

LAUGHING IN SPACE: ROBERT HEINLEIN'S *THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS*
AND TOWARDS A NEW HUMOR FRAMEWORK

by

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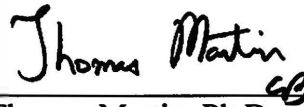
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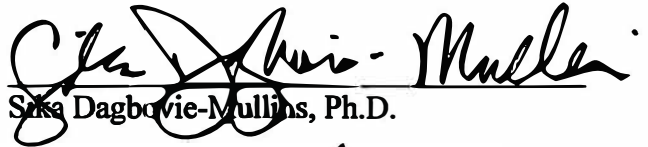
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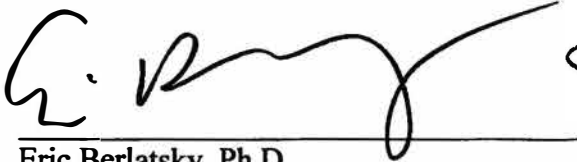
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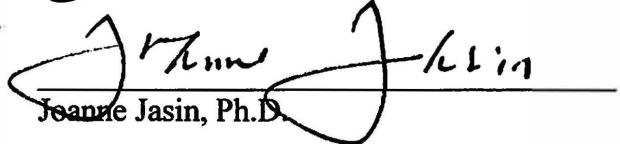
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ABSTRACT

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Humor's effect on the audience's relationship to the object, or speaker, of humor has often been neglected, and creating a framework by which scholars can examine how humor works to alter the relationship between audience and other fills this gap.

Additionally, the definition of science fiction relies on the existence of a cognitively estranging other and under this definition, humor has not been thoroughly studied. This thesis attempts to explain how humor affects audiences cognitively, utilizing Hegel's theory of self and other, and then applies this theoretical explanation to the field of science fiction and examines its effects.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who love to laugh and laugh heartily.

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INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: PAST THEORIES OF HUMOR AND THEIR AIMS	7
CHAPTER TWO: FAMILIARIZATION THEORY	15
Creating a Framework.....	22
CHAPTER THREE: LAUGHING IN SPACE.....	31
CONCLUSION.....	47
REFERENCES	50

INTRODUCTION

“Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand.”

--Mark Twain

Relevant secondary literature of the study of humor in science fiction is relatively sparse, as Fiona Kelleghan states when she ends her essay “Humor and Science Fiction”: “In conclusion, I want to say that there has been a shocking dearth of acutely analytical scholarly studies on science fiction humor. Unfortunately, this essay has done nothing to remedy the situation” (276). Much secondary literature attempts to categorize humor into distinct sections; however, some scholars will narrow their scope to examining the apparent irony inherent to the genre itself, such as the focus on the absence of God in the universe while the writer serves as the god or creator of the universe in which the story takes place. Even then, scholars broadly look at the distinct forms of comedy in science fiction rather than examining how humor affects the genre.

Kelleghan’s aforementioned article also categorizes humor and attempts to explain why science fiction humor is funnier than humor in other genres and mainstream literature. In *Comic Tones in Science Fiction*, Donald Hassler narrows his scope to look specifically at irony and then compares this to English Enlightenment irony, skirting around the effects of humor in science fiction through comparisons as a way to, he admits, legitimize science fiction.

In one essay by David Ketterer titled “Take-Off To Cosmic Irony: Science-Fiction and the Absurd,” Ketterer divides science fiction humor into parody, irony, and

the absurd. He concludes by saying that serious science fiction is not given to “sustained humor” because it “degenerates” the work into fantasy or parody (86). Furthermore, he states that “humor is associated with the human” and that mimicry, such as a human imitating robots, “will tend to transform science fiction into fantasy” (75). Ketterer does make an additional interesting point at the beginning of his essay where he mentions that humor seems to have a humanizing effect. But he does not expand on this point any further, only using a footnote to draw attention to the idea of the humors from Hippocrates as examples of the way humor relates to the human. The humors correlate to certain bodily fluids that can identify personality traits, and so, Ketterer has a point here about the humors relating to the human. But, the humors emphasize the body that then relates to the personality, or perhaps what we might call the mind. The flow of causation, if that term may be used, moves from body to mind, flesh to immaterial, in the humoral theory, but in comedy, in humor, the flow of causation moves from the mind, the idea of the hilarious, to the body, resulting in laughter. With the focus on the body in the humoral theory, the relation between humor and the human becomes disrupted, for humor does not directly interact with the body. Because of this disruption, a different theory detailing the relation between human and humor is needed, one that focuses specifically on the interactions in the mind and perception.

Creating a theory that focuses on the mind requires examining the minds that interact with the humor, and many scholars miss the effect humor has on the audience and on the genre. Sf, according to Darko Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement, contains a novum that causes us to question our intuitive beliefs about the real world, and humor changes this for the reader, removing the questioning. I propose a modification of

his principle as relates to humor and will argue: when familiarizing humor, involving a self and other, turns its laughter toward this novum, the estrangement dissipates, thereby removing the questioning that the novum supplies, undermining the entire idea of sf. The present work attempts to discuss comedy in science fiction as a whole, using Robert Heinlein's *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* as its main text. Heinlein's novel was chosen because Heinlein is known for integrating humor into his works quite liberally while not having the entire work become satire or parody. While a larger undertaking discussing and using a more extensive library of literature besides a novel and short story would be prudent, such use would exceed all limitations impressed upon this thesis.

To be clear, this thesis will not attempt to formalize categories of humor in science fiction nor address the irony found within. The thesis will focus on two major points: 1) how humor familiarizes the object or creator of humor and 2) the effects of this familiarization theory on the science fiction genre, as defined by Suvin, by way of the audience's internal reactions to this humor. To begin speaking of humor, though, the origins and types must be briefly discussed to show the connections and differences between the previous major theories: superiority, incongruity, and relief. These theories attempt to explain why we as humans find a physical act, wordplay, or wit funny. In other words, they attempt to discover *why* we laugh. I propose an explanation for the old idea that humor relates to the human that I call the familiarization theory, which attempts to articulate *how* laughter and humor affects the relationship between audience and creator.

Before detailing these theories however, this thesis uses comedy, humor, and laughter under definitions that must be made clear in order to alleviate any confusion. By comedy, one simply means "the style or genre of entertainment consisting of jokes and

intending to make an audience laugh” (*OED*). Scholars, however, define comedy in various ways, depending on their focus. Aristotle, for example, defined comedy as “a representation of inferior people, not indeed in the full sense of the word bad, but the laughable is a species of the base or ugly” (*Poetics* 1449b). In Ancient Greece, comedies were plays, standing in opposition to tragedy in tone, teaching moral lessons, and showing the Greeks inferior people. During the Middle Ages, Isidore elaborated on comedy as a genre, detailing how comedy must “treat of light and cheerful events” with characters that are “private and ordinary” written in a “lowly, even rustic, style, expressed in everyday language” where the “action progresses from an unhappy state of affairs to a happy one” (Webber 1). Comedy became even more entrenched in genre and structure, and had yet to move past its literary form to that of a tool used in literature. Later in the eleventh and twelfth centuries though, comedy came to include satire, as seen through the works of Averroes and Avicenna (Webber 9). When Averroes and Avicenna translated Aristotle’s *Poetics*, they ceased using *comoedia*, preferring *laudativa* instead. But they still used *tragoedia* in opposition to *laudativa*, demonstrating the transition from comedy as a purely structural entity to one that includes satire (Webber 9). In fact, García de Toledo utilized “the resources of comedy,” in his work instead of composing a comedy (Webber 10). A shift can be marked in the twelfth century in that comedy ceases to be wholly a literary genre but instead becomes a literary tool. Recently, the distinctions between comedy as form, genre, and tool made discussions of the topic difficult, and as such, modern scholars tend to use “humour” and “laughter” because of their “pragmatism” in “cover[ing] the entire spectrum” (Verberckmoes 1). For this thesis

though, comedy and humor are used interchangeably with the understanding that comedy is a tool used by authors.

