joke character, but this repeated joke actually has an important pay off in regards to the plot. Firstly, it is Honeycliffe who does not follow orders and shoots Sadie. Secondly, at the end of the play, Sadie is seemingly deactivated and is due to be sent away by the military for destruction. At that moment, the joke pays off as the Corporal and Lennox choose Honeycliffe to package and ship Sadie. Unsurprisingly, Honeycliffe is incompetent one final time and Sadie escapes, providing the audience with a happy ending. In *Henceforward*, Ayckbourn uses repetition in a similar fashion, the jokes which are repeated at first appear irrelevant, yet they turn out to be vitally important to the plot. An example of this repetition is Nan's numerous quirks and malfunctions which are often repeated. For examples, the slapstick when she attacks and forcefully scrubs people's faces is repeated three times. The first two times, the joke is played purely for laughs, but the third example with Geain advances the plot. Similarly, in act one, Nan's other malfunctions, such as shouting 'stupid old bat' are used purely to elicit laughter. However, in act 2, these malfunctions become an important plot point as Jerome must try to hide them in his bid to fool his wife. This, in turn, leads to Jerome's repeated code phrases throughout his meeting with Mervyn and Corinna. The whole situation becomes increasingly farcical due to this constant repetition and the fact that Corinna and Mervyn still cannot figure out what is actually going on. Finally, repetition is used in *Whenever* to highlight the farcical situation Emily has found herself in during the WW2 scene shortly after Emily's first time jump. Besides the aforementioned use of mistaken identity in this scene, Ayckbourn also utilizes repetition. The repetition here is parrot fashion as the adults repeatedly repeat and paraphrase Emily, repeatedly misunderstanding her, much to her infuriation,

Minnie: Her Uncle's just killed her Uncle?

George: You mean he killed himself.

Emily: No, no! My Uncle Lucas killed my Uncle Martin...

Oscar: Your Uncle Lucas killed your Uncle Martin? (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 36)

In this scene, Emily must feel that she is the only sane person left as these adults fail to be even remotely helpful.

Juxtaposition is another comedic device used by Ayckbourn in order to strengthen the elements of farce and surrealism. He tends to juxtapose his characters with their opposites, which leads to the kind of misunderstandings that pave the way for farce. In *Whenever*, Emily, who is incredibly serious, “I only read books that are elevating” is juxtaposed with the jolly Oscar (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 73). Much of the humor in *Whenever* comes from the overly serious Emily misunderstanding or becoming offended by the jovial Oscar and Ziggi.

Emily: I am nine, I told you.

Oscar: Well, there are times when you seem more like ninety.

Emily: I do not understand that remark Oscar.

Oscar: Fun! Have some fun, girl! You're a kid! Have fun!

Emily: I am not a kid. Life is a serious business, Oscar. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 74)

This is often exacerbated by the fact that they hail from different times.

Oscar: I have funny feet.

Emily: They don't look very funny to me. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 61)

In *Comic Potential*, there are several examples of juxtaposition. Firstly, the incredibly idealistic and naïve Adam is juxtaposed next to the cynical and jaded Chandler, which leads to the play's first misunderstanding. Later on, Adam and Jacie, a very atypical couple, are juxtaposed next to a normal couple also dining at the same restaurant, which serves to emphasize the strangeness of their relationship. According to Arthur Koestler, what produces the comic effect in a comedy is “the clash of two mutually incompatible codes or frames of reference” (Koestler, 2014, p. 35). Therefore, “laughter is sparked off by the collision” of contrasts which are in essence

juxtapositions (Koestler, 2014, p. 408). In that sense, Ayckbourn's use of contrasting characters in the play contributes to the production of the comic effect.

Finally, there is Ayckbourn's use of low comedy to balance out the tragedy and dark humor in his plays. Slapstick is a form of comedy originating in 16th-century Italy. The name, Slapstick, comes from the Italian word *Battaccio* or *Batacchio*, the name for two pieces of wood attached to each other which actors would use to hit each other and make a loud noise (Collins Discovery Encyclopedia). The actors would only have to hit each other very lightly, yet the device would make a sound as if the actors were hitting each other much more violently. While slapstick originates in humor derived from physical violence, it has a much broader meaning today. Slapstick, by more modern standards, is "comedy stressing farce and horseplay," (Merriam-Webster) or comedy in the form of highly exaggerated physical actions. Traditionally, slapstick is seen as a low form of comedy since there is nothing particularly clever about seeing two people beat each other or fall over. Indeed, when in the form of physical violence, it is the kind of comedy looked down upon by the philosophers mentioned in the first chapter. At best, according to Freud and Spencer's musings on Relief Theory, one could argue that watching slapstick violence could act as a pressure valve for some of our own violent urges. There is something quite sadistic in deriving humor from people beating each other or hurting themselves. Therefore, the relationship between sadism and comedy is a fertile ground on which many theories can be built. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes points out that the sudden victory over the suffering of others, and therefore the sense of superiority coming along with it, arouses laughter, which is a sign of cowardice and thus should be avoided (Hobbes, 2005, p. 36). Deriving pleasure from the suffering of others is undoubtedly associated with sadism. In that sense, deriving humor from the suffering of others could be considered as sadistic behavior as well.