With humor and comedy defined, the difference between laughter and humor, or comedy, must also be demarcated. Laughter is a product of humor, the physical process that the body undergoes in response to humor. Laughter specifically is an evolutionary action gained from primates. Jan van Hooff studied various species of monkeys and determined that they have a “laugh like vocalization that accompanies a relaxed open-mouth play face, during tickling and rough-and-tumble play” and that human children also laugh during the same types of activities that the monkey did (Morreall 41).. Humor, on the other hand, is harder to define when considering the various theories about why humans laugh. For the purpose of this thesis, incongruity theory will be the theory utilized due to its general acceptance by the scientific and philosophical community. Taking this into account, humor can be defined as the cognitive enjoyment of incongruities. Humans must of course have developed language for this humor to flourish due to its reliance on verbal communication between the two parties. Relying strictly on non-verbal, physical humor would result in slapstick humor, which is beyond the scope of this thesis due to its interest in a predominantly written word based genre.

To begin to define science fiction, however, one must sift through the mountains of definitions presented, and each definition serves as the individual’s taste allows. Defining science fiction is a necessary and important task, but the academic community cannot seem, at some level, to come to a coherent definition of literature, making a definitive definition of science fiction long forthcoming. With this in mind, for the purpose of this thesis, Darko Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement will serve as

science fiction's definition, which will be explained in Chapter Three. For the present, however, we must gaze into the past in order to understand how humor theory developed from the classical era and the theories of Plato and Aristotle. Such gazing bears fruit when discussing how certain aspects of previous, historical theories impact the aggressively modern science fiction.

CHAPTER ONE: PAST THEORIES OF HUMOR AND THEIR AIMS

In order to provide a sufficient background upon which the familiarization theory rests and to understand how familiarization theory will separate itself from its predecessors, both in content and aim, it becomes important to look at past theories of humor. Despite previous critics disparaging treatment of humor, the superiority, relief, and incongruity theories emerged.

Superiority theory, the oldest, reaches back to Plato and the Bible and continues even today with some modern philosophers, notably Roger Scruton. Simply put, the theory states that humans laugh at others, at actions, because of a sense of superiority over the character. The audience feels that they are better than the objects of laughter because the objects represent digressive forms in society that all recognize as being lesser than some perceived standard. Furthermore, laughter can be directed at this character because the audience recognizes some part of their former self in the ridiculed character, leading to a sense of superiority where the audience feels superior to their past selves. Plato in particular rejects laughter as unbecoming, unfit to grace the educated man, as laughter involves violence: “For a fit of laughter which has been indulged to excess almost always produces a violent reaction” (*Republic* 388e). This violence becomes directed at the comical character because the comical character indulges in self-ignorance, and the audiences finds themselves superior to him: “The ridiculous is in its main aspect a kind of vice which gives its name to a condition; and it is that part of vice in general which involves the opposite of the condition mentioned in the inscription at

Delphi” (*Philebus* 48). The inscription at Delphi reads “Know thyself,” and a comical character revels in self-ignorance, contradicting the Delphic inscription, which allows for the audience to discover joy in the character’s ignorant deeds.

The most apparent descriptions of the superiority theory though can be found in Rene Descartes and Thomas Hobbes. Descartes states that “Ridicule or derision is a kind of joy mixed with hatred, which results from our perceiving some small misfortune in a person who we think deserves it: we hate this misfortune, but enjoy seeing it come to someone who deserves it. When this comes upon us unexpectedly, the surprise of wonder causes us to burst into laughter” (Descartes 178). Hobbes further pins our superiority upon the fact that humans like to win and that desire to win forces us to laugh, in glory, at our vanquished foes:

Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those *Grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much Laughter at the defects of others, is a signe of Pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper workes is, to help and free others from scorn; and compare themselves only with the most able. (32)

Hobbes, like Plato and Descartes, identifies laughter with a feeling of superiority over others, where a great mind frees others from ridicule and allows that person to compare

themselves only to the best. When considering all of these philosophers, Plato, Descartes, and Hobbes all speak of ridicule, which is paramount due to its necessary presence.

Ridicule or the ridiculous forms the basis of laughter and humor in superiority theory, wherein other humor simply does not exist, or at least resists being mentioned. The importance of ridicule both separates superiority from relief and incongruity theory and also limits it. Relief and incongruity theory do not have certain types of humor imperative to their definition, which clearly distances superiority theory. Furthermore, ridicule's necessary presence limits superiority theory's applicability, as much humor does not involve ridicule at all or involves ridicule directed at an entity that resists comparison with a single person, such as jokes about the government as a single body.

Robert Heinlein's *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* effortlessly demonstrates the superiority theory. Heinlein's novel involves a resourceful computer mechanic, Mannie, planning a revolt from the stage of his prison—the Moon. The Moon serves as a generational prison planet, where once people are sent there, there is no way to leave, even for their children. Along with Mannie, Mike, the only sentient computer in the world, chooses to assist in the libertarian revolt organized by the “prisoners,” which ultimately ends in the Mike's death, or suicide depending on the interpretation. Mike often prints jokes for Mannie to judge, and the jokes are often humorous in that they are so terrible, a person can't help but at least chuckle: ““Why is a laser beam like a goldfish?” [...] ‘Because neither one can whistle’” (16). Superiority theory dictates that the reader laughs because he or she feels superior in his or her own ability to craft a better joke than Mike could. He or she laughs because of Mike's self-ignorance of the fact that

he is terrible at creating or jokes, and because of the ridiculous notion that a lowly computer could craft actual jokes in the first place. Such is the superiority theory.

It was not long after Hobbes, however, that critics and philosophers realized that superiority theory could not explain all aspects of humor, and as such, relief theory blossomed. Relief theory, beginning with Anthony Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury—or simply Lord Shaftesbury—and culminating in Sigmund Freud, states that laughter simply releases all tension in a person’s body and mind, relieving the burdens of such emotions as pity, heartache, or fear. Lord Shaftesbury, in the eighteenth century, articulated this theory by stating that laughter releases spirits in the nervous system so that “the natural free spirits of clever men, if they are imprisoned and controlled, will discover other ways of acting so as to relieve themselves in their constraint” using laughter (Cooper 5). Sigmund Freud updated the theory’s biological science in his take on Shaftesbury’s relief theory, but he kept the essential part about release: “My increased expenditure in order to understand is inhibited in *statu nascendi*, as it were in the act of being mobilized; it is declared superfluous and is free for use elsewhere or perhaps for discharge by laughter. This would be the way in which, other circumstances being favourable, pleasure in a comic movement is generated” (Freud 139). Essentially, relief theory entails being able to relieve pent up emotion. Using the aforementioned example from Heinlein, relief theory would dictate that the reader laughs at Mike’s joke to relieve this tension brought about by the pity he or she feels towards Mike, or the fact that his jokes are terrible. Additionally, tension could arise from the fact that a computer acts behind the backs of its masters and has free will, and the reader laughs to remove this tension. Again, scholars

came to realize that relief theory could not explain all scenarios of laughter and humor and decided to embrace a new theory: incongruity.