James E. Caron argues that there is a "complex dynamic between the representation of physical pain and the gut response of laughter" (Caron, 2006, p. 5). Since slapstick comedy involves some basic elements that violate ideal behavior, it elicits the gut response of laughter from the audience. In other words, physical humor (and the representation of physical pain as a result of it) used in slapstick is basically

the violation of how people would ideally behave in a similar situation, which elicits laughter from the audience.

On the other hand, according to The Benign Violation Hypothesis, “humor is aroused by benign violations” on condition that a situation is considered a violation (ranging from “physical threats” to “violation of personal dignity”), it is considered benign, and these two occur concurrently (McGraw, Warren, 2010, p. 2). Thus, comedy in slapstick must be guilt free in order for the audience to comfortably laugh at a joke that derives from a violation. Ayckbourn, in that sense, finds a more wholesome use for slapstick and physical humor in these selected plays. The first example of physical humor appears towards the mid-point of *My Sister Sadie*:

Luke picks up his piece of toast and starts to eat it, holding it in both hands. Sadie watches him for a second, then picks up her bowl of cornflakes and starts eating them in similar fashion, bowl and all. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 35)

The humor in the scene is then increased by Avril’s understated reaction to watching a girl eat porcelain:

Avril: Sadie, stop that at once Sadie. Bad girl! Don’t do that, it’s not good for you. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 35)

The comedy here is slapstick as it is physical. It is funny because Sadie does the unexpected. In that sense, it could be argued that it matches more with Incongruity Theory than Relief. Moreover, what Sadie does here elicits “the gut response of laughter” from the audience as it could be considered a violation of the ideal human behavior. Most importantly, it is a benign violation due to which no one is hurt. Sadie seems more than capable of chomping away on ceramics, and thus the comedy is guilt free. At this point of the play, undoubtedly, Sadie has already been acting strangely and Luke is already suspicious, yet this is the first time Sadie is portrayed doing something truly extraordinary. Ayckbourn uses slapstick in this scene to highlight how different Sadie really is from regular humans, which is something he does in his other works as well. Ayckbourn makes similar use of slapstick in *Henceforward* with Nan. Nan is old and faulty; she suffers from constant malfunctions, apparently made worse by Jerome’s incessant tinkering. These malfunctions are the source of the play’s slapstick:

Nan attacks his face vigorously with a flannel. Jerome struggles. She is apparently quite strong. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 10)

And later,

Zoe turns, see her, but it is too late to dodge. She screams. Nan sets about Zoe's face with her flannel. Zoe screams and struggles but her cries are mostly muffled. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 20)

Clearly, there is physical violence here. Ayckbourn notes that Nan is incredibly strong, yet no one is hurt. Nan is not trying to hurt anyone, in fact, she is trying to carry out a caring act. Much like with Sadie, the slapstick is guilt free and it is predominantly used to show how different Nan is. The final example of slapstick in *Henceforward* comes towards the end of the play when Nan has been disguised as Zoe in order to try and trick Corinna and Mervyn. In this scene, much of the humor comes from the audience's anticipation of slapstick. Nan is on her best behavior and there are several close calls, such as the initial meeting of the parties, the serving of the tea, and Nan's reactions to the name Deborah. Finally, Nan meets Geain:

Before anyone can stop them, Nan has dragged the protesting Geain off to the kitchen and the result, Geain comes in slowly from the kitchen. She looks slightly dazed. Her ace is now clan, almost gleaming. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 40)

Nan and her original programming strike again. Much like in *My Sister Sadie*, the slapstick here is the result of an android attempting to appear human. While it is clear that Sadie is sentient, it is hinted at with *Henceforward* that Nan may have some kind of burgeoning sentience too, which may or may not be the source of the malfunctions that result in slapstick. This potential sentience is shown in the way that Nan can apparently show human emotions. It is not surprising that Nan can mimic love and care as this is part of her programming. Her apparently jealousy is harder to explain,

I know what you're after, dear, and you're not going to have him If you want Jerome, the only way you're going to get him is over my dead body, you calculating little trollop. You'd better watch your step Deborah darling, one of these nights you're going to wake up with your throat cut. (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 35)

The fact that this jealousy crops up during her interactions with both Zoe and Corinna indicates that even if the dialogue itself is a side effect of Jerome's tinkering, the actual jealousy is coming from Nan.

The best examples of slapstick in Ayckbourn's work, however, appear in *Comic Potential*. The source of the slapstick is once again an android, this time Jacie. In the first two examples, *My Sister Sadie* and *Henceforward*, slapstick is used not only to show how different the androids are from humans, but also to point out that the gap is closing. In *Comic Potential*, this theory is taken to the next level as the slapstick does not arise from a mistake made by the android, yet rather the android makes conscious decisions to employ slapstick. Adam begins to teach Jacie about slapstick comedy and 'double takes' and then demonstrates the 'comic trip' and mentions the throwing of custard pies, which are both pretty basic examples of slapstick. Slightly later on, and much to Chandler's surprise, Jacie executes a doubletake on her own volition:

Did you see that just now? That thing over there. I swear it did a double take. Looked like it had been watching too much James Finlayson. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 29)

Chandler is soon impressed with Jacie, and he decides to teach her the best way to carry out a slapstick scene. In this scene, it can be supposed that Chandler's opinion is perhaps Ayckbourn's, and the audience is hearing Ayckbourn's own advice through Chandler,

You can do it big, or you can do it small. You can do it like this: (He picks up the kettle with a great yell and hops about). Or alternatively you can choose to do it like this. (He repeats the business. This time he replaces the kettle and walks away mouthing a silent scream.) You know which choice I want you to make?' He continues, after Jacie responds with the little one, 'Aren't I predictable?' The one thing to never choose is the middle ground (This time he picks up the kettle with genuine pain). Now that hurt. – Nobody laughs at that except sadists and weirdos and them we can do without. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 46)

This appears to be Ayckbourn's own opinion on slapstick, and it explains why he always saves slapstick for his android characters in these plays, to avoid sadism. Slapstick is not or should not be funny in Ayckbourn's eyes if there appears to be genuine suffering. Unfortunately, Jacie does not seem to take Chandler and thus Ayckbourn's advice to heart since several pages later on, she goes big:

Jacie has picked up the dish of egg custard from the table and squashed it in Carla's face. She twists the plate in the way she has been taught. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 57)

This is the kind of sadistic slapstick that Ayckbourn normally disapproves of, and every character in the rooms besides Carla laughs. While Carla is the villain of the piece and the audience enjoys her getting her comeuppance, it must be noted that there are repercussions for this act. Although Lester finds it amusing, he orders Jacie to be deactivated permanently.

When Ayckbourn uses slapstick in these plays, he uses it as a device to show how different the androids are from their human counterparts. It is most common when the androids are attempting to become more human: Sadie trying to eat, Nan attempting to be caring, or Jacie attempting to be funny. This slapstick actually humanizes the characters and makes the audience care for them more, not less. This 'caring' slapstick is best explained by Chandler's (or Ayckbourn's) opinion that slapstick should always be funny but never sadistic. When the humor is sadistic, like Jacie's pie in the face, Ayckbourn makes sure that there are repercussions. Thus, the audience never feels uncomfortable or guilty enjoying the slapstick, which ensures that the slapstick serves its primary purpose, to balance out the tragedy in each play.

According to Eva Dadlez and Daniel Lüthi, comedy is "an authentic counterpart of tragedy" in terms of its function seeing that comedy does not simply provide the audience with amusement, but it can also provoke "equally important insights" as well as addressing equally important matters (Dadlez, Lüthi, 2018, p. 81). Even though comedy and tragedy aim to arouse different feelings, both employ similar methods to achieve these different effects. Dadlez and Lüthi link comedy to tragedy due to their reliance on incongruity, which is the "staple of tragic drama" (Dadlez, Lüthi, 2018, p. 85). This theory bears a great deal of relevance to tragedy as

Aristotelian reversal stems from incongruity. As Aristotle writes in *Poetics* (Book XI), Oedipus experiences a sudden reversal followed by recognition when the messenger reveals who he actually is, which creates “an opposite effect” as “the messenger comes to cheer him and free him from his alarms about his mother.” Just as incongruity in comedy elicits laughter, reversal in tragedy arouses pity and fear. In other words, both Aristotelian catharsis of fear and pity in tragedy and amusement in comedy (comic catharsis) are achieved through incongruity. The only difference is that, according to Dadlez and Lüthi, “amusement targets a reversal or incongruity” whereas “pity targets someone’s suffering.” Yet, pity is most evident “when the suffering is considered undeserved, so amusement is more likely when the reversal or incongruity is believed benign” (Dadlez, Lüthi, 2018, p. 84). In that sense, Ayckbourn manages to balance out tragedy and therefore he achieves his comic catharsis through his use of comedic devices.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. HOW AYCKBOURN UPDATES COMEDY VIA FUTURISM, FARCE, AND SCIENCE FICTION IN HIS SELECTED WORKS

Of Ayckbourn's eighty-four full length plays, only five of them can be described as science fiction. On top of these, he has written one science fiction novel aimed at a young audience, *The Divide*. By Ayckbourn's own admission, writing and then producing a successful science fiction play is no mean feat. So why would an already successful and respected playwright take the risk and turn his hand to science fiction? And then later on why would he further risk that reputation by writing not only his first novel, but his first science fiction novel? And finally, how did he succeed?

When people think of science fiction, they usually think big and science fiction tends to go big: the epic space battles of *Star Wars*, the exotic and exciting locations in *Star Trek* or special effect heavy fight scenes in films like *Terminator*. These are all things which do not lend themselves to the kind of low budget small scale plays that Ayckbourn specializes in. Instead, he focuses on updating comedy via futurism, farce and science fiction to allow the telling of the kind of small scale, personal science fiction tales that is so rarely seen.

Futurism first appeared in 20th-century Italy and its goal was to denounce the past and focus on the developments happening in the present as well as what they could lead to in the future. As a result of this, futurist works often involve the latest developments in science, technology and philosophy. Some of Ayckbourn's works can be seen as having futuristic aspects in their choice of settings, use of technology, and their focus on modern philosophical problems. *Comic Potential*, *Communicating Doors*, and *Henceforward* are all set in the near future. They also predominantly focus on the present and the future, rather than the past. Furthermore, *Comic Potential* and *Henceforward* focus on modern and future technology.