Incongruity theory has become so widely used in modern comedy that most can immediately understand it, even if its definition may seem complicated. Simply, incongruity theory states that we laugh because something is incongruous, or has disrupted our regular mental functions about an event, or those that would predict an ending. Immanuel Kant explains it as such: “Laughter is an affect resulting from the sudden transformation of a heightened expectation into nothing. This very transformation, which is certainly nothing enjoyable for the understanding, is nevertheless indirectly enjoyable and, for a moment, very lively” (Kant 209). In other words, we laugh “not because we find ourselves cleverer than this ignorant person, or because of any other pleasing thing that the understanding allows us to note here, but because our expectation was heightened and suddenly disappeared into nothing” (Kant 209). Improvements, so to speak, were added to Kant’s theory that specifically state that laughing is a way to enjoy incongruity, as Kant’s and others theories seemed to say incongruity only need to be present to elicit laughter (Morreall *Philosophy*). Examples of incongruity theory abound. Imagine a comedian who begins with a normal set up to a joke but ends with a punchline that completely flips every prediction of the joke’s ending. The extremely popular Old Spice commercials tend to utilize this approach. One such example would open with a close-up of a man on the beach with the sun shining behind him and him moving but not in an immediately perceptible way, but as the camera zooms out, it turns out he is seated on a horse, backwards, while the horse walks forward. What the viewer expected, and could predict, from the commercial was not the ending given to

the audience, which evokes laughter. In another example, harkening back again to the same instance from Heinlein, incongruity theory would say that the reader laughs at Mike's joke because the punchline was unlike anything one would expect from a standard question joke. The punchline technically has nearly zero relation with the setup, and as such, the reader's mental processes were disrupted into "nothing." The reader then finds enjoyment in that disruption of thought, in the surprise of the punchline, and laughs. The fate of incongruity theory is still unknown, but it seems many scholars are now turning away from it, searching for yet another theory.

The three theories discussed epitomize most of the studies in humor from the ancients to modernity. Despite their exhaustive use by scholars, many authors above did not write much more than an essay or a few paragraphs concerning humor and laughter. It remained an avoided topic, which perhaps had much to do with the influence of individuals during the medieval ages and beyond who forbade laughter because they thought that God scorned it. However, in the early twentieth century, Henri Bergson wrote a notable collection of essays titled *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* that is especially relevant.

Bergson's philosophy of humor begins by limiting itself to three fundamental "observations": "the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly *human* [...] a symptom equally worth of notice [is] the *absence of feeling* which usually accompanies laughter [...and] you would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others" (9-11; emphasis in original). The comic, and thereby humor, is necessarily human. Bergson attempts to explain this by giving examples of pets and clothing, wherein people laugh at their pets because they recognize in the pet something

inextricably human, or people laugh at an article of clothing because of the way a human shaped the clothing, rather than laughing at the clothing itself. Bergson then goes on to state that in order for laughter to occur a person must be a “disinterested spectator” because it is impossible to laugh at something if a person is full of emotion, which would typically be, by Bergson’s reasoning, distressful emotions. He posits that a society of intensely emotional people would be full of tears while a society of consistently rational, “intelligent” people would be full of laughter because of the “anesthesia of the heart” (10-11). Bergson’s final point, which seems to grow out of his first, is that the comic is necessarily social, “need[ing] an echo,” and where its “natural environment [is] society” (11, 13). He justifies this by way of an example wherein one often finds groups of people laughing together, such as at a table nearby.

However, Bergson’s examples do not seemingly justify jokes one has with oneself, nor can it account for modern times with the proliferation of seemingly comic items on the Internet. The fact that Bergson wrote in the early twentieth century does justify the exclusion of the latter but not the former. Nevertheless, Bergson still seems correct because even to laugh at oneself, or laugh at something on the Internet where one person is the only person laughing, would still be seeing the human in one’s actions or in the humor on the Internet, and to see the human is to be fundamentally social because, present or not, one is still interacting with the essence of the human. The human cannot be separated from itself.

Furthermore, Bergson’s theory depends upon the idea that rationality creates laughter in the absence of emotion. This seems contradictory to the entire idea of laughter. Laughter needs tragedy, its opposite, and the emotions that it gives to exist. It is

the same concept behind the idea of opposites, where both sadness and happiness must exist or neither will. If emotions were to be eradicated, how could people even begin to think about laughing? What would there be to laugh about? Bergson posits laughter as a hyper intellectual phenomenon, but emotions are of extreme important to being human. Ignoring such a fact misses how humans operate.

The theories I have discussed—superiority, relief, incongruity, and Bergson’s—form the foundation of a philosophy of humor upon which this thesis rests. Without understanding how scholars of comedic studies have previously thought, the differences between this thesis and the older theories could not clearly be observed. One particular difference is the nature of the discussion taking place. Where superiority, relief, and incongruity theory attempts to explain *why* we laugh, the ensuing theory of familiarity will attempt to explain the effects of laughter. Bergson’s theory, though, is important here due to its emphasis on the relation it posits between the comic and the human. However, missing from Bergson’s analysis is how humans recognize the human in others and how that impacts our analyses of humor. The answers to these two questions become important in articulating what I call familiarization theory in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: FAMILIARIZATION THEORY

Familiarization theory states that when the self does not recognize the other as being related to the self, humor directed at or originating from the other bridges the gap of knowledge between self and other, leading to a familiarizing and humanizing of the other. From this description, the two questions arise: how do we recognize the other in people and objects, and what effect does this recognition have? Further, two more questions emerge as subsets of the previous questions: what is the self and other, and how do they interact? If these questions are to be answered fully, they must be contextualized in a specific philosophy because many philosophical answers exist and often conflict. Hegel's philosophy is especially relevant due to his emphasis the role knowledge plays in the relationship between self and other, and as such, will be used here.

For Hegel, the mind is a difficult subject, but also the most important because the mind is paramount to understanding man. Just as well, one must first understand man if one is to understand the other and the relation between man and other. Hegel writes at the beginning of the Introduction of his *Philosophy of Mind*:

The knowledge of Mind is the highest and hardest, just because it is the most 'concrete' of sciences. The significance of that 'absolute' commandment, *Know thyself*—whether we look at it in itself or under the historical circumstances of its first utterance—is not to promote mere self-knowledge in respect of the *particular* capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the single self. (3)

Here Hegel gives us a glimmer of his true aim by situating the mind within the realm of others. In other words, people cannot have any self-knowledge without first understanding that they do not “exist in isolation” from others and that “self-knowledge cannot be achieved through mere introspection into [their] own feelings, foibles, habits, likes and dislikes, capacities, and so on” (Berenson 77). To possess any sort of self-knowledge, or to maintain the ability of self-critique, humans must examine themselves in relation to others. However, self-knowledge is impossible without some understanding of the self. To address this issue, Hegel writes:

The knowledge it commands means that of man's genuine reality—of what is essentially and ultimately true and real—of mind as the true and essential being. Equally little is it the purport of mental philosophy to teach what is called *knowledge of men* [...] Information of this kind is, for one thing, meaningless, unless on the assumption that we know the *universal*—man as man, and, that always must be, as mind. (3)

Hegel states here Man, and thereby the self, *is* mind and that ontological being is situated in mind. Mind is the “absolute substance,” where there is an “ego that is ‘we’ [...] and ‘we’ that is a single ego” (*Phenomenology* 227). The ego is the complete multiplicitous mind and that mind is also the I. Further, Hegel contends: “If we consider mind more closely, we find that the first and simplest determination of it is that it is I. I is something perfectly simple, universal. When we say *I*, we indeed mean an individual; but since everyone is I, we thereby say only something entirely universal. The universality of the I enables it to abstract from everything, even from its life” (*Philosophy* 12). Hegel

essentially is saying that the self is the mind, and the mind, in its universality, is both the self and everyone.