Of the plays, *Henceforward* is perhaps the most futurist. It has an urban near-future setting with a focus on modern technology. It also includes the kind of violence that futurists often depicted, "Rita, the Daughter of Darkness, yelling obscenities, comes racing up the hall brandishing an iron bar" (Ayckbourn, 1995, p. 98). Even though much of the technology talked about in *Henceforward* may not seem

impressive by today's standards, it must be remembered when it was written. The play involves robots, video telephones, sci-fi style ready meals, personal computers, armored cars and Mervyn's personal defense system. At the time of writing, all of these things would have seemed very impressive and futuristic, yet in the play, they have become everyday items. As Ayckbourn states, the play's primary themes are the artistic process and how it changes with modern technology and the isolating effect technology can have:

As technology continues to grow, will the creative artist's role still be there? I don't really answer them except to say that there are times when one feels, as a so-called creative artist, totally irrelevant. In the nuclear shelter, I probably wouldn't get precedence over the plumber. Creative artists often do detach themselves from the real world, and they plunder from it quite freely. (Murgatroyd, 1998)

Comic Potential shares similar futurist themes. The play is once again set in the near future and focuses on futuristic technology, this time, androids. In this future, androids have become so common place they can be found working in restaurants. Moreover, they have even replaced actors. These androids are so realistic that it can be hard to tell them apart from humans, much like in *Blade Runner*, another piece influenced heavily by futurism. Ayckbourn's focus in *Comic Potential* is the philosophical debate of what it means to be human and at which point a machine becomes human (also similar to *Blade Runner*):

I wanted to write a play about the nature of being human, and so I came up with this Pygmalion-esque story about a boy who falls in love with an android. (Murgatroyd, 2000)

This can be seen in Ayckbourn's depiction of Jacie, an Android who becomes increasingly sentient and human as the play goes on. Throughout the play, Jacie questions who she really is. Is she truly alive or is she just an amalgamation of the past roles programmed into her?

I am not Jacie, Adam. There is no Jacie. I am a machine, Adam. I will only ever be what people want me to be. I can play our Jacie. But I will never be your Jacie. (Ayckbourn, 1999, p. 99)

This is a theme also explored towards the end of *My Sister Sadie* when Sadie discovers what her true purpose is as a killing machine and Sadie opts to destroy herself rather than live up to her intended purpose,

I can feel it starting. And I no longer know who I am. I must leave you, Luke.
I must. (Ayckbourn, 2003, p. 72)

Another theme of modern futurism is the idea that the future depicted should be realistic and grounded. There should be a clear delineation between futurism and complete works of fiction. *Comic Potential*, *Henceforward*, *My Sister Sadie* and *Communicating Doors* all fit the bill here. All four depict near futures that, for the most part, are believable. Sadly, the kind of societal breakdowns shown in *Communicating Doors* and *Henceforward* do not seem a million miles away. Much of the future technology depicted in *Henceforward* is so realistically written that, ironically, much of it now seems outdated. Nan may be more advanced than robots that exist now, but her quirks and malfunctions make her feel more realistic, more akin to the kind of technology people use every day. Similarly, the androids in *Comic Potential* and their limitations are depicted realistically. For instance, in the restaurant scene Jacie needs her waste bag emptying and earlier still, the malfunctioning actor robot requires ‘cyber surgery.’ Due to their limitations Ayckbourn’s androids feel like the kind of technology that could be possible in the near future, and this is a key aspect of futurism. Arguably, much of this stems from the inherent limitations of performing on stage and catering to an adult audience. Theatre companies do not have the special effects budgets to pull off the kind of high sci-fi often seen in Hollywood, and therefore, Ayckbourn’s future technology must be cheap and easy to depict due to the inherent limitations of his medium.

Interestingly, the play which deviates the most from futurism is *Whenever*. The play is predominantly a piece of science fiction rather than futurism. Firstly, futurist pieces are normally not concerned with the past, yet the play begins in the Victorian era, before visiting WW II era London, where it makes comments about war profiteering during that period,

He’s certainly a traitor love. Well, he’s worse, he’s a war profiteer. That’s the lowest of the low. (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 55)

Secondly, *Whenever* is not at all concerned with realism. How the technology the plot revolves around works is never really explained, it may as well be magic. Similarly, after Emily changes the time-line, the audience learns that Ziggi now works for some kind of robot circus while Hoombean is part of an intergalactic human empire. These futures and the technology they use are never really explained or explored. It is no coincidence that Ayckbourn's only piece of pure science fiction is aimed at children. A child's imagination can do most of the heavy lifting and fill in the special effects gaps, and thus Ayckbourn does not have to focus so much on realism compared to when working with an adult audience.

Up until the two World Wars, futurists tended to focus on glamorizing technological advancement and the potential benefits of technology. However, after the heavy death tolls suffered during the wars, predominantly due to the industrialization of warfare and the Nazi obsession with advancement no matter the human cost, things began to change. Futurism went on to inform modern science fiction, yet the focus often became to tell cautionary tales, and this can be seen in Ayckbourn's plays. He has stated that:

The best science fiction, in my opinion, usually takes the form of a cautionary tale for the present; if we continue to do this, then this will happen.
(Murgatroyd, 2017)

In the world of *Henceforward*, the outside world is no longer a safe place and people like Jerome have chosen to cloister themselves away and hide behind technology. Vicious gangs have taken on the role of the police while young men and women have formed rival gangs. In this way, *Henceforward* is a warning against the dangers of modern technology. Similarly, in the world of *Comic Potential*, the use of technology has led to machines taking over human jobs. Everything has become so automated that an average person just sits at home and stews in front of their TV all day. Moreover, people's attention spans have been reduced so severely that an average show is only a few short minutes long. During the future scenes of *Whenever*, human use of technology has led to their near extinction and robots have taken over. Humanity's eventual devolution is seen clearly in Ayckbourn's representation of Hoombean, a creature described as "a hairy biped, it sees them and becomes very threatening,"

almost dog-like in mannerism: “rather crestfallen it rolls on its back and waves its legs in the air” (Ayckbourn, 2002, p. 91-92).

This point about science fiction stories and how they often act as cautionary tales, especially in Ayckbourn’s works, leads to a discussion on Ayckbourn’s use of farce. As mentioned earlier, these plays often walk a fine line between comedy and tragedy. The primary way Ayckbourn keeps them light is in his use of farce. Science fiction and futurism are not typically associated with comedy nor farce. Most examples of comedy sci-fi such as *Red Dwarf*, *Galaxy Quest*, and *Space Balls* tend to rely on spoof or parody. Instead, Ayckbourn chooses to add elements of farce (amongst other comedic devices) to lighten his plays. When Ayckbourn uses farce in these plays, the source of the farce is always based in science fiction to keep his plays thematically consistent. For example, in *Henceforward*, the source of the farce is Nan and her constant malfunctions. In *Comic Potential*, the source of farce is Jacie and in *My Sister Sadie*, the source of the farce is Sadie. By doing this, Ayckbourn uses farce to lighten the mood and add to his central themes, rather than just inserting a funny piece of the farce to lighten the mood of the play.

The Divide can feel like a culmination of Ayckbourn’s previous science fiction writing and a product of his updating comedy through science fiction. Ayckbourn describes *The Divide* as a play that got away from him and just kept growing in scale:

I set myself into freefall. I wrote something I knew was going to be virtually impossible for me to direct. Budget-wise it was too big, logistically it was impossible: bottomless ponds, whole villages, waterfalls, caves... It was like a novel. (Murgatroyd, 2017)

However, despite its larger scale, it is clear that the novel shares creative DNA with his on stage works. Firstly, the novel is largely futurist in its depiction of a possible dystopian future. In *The Divide*, humanity’s numbers have been decimated by a deadly plague that has wiped out millions and has led to men and women being forced to live on separate sides of a wall. The fact that the book was published in 2019, shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, makes the book seem incredibly prescient. Ayckbourn paints a future that no longer seem very far-fetched at all. *The Divide*’s approach to the future remains grounded, and there is no mention of any kind of high technology. On

the contrary, technological advancement has ground to a halt in the world of *The Divide*. Much like in his plays, Ayckbourn uses this futurist setting to satirize modern society. In the case of *The Divide*, Ayckbourn is satirizing gender roles and stereotypes by inverting everything. Heterosexuality is a sin; men are weak and need protecting from predatory women and same sex relationships are the norm.

I see *The Divide* as a sexual satire in which the enforced separation of the sexes, at the risk of human extinction, causes an upending of social norms when heterosexuality is considered unnatural and same sex relationships are the established norm. Yes, it is dark, but it's equally quite funny, too. (Murgatroyd 2019)

Ayckbourn also makes important points on how easy it is to rule through fear. In *The Divide*, a dictatorship / religious cult has maintained power by perpetrating the lie that the virus is still deadly, and that men and women must remain separated. Thus, the populace has given up all of the freedoms that people take for granted, which once again makes the novel prescient. Ayckbourn does not wait long to give his readers this message. The foreword is written by Soween, and referring to the status-quo she states,

There were, needless to say, powerful factions of society, particularly on the male side, with a considerable vested interest to maintain it. But when has it been otherwise? (Ayckbourn, 2019, p. 2)

Much of the satire in the novel derives from feminism, another common Ayckbourn trait. In this future where men and women are separated, the women's side of the wall sounds quite idyllic while the men's side is troubled by violence, domestic abuse, and gang warfare.