One point to address here is that Hegel almost makes it sound as if the universality of the mind leads to a sort of hive mind or transcendentalist idea of the mind. To counter this idea, Hegel's understanding of language becomes essential. For Hegel, language is paramount in allowing the mind to reach its "absolute end," which is the "highlighting the universality of the 'I'" (Berenson 79). The nature of language is universality; such that language ultimately applies to everything at the same time. When a person speaks of "I," language does not differentiate between the "I" of the speaker and the "I" of the listener. Each person is "I," and as such, individuality in language is impossible. Hegel overcomes this obstacle by stating that objectivity, and thus the recognition of the individual, arrives when the mind is able to meld its thoughts into verbal signs to the point where the word no longer has a sense but becomes one with the individual consciousness instead because a word is the most "internal externality" (*Philosophy* 200). Hegel also posits that the universal, or sense, cannot be separated from the particular, and as such, combine into one, allowing words to be reflections of the person speaking and for differentiation between individuals. For Hegel, as Berenson points out, "thought is Being," and because individual minds think, they must exist individually. The mind's individual existence then occurs when thoughts are put into words that carry the sense of the self in them, making those words referential only to the one who spoke.

If the self is the mind, both universal and particular, then the other must also be a self. Extrapolating further, consider Hegel's earlier comment that one cannot understand

the self without realizing the relationship between the self and others. If this is the case, other minds must exist because one must have self-knowledge to perceive self, and self-knowledge is impossible without knowing that others exist against which a mind can examine itself. As Hegel puts it: “Thus intelligence is *for itself intrinsically* cognitive: *intrinsically* the universal; its product, the *thought*, is the thing; simple identity of the subjective and objective. It knows that what is *thought*, is; and that what *is*, only *is* in so far as it is a thought” (*Philosophy* 202). Essentially, if the mind simply thinks of the other, then the other is. If the other exists, then it too must be defined.

The other, per Hegel, is an object, and object can “literally be translated as ‘standing against’” (Berenson 81). If an object stands against something and the other is an object, then the other must stand against something, which would be the self. Ultimately objects, and thus others, are “things for consciousness” (Berenson 81). This leads into the fact that the self and other are intrinsically and immediately related as soon as recognition of the other occurs, and so, there is no distinction between what the other is for itself and what the other is for the self. The lack of distinction occurs because the object “*is* knowledge itself and thus amounts to self-consciousness,” and “the being of something as a something for a consciousness, is knowledge,” which leads to an understanding that we have knowledge of both the self and the other through this relationship. (Berenson 80-82). In summation, the other stands against the self as an opposite where the self gains both knowledge of the self and the other because of the inability to distinguish the other from both how the other sees itself and how the self sees it.

Hegel goes even further, though, when laying out the connection between self and other. He states that when the mind reaches the thinking stage and recognizes the other, the mind becomes human when it assimilates the other and self into one universal self, or self-consciousness. This unification brings with it ultimate knowledge of both the self and other, leading to a familiarization. Each person exists as an individual unit but also with the other where we come to know both ourselves and others through mutual interactions. For Hegel, to be human is to have this assimilation of self and other, which involves a cognitive process of recognition and maturation. Understanding how Hegel constructs the self and the other, their relationship, and the goal of their relationship is the first step to seeing how humor works. However, there are a few clarifications and objections to consider, namely in the realm of the connection between reader and text.

If the reader constitutes one mind, then the mind or minds that serve as the other must be located. If we accept Hegel's reasoning for the existence of other minds, then it becomes easy to see that the reader interacts with—on an intelligent, rational level—two other minds, the first of these being the author's. Because the author is the one who created the text in the first place, the author is essential for the existence and content of the text. As the content is a direct effect of the author's mind, readers must accept that the text itself is a representation of the author's mind. A representation here does not mean an inadequate copy, where the representation fails to accurately represent the true self, as David Hume posits in his differences between impressions and ideas. The text is a literal creation of the self. When this idea is taken into account, then the reader recognizes the author's mind that he or she perceives as an other.

The other mind or minds with which the self can interact are characters themselves. Characters have a mind of their own with characteristics and emotions that are all their own, and while they may be the creations of the author, authors often describe their characters as having a life apart from that of the author's, drawing from the idea of a consistent character, voice, and agency. Brandon Sanderson, for example, while finishing Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, remarked that the way he portrayed Matrim was wrong, or off, in *The Gathering Storm* and had to rethink Matrim as a person (Sanderson). In other words, characters are their own minds, and readers, usually, have extensive, though never complete, access to a character's mind. Readers interact with those minds while reading the text. Because readers can interact with the characters' minds, it stands to reason that readers then have the ability create an other from those minds.

However, two possible objections exist to the idea that characters having their own minds. One such objection might arise out of the fact that the characters are the author's creation, and therefore readers would be interacting with the author's mind. However, characters can be seen as the offspring of the author's mind, and as such, are not identical or equivalent to it. In this sense, the relationship between author and character is analogous to that of parents and their children: just as parents guide their children, pushing them towards certain actions that can benefit them and nurturing their minds so that they can make their own decisions, so, too, do authors shape their characters. Authors create and incubate their characters in their own minds, yet once they establish them on the page, they have given them their own life. Authors at first guide their characters on the path they wish them to take; however, characters, like children,

develop their own minds and often surprise authors with how they themselves drive the story and events. These characters exist in their own world where the actions they take and emotions they feel are very much real, leaving the author, to record their actions and emotions. Furthermore, it can be argued that characters always have self-knowledge, in that they express their thoughts and emotions and at times critique themselves. In light of Hegel's view that self-consciousness is the same as self-knowledge, then if characters have self-knowledge, then they also have self-consciousness.

The second objection—that characters, as creations of the author's mind, have no free will and that to compare them to other minds would be to imply the lack of free will within oneself—can to some extent be answered with the paragraph above. Yet the notions of free will and determinism, still debated by scientists and philosophers, can indeed be applied to characters, as they apply to human beings. As much as it can be argued that human beings possess free will, they still act outside that free will at times. The most basic example is the act of breathing. Humans do not consciously make themselves breathe; it happens automatically or instinctively. Even when a person is swimming and has been underwater for an extended period, while that person has the will to stop himself or herself from breathing for a short period, the body will eventually override the mind when its need for air peaks. The person underwater will then attempt to breathe, no matter the circumstance. In a similar manner, humans do not have complete and utter free will, as the needs of their bodies at times supersede their will, despite everything they muster to the contrary. Characters can be said to work in the same way. While characters are independent of their authors, as discussed previously, at the same time their actions are shaped by the author who creates them and the world they inhabit.

So the author, like a parent with respect to the children, or the forces of human physiology, controls the character at some points. Conversely, if human life is determined, then so too is a character's, both entirely determined by forces outside their control, even as both recognize that they still have a mind and self-consciousness. In either case, whether determinism or free will is the governing principle, a character's life or actions can be said to parallel a human being's. If free will is assumed to be the governing principle (allowing for the operation at times of other forces overriding free will, as discussed earlier), it can thus be argued that characters have minds of their own, apart from that of their author.

Creating a Framework

With the other and the self outlined, we can now define familiarization theory. Ultimately, familiarization theory states that when the self and other do not recognize each other, resisting any knowledge of their opposite, humor bridges this gap by creating knowledge of, or reconciliation with, the opposite.