Although *The Divide* cannot really be considered a comedy, it still contains humor. The comedy predominantly comes from Soween's adolescent diary entries and her constant use of hyperbole. However bad things are for those around her, the world revolves around Soween. A prime example of this is towards the end of the book. Soween's Mapa has committed suicide, her brother is believed to be dead, and his wife has been sentenced to death. In such a situation, Soween's primary concern is the weather:

Today the worst happened, and it started to rain, not heavily but that awful incessant drizzle which gradually soaks through you until you're reduced to a sodden miserable lump. (Ayckbourn, 2019, p. 301)

Soween, in her innocence, is also the novel's primary source of farce. This is best highlighted in her depiction of her brother after she unknowingly witnesses Elihu and Giella making love. Soween misinterprets this as Elihu attacking some poor woman and imagines Elihu stalking the village at night like some kind of half-man, half-beast monster. Later on, Ayckbourn's signature skill of writing witty dialogue is also readily apparent, despite the fact the novel predominantly takes the form of old diary entries. The best example of this is during Giella's trial where she makes her frustration apparent using understatement, comic timing and sarcasm in abundance as well as some colorful language,

He had a gorgeous body, for a 12-year-old. It would have got most women cooking, I reckon. Even you, possibly. He stood there with an ***** the size of the men's memorial. (Ayckbourn, 2019, p. 279)

Giella's use of colorful language serves a second purpose. She has grown up in a strictly orthodox society where sex is totally taboo and any kind of challenge is quickly rebuked. Where did she learn to talk like this? It shows that the power base the Church is much shakier than they ever dreamt. In his works, Ayckbourn consistently encourages his audience to challenge social norms. With this scene, he is doing the same. He is showing his young audience that anyone can stand up and challenge their elders and that their elders are not always right.

There is a shared approach towards science fiction in Ayckbourn's plays and his novel *The Divide*. With the exception of *Whenever*, Ayckbourn's plays never go big in his approach to science fiction, and they always remain grounded. As mentioned earlier, this is largely due to the practical constrictions of producing low budget theatre. However, if this was the sole reason, how can his similar approach in *The Divide* be explained? The truth is Ayckbourn has no interest in going big. *The Divide* may be far larger in scale, but it still has a narrow, personal focus. The novel predominantly focuses on one family, in one small village and their personal troubles. These troubles and the actions of the family may have huge ramifications for society as a whole, but

this is not Ayckbourn's focus. It is a tragic romance about young love that just happens to be set in a dystopian future where the romance is the focus, not the science fiction. In his plays, Ayckbourn focuses on people, their personal problems, and their relationships, as he does in *The Divide*. This is not due to any kind of limitation but purely because this is where his interest lies. He is happy to leave the spectacular to Hollywood so that he can focus on the personal. This attitude to science fiction is best summed up by Ayckbourn himself:

Theatre can do domestic sci-fi that doesn't require high technology. If you want to take on the full might of the Spielberg empire on a budget of £10,000, you're in for heartache. Science fiction can be about the nature of what is going to happen to the human race, and that is where theatre can do it - certainly I'm doing it. I will soon want to write about the future family: what will happen to the family unit which has been slowly disintegrating in the past few decades? All the projections one could write about in theatre would probably not interest film and television, because it is less spectacular. But I think it is just as interesting. What will happen not to the planetary system, but to people? One has to boil it down to that ingredient that theatre deals with best. (Murgatroyd, 1998)

The fact is that Ayckbourn does not just update the codes of comedy through his use of science fiction, but he updates the codes of science-fiction through his use of comedy and his focus on people.

1.1 Ayckbourn's Difference from His Contemporaries

Apart from John Osborne's anger, Samuel Beckett's absurd plays, Arnold Wesker's kitchen-sink drama, Tom Stoppard's intellectual acrobaticism, Peter Shaffer's political plays, and Harold Pinter's comedy of menace, Alan Ayckbourn comes into prominence with his dark comedy as well as his use of futurism, fantasy, and science fiction especially in his later works. Ayckbourn's plays have a distinct characteristic owing to his blend of traditional and new styles through which he has stretched the boundaries of farcical comedy. Just as Ben Jonson dealt with avarice in his farces in the 17th century, Ayckbourn, showing the darkness in human beings by using comedic

devices, stands out as a comic tragedian of modern theatre. Peter Buckroyd suggests that

Ayckbourn has given to comedy some serious concerns, rooted in social behavior and credible personalities. Comedy has been given more substance than it used to have. Ayckbourn has also brought a wider audience to plays which have something to say. (Buckrody, 1986, p. 58)

Although Alan Ayckbourn is not the only modern dramatist whose works have something to say, he is different from his contemporaries thanks to his expertise in technique and characterization. Harold Pinter, for example, delves into “the existential conflicts and dynamics of human relations which are mainly based on power relations” in his comedies of menace (Kaya, 2020, p. 106). Pinter uses pauses and silences as his characters fail to communicate with each other. Misunderstanding caused by lack of communication is undoubtedly a *sine qua non* of farcical comedy. Moreover, it is one of the “major themes of serious modern dramatists like Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter,” whose works could be perceived as “a comment on the deterioration of relationships in modern society” (Hornby, 1991, p. 287). In his comedies of menace, Pinter uses rooms that have doors through which “sooner or later something enters to destroy those within” (Gale, 1973, p. 179). Behind these doors, communication between the characters becomes necessary, and thus its absence elicits humor. As Richard Hornby points out, in farce, the use of doors is “a stock device going back to ancient Roman theatre” where the audience already knows what is going on behind the doors, wait for “the entrances and exits through them” with bated breath, and it gives rise to “comic confrontations” or “hilarious near misses” (Hornby, 1991, p. 285). Ayckbourn, on the other hand, did not use doors as the stage of his theatre in Scarborough is in the round. Thus, he employed “the device of having the action take place on three levels, all of which are depicted simultaneously on the stage” (Hornby, 1991, p. 286). By doing so, Ayckbourn was able to show his audience all the entrances and exits, and thus all the comic confrontations and hilarious near misses, in plain sight. Later in his article, Hornby states that Ayckbourn's obsession with “the technicalities of playwriting” is characteristic of his work, which includes devices such as “a play within a play, retelling the same story in three related plays in three parts of the same house, and tossing a coin to determine where the plot in a particular

performance will go” (Hornby, 1991, p. 286). In a similar vein, referring to *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, Stephane Tucker suggests that Ayckbourn commits a great deal of time and effort to “professing his craft” and his “penchant for teaching” is revealed in his plays such as *Comic Potential*, which Tucker describes as “a dramatic master class in comic theory and practice, disguised as a futuristic farce” (Tucker, 2003, p. 72). In order to lay an emphasis on Ayckbourn’s expertise in technique, Tucker quotes from Stuart Baker:

Technical proficiency is perhaps Ayckbourn's most distinctive characteristic; he never lets us forget for very long that a playwright is at work. His devices are delightful in themselves, but they usually also enrich the action and comment on the characters. (Tucker, 2003, p. 74)

According to Tucker, Ayckbourn’s devices do not “jolt” the audience solely for the sake of jolting or just eliciting laughter. The way Ayckbourn uses “his metadramatic devices” enables him to “shatter theatrical illusion”, which makes the boundaries between on and off stage disappear. For instance, in *Comic Potential*, even though Ayckbourn sets the play in “the foreseeable future when everything has changed except human nature”, the audience feels that “the future is ominously present” (Tucker, 2003, p. 74).

Referring to the “critical prejudice” against Ayckbourn due to the commercial success and the subject matter of his plays, Billington states that, as a “prolific” playwright, Ayckbourn is “seriously underrated” (Billington, 1993, p. 1). Similarly, Michael Holt suggests that Ayckbourn was “labelled as the inheritor of the lightweight boulevardier mantle recently worn by Terence Rattigan, Peter Ustinov and Enid Bagnold” due to his adherence to comedy and his focus on “the middle class” (Holt, 1999, p. 2). Unlike his contemporaries such as Tom Stoppard, whose subject matter is “artists, intellectuals, and political leaders” as Hornby says, Ayckbourn inks hilarious stories about “dull” and “ordinary middle-class folk” (Hornby, 1991, p. 286). Contrary to Tom Stoppard, Peter Shaffer, and Harold Pinter, whose plays are set in “a working-class environment,” neither Ayckbourn nor his characters have an “overtly political agenda” (Holt, 1999, p. 2). As McGrath points out, differently from his contemporaries such as Pinter, Arden, and Wesker, who were attempting to “change the world” by

means of “radical theatre,” Ayckbourn was “recording the transformation that was actually taking place” (McGrath, 2017, p. 61). Since Ayckbourn was focusing on the lives of individuals who appeared to be “winning” while the working-class were being demolished by “economic and political forces,” it was not surprising that Billington called him a “reflex libertarian” as well as saying that he is “in no sense a radical writer” (Billington, 1993, p. 61).

Last but not least, without excepting *Henceforward* (1987), Ayckbourn has produced 15 plays and a novel containing elements of futurism, fantasy, and science fiction, which makes him “unique amongst major British playwrights in the depth and longevity of his interest in these genres” (McGrath, 2017, p. 62). However, Ayckbourn’s use of these elements do not “water down” his focus on “human relations;” instead, it enables him to reiterate his “primary messages” in a more acute, “challenging,” and a more “difficult way for his audience to ignore” (McGrath, 2017, p. 62). Besides embracing the classical codes of comedy and therefore the traditional comedic devices, Ayckbourn updates comedy via futurism, fantasy, and science fiction. As McGrath points out, Ayckbourn’s frequent and intense use of futurism, fantasy, and science fiction especially in his later works does not mean that he has given up “his long-term and rigorous thematic focus”- instead, it shows a dramatist who experiments with new ways of making his “concerns” intriguing and impactful for his large audience “even at the risk of alienating them by disrupting a successfully lucrative formula” (McGrath, 2017, p. 63).

Even though Alan Ayckbourn has not been able to receive much scholarly attention as a comic playwright due to his adherence to traditional codes of comedy, choice of subject matter, and commercial success, he believes that he will be “on par with an equivalent serious writer” long after he dies. Regarding the scholarly appreciation that he hopes to receive one day, in *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, Ayckbourn says “by that time, of course, most of the comedy will be incomprehensible and will only be laughed at by scholars” (Ayckbourn, 2014, p. 4).