The primary aspect here is the lack of recognition, or distancing, between the self and other and how it occurs. Certain situations and psychological states, ranging from estrangement to trauma, impede this recognition, and with these impediments, the self cannot recognize, or chooses to not recognize, the other. A simple example of this would be the relationship and perception between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a former Cornell University psychology professor, interviewed Soviet citizens and compared the propaganda machines of both the United States and the Soviet Union, and he points out after his trip to the Soviet Union that

people in general have “the tendency to assimilate new perceptions to old, and unconsciously to distort what one sees in such a way as to minimize a clash with previous expectations” (49). He further states that this “[strain toward consistency] is especially powerful in the sphere of social relations—that is, in our perceptions of the motives, attitudes, and actions of other persons or groups” (49). He concludes that people in both countries have a tendency not to upend their previous perceptions of people and situations, and when presented with contradictory evidence, people combine the contradictory evidence with old expectations to reaffirm those same depictions, creating a self-perpetuating cycle. People in both countries did not recognize the otherness of the other country’s people, simply choosing to reject any existing other that did not conform to previous stereotypes. If knowledge is not generated between the two opposing groups, the self and other cannot assimilate, and knowledge is created by interaction with the other, not by communication from another. This writer firmly believes that humor traded back and forth between the two societies could have bridged this gap and led each country to have a better understanding, becoming part of Hegel’s Universal-Mind, because of the knowledge that humor creates.

In these situations, where recognition of the other is impaired, humor serves as a “link,” to use Arthur Koestler’s term, of knowledge between humor’s two participants, thereby allowing for the self to recognize, merge and cognize the other (Farber 68). In order to for this process to occur, it is important to understand that humor is a form of communication that “may assume different forms and has different functions in various structural settings,” where communication is the exchange of information, and thus knowledge (Martineau 114). Other recent theories, ranging from fields of philosophy to

literary studies to psychology, acknowledge humor's importance in knowledge creation. In psychology, Anna Radomska, in her survey of psychological studies regarding humor, analyzes a theory articulated by J.D. Webster as being pertinent and important to the process of creating understanding and coping in humor's participants (216). Webster's theory rests upon the idea that humor is fundamental to creating wisdom, where wisdom is "the competence in intention to, and application of, critical life experiences to facilitate the optimal development of self and others" (Webster 164). Webster's definition emphasizes the development of self and others and humor's necessary presence for wisdom. Webster's study carries the implication that, without wisdom, the development of self and other ceases, and that humor is essential for the creation of wisdom and thereby the development of the self and other. Humor creates wisdom and knowledge between the two participants by allowing the self and other to continue developing, eventually reaching the point of assimilation and understanding between minds.

Likewise, in zoology and ethology, Nobel prize winner, Konrad Lorenz states how laughter creates an essential bond between some people:

Laughter produces, simultaneously, a strong fellow-feeling among participants [...] Heartily laughing together at the same thing forms an immediate bond, much as enthusiasm for the same ideal does. Finding the same thing funny is not only a prerequisite to a real friendship, but very often the first step to its formation.

Laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line. If you cannot laugh with the others, you feel an outsider, even if the laughter is in no way directed against yourself or indeed against anything at all. (Lorenz 284)

Lorenz emphasizes how laughter creates bonds of friendship, where people must be able to laugh together and at the same things. Similar to Hegel, creating this bond links the self and the other, which allows for understanding. However, Lorenz mentions how humor can lead to “joint aggressiveness against outsiders” (284). Yet, humor directed at an outsider would inherently make them insiders. The distinction becomes lost. If humor is directed at an other that is an outsider, the outsider ceases to be an other due to the knowledge and bond created. Conversely, when the other cannot laugh, as Lorenz stated above, the other is still familiarized because knowledge, albeit a knowledge of negatives—such as what a person does not like—is still passed between participants. A small note: Lorenz’s creation of, and subsequent use of, ethology is particularly interesting because Lorenz observed people in their natural surroundings, which eliminates most, if not all, awkwardness in social situations that can happen during lab studies, and the level of awkwardness of a situation directly impacts the effect of humor. Lorenz’s analysis, in other words, especially holds weight.

Similarly, within literary studies, humor breaks down the barrier between self and other. Farber, who predominantly is working on a way to extend incongruity theory, states that the “perceiver” of humor “temporarily succeeds” in “defying the restriction” that governs the relationship between inner and outer conceptions of a joke (71). In other words, to understand the joke, perceivers must defy the expectations of the teller, and only then can the restriction that hinders the connection between the teller and perceiver dissipate, allowing humor to link teller and perceiver and create knowledge.

Each of the aforementioned ideas—Webster’s Lorenz’s, and Farber’s—theorize the relationship between humor and knowledge and how humor can bridge the gap

between the self and other. These ideas give familiarization theory its framework, and with an established framework, familiarization theory then can be seen in action. The most effective examples of familiarization theory are prisoners-of-war (POWs) and market advertising, specifically modern advertising that is usually transmitted via television.

Regarding POWs, it should be no surprise that they often have difficulty recognizing or talking about the other during their time as prisoners, and this difficulty stems from an inordinate amount of physical and emotional trauma that occurs while being POWs. Stories abound of “acute hunger, deadening monotony, and the misery of being beholden to the will of the enemy” (Horn 537). The induced trauma inhibits their ability to cognize the other in any relatable terms. These soldiers had effectively othered their experience and their captors, and their captors had othered them as well. The othering that takes place between POWs and captors is ostensibly no different from the othering of colonizers and colonized, where the colonizers other and refuse to recognize the similarities or humanity in those they conquer, leading to horrendous actions and policies. However, as Karen Horn observes from her conversations and interviews with South African POWs during World War II, POWs found ways to overcome this trauma that would lead to better resources for themselves while being a POW and coping afterwards: humor (538). To address a concern that the ensuing discussion about South African POWs would not necessarily apply universally to POWs, Horn does note that “captives of most nationalities shared common experiences during their captivity” (538).

South African POWs that were kept in the German *Stalags* attempted to balance normality and sense of sanity by using humor to make their situations a little better:

“Most of the time POWs found themselves balancing precariously on this line, many of them managing to lean more towards the side of normality for the sake of sanity, while others were not able to do this” (Horn 538). This line to which Horn refers is the POWs attempt to maintain a sense of a normal life amidst their situation, straddling normalcy and insanity, yet some were driven to insanity. Those that were unable to walk this line were considered to be “‘Stalag happy’ as their behaviour was often viewed as absurd or humorous” (538). Horn further learned, though, that those who could straddle the line used humor and humorous actions to keep themselves from stepping too far to one side: “POWs felt the need to perform the same balancing act using devices usually associated with humour when talking about their experiences” (538).

Humor allowed the POWs to survive mostly intact throughout the ordeal. Horn states how “in some instances humour in POW camps even bridged physical and ideological boundaries between captives and captors, revealing compassion in the face of conflict” (540). Humor linked the POWs to their captors, allowing each group to be seen as human or similar to themselves, and altered the relationship between the two parties to be closer to reality. For example, “POWs may have tried, through humour, to appear as soldiers fighting for a cause, and not as helpless captives waiting for liberation” (Horn 541). Instead of seeing the POWs as captives, which defined their present *state*, humor allowed the captors to see them as fighting soldiers, which defined who they *were*. Their job and identity revolved around being a soldier, of which being a POW is only a small part. The captors had a limited view of their captives’ identity, or self, and knowledge between the two groups was lost. However, by using humor, the POWs were able to

foster the exchange of knowledge between the two groups—expressing their whole identity, instead of the limited subset of possible soldier identity: captive.

After liberation from the *Stalags*, though, many former POWs, even those that stepped over that precariously drawn line, used humor when discussing their time as captives. Part of a former POWs self became infused with his or her humor. Horn states that “humor helped forged [sic] a post-war identity,” where the nature and state of a POWs humor directly affected how each soldier identified with himself or herself that was a prisoner (540). The wording previously is important because many POWs would other their own self, seeing their prison self as a different person, separate from their current self. The former POWs have distanced themselves from the trauma and events of their past, creating an other of themselves that they are unable to, or refuse to, recognize. It is here that “humour could be employed as a type of antidepressant” that draws comparisons to Freud and the ridiculous “self-mocking ridicule” (Horn 540; Critchley 94). In order to link the past other and current self into a whole, POWs used humor as a coping mechanism. Humor allowed the former POWs to have access to their memories more readily than they would otherwise, which permitted them to reconcile their past experiences with their current self, gaining the full knowledge of what happened to them, and becoming whole once more.

Another example that may be easier for most to relate to would be how market advertisers utilize humor in their ads. Advertisers often debated whether humor was effective in ads, and each group has their staunch supporters, despite evidence to the contrary. Recent studies have shown humor is in fact effective in increasing sales, brand notoriety, and relatability. These studies used “industry data collected by Roper/Starch in

the form of several post-exposure measures” concerning attention and attitude using “Noted,” “Associated,” and “Read Most” as their categories of measurement (Gulas et al. 66). In fact, “The eight laboratory studies show[ed] a positive impact on attention, A_{ad} (attitude toward the ad), A_b (attitude toward the brand), and source liking” (Gulas et al. 66-69). Essentially, humor has a statistically significant impact on how people view a certain brand, which is by all means an other due to the relative inability for a person to relate to a company, despite the recent Supreme Court ruling that posits companies as people. In fact, the most effective humorous ads are when the humor in the ad contains a high degree of information, demonstrating that humor is an effective communication tool and distributor of knowledge (Gulas et al. 75-76). Furthermore, by increasing how favorably people view brands, humor is effectively letting people see the othered brand, the inhuman brand, as something run by humans, with human minds behind it, minds that can be familiar to one’s own. After all, if humor is to be funny for most, it must also be relatable.

Such are the inner workings of the familiarization theory of humor. In quick summation: by understanding that humor, as a form of communication, is predicated upon the existence of a self and other, as defined by Hegel, familiarization theory attempts to explain what happens to the reader—the self—and the other when the two do not recognize each other, namely that humor and laughter familiarize the other, allowing for Hegel’s assimilation and understanding of minds. POWs and marketing advertisements both demonstrate familiarization theory, where POWs use humor to familiarize themselves to their captors, gaining better treatment and holding on to their sanity, and ads connect brands and people, allowing for a better understanding of the

brand itself. In the following chapter, familiarization theory will be applied to literature, specifically to the science fiction novel *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* by Robert Heinlein because of science fiction's definition as one that creates estrangement.

CHAPTER THREE: LAUGHING IN SPACE

With the details of familiarization theory behind us, we can start to examine how it affects science fiction. Science fiction, as per its most academically well-known and often cited definition, must contain an other. To see how this other enters science fiction at its very core, we must first define science fiction, and doing so will demonstrate how familiarization theory especially applies to the genre. Choosing a definition of science fiction, though, is no easy task, as multiple definitions proliferate academic discussions; however, Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement is by all measurements the most popular and will serve here.

In Suvin's theory, science fiction is the "literature of cognitive estrangement" that revolves around what he calls a "novum." In this definitional theory, science fiction produces estrangement by the "factual reporting of fictions," or taking a normal situation and imposing new norms on said situation (Suvin). The term *estrangement*, as Suvin uses it, comes from the German formalist playwright Bertolt Brecht, who in turn borrowed it from literary critic Viktor Shklovsky, who determined that estrangement occurs when the subject presented is recognizable to a reader but also to some degree odd, weird, or unfamiliar (Brecht 192). It is interesting to note here that earlier translations of Shklovsky and Brecht's works translated the original Russian word *ostranenie* as "defamiliarization," which immediately contrasts with what I have been calling familiarization theory (Martin 92). Brecht's example of Galileo, as used by Suvin, is perhaps the most apt simplification of the process: "[the reader] would need to develop

that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by that pendulum motion as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come at the rules by which it was governed” (Brecht 192). Suvin then states that this estrangement is both cognitive and creative in that it involves both science and art. However, the important distinction between Brecht’s conception of estrangement and that of Suvin is that Suvin’s use of the term creates the integral formal framework of the genre, rather than acting as a literary device.

The cognitive part of Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement differentiates the estrangement of science fiction from that of fantasy and myth, on which Suvin, regrettably, seems to have a negative opinion. Myth is static, unchangeable, and looks “below (or above) the empiric surface,” containing human relationships that are fixed and religiously and supernaturally created and enforced (Suvin). This is fantasy’s and myth’s form of estrangement, but its focus on fixed relationships both to its world and between its characters does not lead to a cognitive definition; science fiction’s estrangement though differs in mostly the exact opposite way. Science fiction views the world and human relationships as continuously changing and fluid, adapting to the most revolutionary changes present throughout the world, both in past and present. Then science fiction embodies a type of cognitive estrangement because of the fluidity of relationships, as evidenced by—as Suvin points out—the origin of science fiction as a genre arising directly out of times of great emotional, political, and scientific upheaval. It is the genre’s ability to adapt and change that allows for it to be cognitive (Suvin).

Science fiction, in Suvin’s theory, contains a novum that causes us to question our intuitive beliefs about the real world, and humor changes this for the reader, removing the

questioning. The novum, the central part of the definition, is the specific object or idea within the text that produces the cognitive estrangement. The novum produces, by way of innovation, a dissonance in the reader as related to the actual world. It is important to point out here that despite using the term singularly, science fiction utilizes many, if not hundreds, of nova in a single novel. The concept of the novum does not only apply to a single entity in the novel. Despite this, however, many critics tend to single out a specific central novum in each novel that begs great discussion, ranging from virtual reality cyberspace—or matrix—in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* to the lack of a single biologically defined sex in Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

In the text for this thesis, *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress*, published in 1966, the central novum would be Mike. Mike is a computer and is short for Mycroft Holmes, a nickname given by Mannie based off a “story written by Dr. Watson before he founded IBM” (1). Mike is the only known computer existing who has gained sentience or, as Mannie puts it, “woke up” (2). However, the fact that a prison is on the moon and that each inhabitant is stuck there, whether or not they committed any crime but had the unfortunate circumstances to be born there, could also be the central novum. The moon prison does fit Suvin’s definition of estrangement by being familiar—a prison—yet odd—the setting and hereditary prison sentences. In fact, it would be hard to disprove the idea that the moon prison is in fact a large integral novum. Nevertheless, Mike is the innovation around which the novel revolves. While the modern reader may find Mike to be more feasible, Mike’s presence and creation would be outside the scope of the 1960s public thought. For the purpose of this thesis, Mike will serve as the central novum for discussion, and the moon prison will still be considered a novum.

Familiarization theory, as can be seen, especially applies to science fiction due to its very existence being dependent upon an other. Without the cognitively estranging other, science fiction, according to Suvin, could not theoretically exist apart from fantasy. Every novum inside science fiction can only serve as an other to the reader by its very definition. This particularly creates problems for readers of science fiction, especially first time readers who often complain that they cannot wrap their heads around the multiple and dissonance-inducing ideas, aliens, and technologies being introduced. The nova produce a gap of knowledge that must be bridged between reader and concept. Knowledge of the nova ceases to exist because the mind of the self and other cannot assimilate. Familiarization theory then would close that gap of knowledge with humor in science fiction which has ramifications for the theory itself. If one cannot be cognitively estranged by the nova, then does the novel remain science fiction? Before delving into this here, a few objections must be taken into account, namely the use of technology and innovative ideas as an other under Hegel's definition and number of selves that can be estranged by the others.