CONCLUSION

Alan Ayckbourn started his career in the theatre as a teenager with little experience and has since progressed to become one of the most prolific and popular dramatists of our day. Ayckbourn adopts Moliere's style and dramatic techniques, mixing and updating them through futurism, farce, and science fiction, in order to not only entertain but also to educate the audience through comedy. Since it is beyond the scope of this study to provide an in-depth analysis of all 84 plays, *Henceforward*, *Communicating Doors*, *Comic Potential*, *Whenever*, *My Sister Sadie*, and *The Divide* have been selected for their relevance to the thesis. Each of these works is not just in a slightly different genre than the others, but it also specializes in a distinct comedic device. *Henceforward* is a farce, *Communicating Doors* is a dark comedy, *Comic potential* is a Romantic Comedy, *Whenever* is a musical Parody, *My Sister Sadie* is a family adventure, and *The Divide* is a tragic romance set in a dystopian future. In these works, Ayckbourn uses a variety of humorous tropes found in the Classical Comedy, ranging from physical humor in the form of slapstick to witticisms in the form of sarcasm.

When Ayckbourn employs satire, parody, and stereotypes, he is always attempting to make a point, usually one of social criticism. The protagonists of a Sentimental Comedy are flawless and moral, while the villains are totally evil and repulsive. Ayckbourn's heroes are not typical of a Sentimental Comedy, but his antagonists are. In his selected works, Ayckbourn depicts a stereotypical villain to whom he never adds any further dimensions. He employs the unbroken stereotype to maintain the audience's hostility and lack of sympathy for them throughout their inevitable downfall. On the other hand, he employs broken stereotypes as a tool both to build up his characters and to endear them to the audience. In a similar vein, sarcasm is used by Ayckbourn to develop his characters and to give them a personality, which is often stereotypically British. In addition, the use of sarcasm serves as a way for Ayckbourn to emphasize the oddity and innocence of his characters.

In his dark comedies, in line with the Incongruity Theory, Ayckbourn uses taboos and the understated delivery of disturbing information in order to make the

audience experience astonishment as a result of the abrupt realization of incongruity in the scenes, which results in laughter. Apart from his use of the taboo to produce dark humor, Ayckbourn's plays have dark endings. As a dramatist who acknowledges that even the happiest endings in real life are tainted with melancholy, Ayckbourn uses this darkness to educate his audience through his cautionary tales, where dark endings are necessary. Just as his heroes earn their happy endings, the villains in his works deserve to suffer due to their flaws.

However, these dark endings come with a heavy dose of irony as Ayckbourn is a master of balancing the dark and tragic with the light and comic. Although comedy and tragedy aim to elicit different emotions, both employ similar techniques to achieve these different effects. Reversal in tragedy arouses pity and fear while Incongruity in comedy elicits laughter. In that sense, Ayckbourn manages to achieve a comic catharsis as well as a delicate balance between the light and dark elements through his use of mistaken identity, surrealism, repetition, farce, juxtaposition, and slapstick.

Mistaken identity is frequently used by Ayckbourn, leading to surreal and farcical situations that tend to balance out the dark and tragic elements in his works. In addition, he uses Juxtaposition in order to strengthen the elements of farce and surrealism. Ayckbourn's use of contrasting characters in the play contributes to the production of the comic effect.

Ayckbourn employs slapstick as an element of low comedy in his plays in order to emphasize the differences between the androids and their human counterparts. His use of slapstick humanizes the characters, making the audience care more for them. This slapstick is usually funny rather than being sadistic. On the other hand, when the humour is sadistic, Ayckbourn makes sure that there are repercussions. As a result, the audience never feels uncomfortable or guilty about enjoying the slapstick, which ensures that the slapstick fulfills its fundamental function of counteracting the tragedy in each work.

Ayckbourn's futuristic depictions in *Henceforward*, *Communicating Doors*, *Comic Potential*, *My Sister Sadie*, and *The Divide* are realistic and grounded. In fact, much of the futuristic technology depicted in these works is written so realistically that it now appears to be antiquated. Even though science fiction and futurism are

not typically associated with comedy, and most examples of comedy sci-fi tend to rely on spoof or parody, Ayckbourn chooses to add elements of farce to lighten these works just as he uses farce to balance out tragedy. When Ayckbourn uses farce, he does not just insert a funny piece of the farce to lighten the mood of the play as the source of the farce is always based in science fiction to keep his plays thematically consistent. Dystopian future settings of his plays enables Ayckbourn to emphasize the isolating effect of modern technology while focusing on people, their personal problems, and their relationships. In a sense, he prefers to leave the spectacular to Hollywood so that he can focus on the personal. Therefore, Ayckbourn does not just update the codes of comedy through his use of science fiction, but he also updates the codes of science-fiction through his use of comedy and his focus on people.

Ayckbourn's plays have a distinct characteristic due to his blend of traditional and new styles through which he has stretched the boundaries of farcical comedy. His mastery in technique and characterization sets him apart from his contemporaries. Although Ayckbourn has not received so much appreciation from the scholars mainly due to his adherence to comedy, his focus on the middle class and thus not having a political agenda, and the commercial success of his plays, he stands out as a comic tragedian of modern theatre, revealing the darkness in human beings using comedic devices. Ayckbourn is not only a dramatist who has been experimenting with new ways of conveying his constructive messages in a more effective way, he is also a prolific playwright who embraces the classical codes of comedy as well as updating it via futurism, farce, and science fiction.

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