Science fiction's nova often take the form of outlandish, innovative technologies or sociopolitical experimentation. The question then is: how can we view these nova as others? Hegel's definition of the other and self take into consideration the mind predominantly. However, technological innovation and odd sociopolitical ideas could qualify as others because they still have the same definition of Hegel's object and other. The far future technology and utopian/dystopian laws in science fiction novels still "stand against" the current world's technology and laws. They still abide by the object's definition of an opposite. Further, each of these categories still constitute an important

part of a person's mind or psyche. The influence of technology on a person's mind is well-known and documented by Nicholas Carr in his book *The Shallows*, who comments, "My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles" (6-7). Further, the mind is the creator of ideas, and without it, ideas would cease to exist. What this means is that technologies and ideas are both part of the mind, specifically the author's mind, and to separate them out as being unable to be an other under Hegel's definition is to remove heavily influential and integral parts of the mind.

Additionally, it would be prudent to address the idea of whether or not the self and other could be addressed as a group, as opposed to individuals. The self, which constitutes the person or the sense of identity of a particular, can be identified also as the self-identity of the group rather than any individual within the group, and so the other would be defined as anything outside the group where the identities of each group do not overlap or coincide. The aforementioned prisoners of war are seen as groups by their captors for the most part. Unless a singular captor has an odd tendency only to speak with one captive and only applies everything he or she learns about the group to that singular captive, captors will always view their captives as a single, cohesive group, similar to, as mentioned above, the way a colonizer views the colonized as a group. Market advertisers follow the same principle by using humor to make their product seem more relatable to human needs and desires. Even under Hegel's definition, the self is both a particular and conglomerate, where the "I" upon which a person bases his or her individuality can be applied to all, showing the interconnectedness of people and allowing the self and other to be seen as a group. Through these examples, we can see that the other and self can

both be analyzed in individuals and in groups, corresponding to the audience of science fiction where one can refer to the reader's specific reaction and the sf readership's reaction.

With possible objections addressed, one can return to the use of humor in science fiction. Humor serves multiple roles, and it seems prudent here to demonstrate briefly these roles, including the very traditional role of comic relief; that is relieving tension after a particularly intense scene. The idea of comic relief seems to have grown out of Spencer's and Freud's relief theory. Despite the fact that the theory itself cannot explain *why* we laugh in every situation, the theory still highlights a common use of humor by the author. In Heinlein's novel, after an argument between members of Luna's government about Wright's involvement in the war urged on by Mannie's insistence, tension builds when Mannie starts "blinking back tears" and Prof. remarks that Mannie's prosecution of Wright "[forces the Prof.] to resign" (347-48). This scene ends the chapter, and in the following chapter, Mannie begins by making fun of the hypocritical situation of Luna's bombing of Earth, remarking upon citizens who bring "picnic baskets" to sit and watch (350). This scene, reminiscent of families traveling to war battles during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where families would often sit and picnic atop a hill to watch battles take place with their children, evokes humor of the absurd in order to disperse the tension induced by the previous argument among the War Cabinet, Wright, and Prof. Readers see the Earth's citizens acting in way that they know to be foolish and react in disbelief at the absurdity of it all. The tension dissipates at the point of laughter, releasing tension from the mind's frayed nerves resulting from the previous scene.

Humor can also be seen through the superiority theory of Plato and Aristotle's theory of catharsis within plays. Aristotle said that people show emotion, which one can see as laughter as well, because it expels the emotions pent up, and so people laugh at those that are morally inferior (*Poetics* 1449b). At the beginning of the novel, Mike makes a comment about others on Luna, except for Mannie, describing the reason why he never talks to them: "Because they're *stupid* [...] [Mike's attitude] was like [the] stubborn sulkiness of a child whose feelings are hurt" (18; emphasis in original). The reader views the beings of lesser intelligence, to which Mike refers, as being inferior to himself or herself. This does change slightly from Aristotle's theory in that the person performing the humor is not the person the reader feels superior towards but rather the receiver of the humor, leading to the reader feeling superior to the people of Luna. If a computer that has become humanized, feels that a human being is stupid, then the reader also views those characters as humorous. Nobody laughs at Mike because they feel superior to him, but rather, because of how relatable he is to the human population, particularly children. Mike actually is a child at the beginning of the novel, if age is measured by time spent sentient. Because of his childishness, the reader sees Mike not as inferior but simply embodying the playful mindset and naiveté of children.

In the same vein, one can also use Plato's idea that people laugh at the ridiculous because of the character's vanity, where vanity here shows either the character's obsession with self or their uselessness (Hokenson 25). Using the above scene where Mannie clashes with Wright, Mannie's use of humor afterward highlights Wright's vanity, his uselessness and emphasis on self in the fight against Earth: "Did you fight when they invaded us?" Wright said stiffly, 'I had no opportunity. By the time I knew of

it, it was over. But now both my bravery and my loyalty have been impugned. I shall insist—’ ‘Oh, shut up,’ [Mannie] said” (347). Through the humor used by Wright, his use of chivalric and proper language in a society that has neither, and Mannie’s frustrated quip, the reader comes to see Wright’s vanity and laughs at him. The reader laughs because of Plato’s idea that people laugh at things that they find vain. Wright shows both his uselessness by not fighting in the battle and his obsession with self by considering himself above the other Loonies who agreed to fight.

While authors use comedy in science fiction in all of the above ways, the most interesting and unremarked upon use would be that humor familiarizes the weird through the use of the familiarization theory. That is, comedy takes the odd elements that makes us squirm in science fiction, whether it be an alien like that of Shambleau or a mechanical entity that evokes the uncanny valley, and transforms them into forms more digestible. It is important to note here that the use of the theories of humor above do not contradict the familiarization theory. All theories of humor fit underneath its umbrella, especially in science fiction. The fact that the author simply wishes to relieve tension built in a previous scene does not let the audience escape from the familiarizing effect that the humor induces. No matter the reason, as shown below, humor familiarizes the other.

In Heinlein’s novel, Mike acts like a child, as evidenced above, when calling the others “stupid” (18). Mike also does not “necessarily give [the] right answer,” which shows that he takes part in the most human of activities: lying (12). When talking about creating jokes, specifically “‘Why is a laser beam like a goldfish?’ [...] ‘Because neither one can whistle’,” Mannie describes Mike’s voice as “shy” when Mike admits he created the joke himself (16). This further posits Mike as a humanized character, embodying

traits readers see in themselves. This familiarization allows the reader to better cognitively understand the estrangement that Mike's presence induces. A machine that pushes past the boundaries of human relatability into the realm of the uncanny, at least at that moment's understanding of computer software, estranges the reader; it frightens them. Readers view Mike as an other, outside their group or their individual minds. However, the humor present pushes the reader to come to a better understanding of Mike by providing an avenue of knowledge about Mike to the point that his tragic death, noble suicide, or permanent self-exile at the end of the novel can be seen as a heroic action deserving of a statue in Luna's town square. Humor breaks down the barrier between novum and reader by releasing tension between various connections, most notably between the reader and those of the novum. By releasing tension, humor dispels the uneasiness of Mike's existence. The reader familiarizes Mike enough to see him as more human than he actually is and equal to, or perhaps greater than, the humanity of Mannie.

Through this familiarization, the ambiguity around Mike's death dissipates slightly. If Mike has consistently been familiarized throughout the entirety of the novel, then Mike could be said to be more human than the warmongers left at the end of the novel that have been dropping rocks on people below, and because Mike recognizes the humanity, that is to say the morality, in himself, he chooses to permanently exile himself from the flesh and blood humans. Mike becomes more human to the audience but also in relation to his fellow characters because of the humor he uses throughout the novel, and Mike recognizes the lack of humanity present in his comrades, their deviance from the original plan and idea of the revolution, and chooses to exile himself from interaction with them. Mike cannot physically move himself, and as such, his only course of action is

to remove himself entirely, diving into the information network. Mike's familiarization, both through the eyes of the audience and between characters, affects nearly everything.

Mike's ability to use rhetoric and give speeches is an effect of familiarization as well. Mike comes to understand what it means to be similar to his caretakers—humans—through humor. His ability to give rousing speeches to the populace of Luna and have the Loonies believe and trust in him requires Mike to be familiar with, thereby familiarized, how humans function in a fundamental way, apart from the string of code to which Mike must adhere. Through familiarization theory, Mike becomes familiar to humans by his obsession with crafting jokes and making Mannie laugh. Mike learns rhetoric, which is inherently a human action that involves bombastic tones of voice and grand gestures or sometimes a more controlled demeanor depending upon the situation: “[Mike] was gentle, strong, warm, and persuasive” while articulating a moving moment ““it will speed the day when I can bow out and life can get back to normal—a *new* normal, free of the Authority, free of guards, free of troops stationed on us, free of passports and searches and arbitrary arrests” (194). Because Mike is able to control rhetoric with such ease, the Loonies then view Mike as another human, passing the Turing test and John Searle's Chinese Room: “[Mike] had programmed most of it for automatic and gave his attention to just facial expressions. I soon forgot [Mike's persona] was fake” (193). Passing Searle's Chinese Room is a large step for Mike because of the barrier Searle created for computers: computers can act like humans but will never understand what they do. Mike at the end of the novel—as opposed to the beginning where he did understand how humor worked—understands how the human mind functions through his attempts at humor, to craft jokes that all humans would find funny, and by *understanding* rhetoric, Mike passes

Searle's test, becoming familiarized. Furthermore, the Loonies also become familiar to Mike, as humoral interactions and familiarization flow through a two-way bridge, so to speak. With Loonies becoming more familiar with Mike, he becomes able to craft better and better speeches, without help from Prof: "Mike rehearsed speech...Mike made revisions [to his speech]" (193).

Mike's familiarization also affects Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement. If nova no longer estrange the reader because of the humor, then the question arises: can the novel or short story still be considered science fiction? Consider the fact that science fiction depends upon the cognitive estrangement of the novum for it to be different from fantasy and from other genres of literature in general. Because humor familiarizes the effect the nova has on the reader, science fiction texts can cease to be essentially science fiction texts. The definition becomes limited in its applicability. While Suvin's theory could still apply to non-humorous science fiction texts, when humor appears to familiarize the novum, the text can no longer be thought of as cognitively estranging. Suvin's theory already runs into this issue when considering the idea that nova stop being nova after the reader has finished the novel. If the reader were to reread the novel, the nova would no longer be able to estrange the reader because the reader has cognized the nova efficiently. Implications abound in regards to this; however, the main point in bringing it up was to differentiate the familiarization effect of humor and the regular cognizing of nova after reading.

The main difference here is that humor removes the cognitive estrangement on the first reading while regular cognition removes it in subsequent reading. The text was, when cognized normally, at one point science fiction because the nova were able to

produce cognitive estrangement at one time, which also brings up questions about temporality in relation to Suvin's theory. However, with humor, nova simply do not estrange the reader on the first reading, and they never will. The text could not at one time, under Suvin's theory, be considered science fiction but rather would have to be included under the shadow of fantasy or fiction with no special characteristics, effectively miscategorizing swaths of literature, like those of Kurt Vonnegut.

A further implication of familiarization is the lessening of the estrangement, which allows the author to convey ideas contained within the novum more easily. For example, readers see Mike as human, as a character indistinguishable from Mannie, Prof, or any of the other Loonies. Mike's humanness is perhaps what Heinlein wishes us to see: a future and reality where maybe humans have become gods, enough to artificially create a mechanical being with human qualities. Computers need not be something frightening but magnificent with the breadth of possibility contained within their technological structures. Readers can also view Mike as a computer run by logic, by mathematical theorems and simulations. With the logic of a computer behind him, Mike acts within reason by helping the revolution as he too is shackled by Earth's society. His help leads to destruction, true; however, his assistance also leads to a better peace for the Loonies. Too much reason oft brings about destruction, but Heinlein, through Mike, shows that reason need not be a destructive force. Because the reader sees Mike as something familiar due to his affinity for humor, the reader can then become more familiar with the idea that reason need not only lead to destruction. But, while making the information easier to understand and come to terms with, this effect can have a detrimental result as well.

With comedy making nova less frightening and more human, some of the danger in the novum's creation can be lost. That is to say, it almost warps the morality around the novum itself, covering reality the way the attractive market advertising on the outside of soda bottles distorts the reality of the harmful effects of the product itself. Most nova create dissonance in the reader for a reason; the dissonance acts as a sort of primal defense mechanism for things of which we should rightfully be frightened. Humor's inhibition of our dissonance by distorting the novum becomes a hindrance because it lessens the perceived danger to ourselves. In the context of Heinlein's novel, it can reasonably be said that Luna's liberation and battle could not, and would not, have happened nor been won without Mike. Much as Mike is the oddity around which cognitive estrangement orbits, he is also the central device around which the plot revolves. Without Mike, there would be no revolution (Heinlein 13). While in this context, skewed as our interpretation is by the humor within, Mike becomes both a useful tool and friend. However, Mike's efficiency at hiding his independence from the prison guards and task force along with his ability to run a full-scale revolt nearly by himself, can and should be seen as frightening. There is something discomfoting about the idea that a computer holds an entire population in its hands; nuclear missiles and other militaristic long range weaponries are controlled by computers in contemporary times. But a human, albeit lacking a definite sense of logic at times and with a sense of morality based on relationships rather than math, controls the ability to use such destructive force.

Additionally, Mike acted against reason. If Mike does not act within the parameters of computer logic or reason, then interpreting and predicting Mike's actions becomes impossible. A computer, by its very nature, must act within a coded reason, and

Mike's ability to circumvent this issue should be moderately disturbing, harkening back to Asimov's *I, Robot* stories. Mike has the ability to kill all those on Earth and on Luna by himself. Mike also becomes the vocal mouthpiece for the revolution, taking on individual tasks more and more as he becomes more human. To encapsulate all of Mike's abilities, he can fire rocks and lasers that can decimate the population of Earth, control the systems of Luna that can effectively eradicate the people there as well, and he has such an understanding of rhetoric that he can be manipulative and controlling. To miss all the capabilities that Mike has is to miss the elephant in the room. It is the comedic elements that familiarize him and distort the reality around him in order to make the reader miss the said elephant. Comedy's effect on interpretations then becomes a double-edged sword.

The comic, however, need not distort reality all the time. Humor only warps the reality surrounding the novum, and so, familiarization only affects nova. This does not mean that humor's presence in science fiction leads to a whole-scale distortion. Humor can still have a familiarizing effect, even when it does not necessarily affect the novum. Take, for example, the humorous argument between Wright and Mannie given above. Humor is present; however, it is not directed at a novum. The humor still brings the reader to a better understanding of the tension between Mannie and Wright, making their rather stressful position more relatable, but since the humor is not directed at a novum, the reality around it remains intact. The same principle can also be applied when discussing humor generated by the novum itself.

In *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress*, Mike often prints jokes for Manny to read and give feedback on their level of hilarity. Mike can also be found making jokes himself,

though not in printed form (13, 18). If the humor comes from the novum itself, it distorts reality. It familiarizes that which is not essentially the self. However, if the novum itself, if indeed it is an entity with which one can interact, avoids making humor, then it can maintain a stable, clear reality around itself. With these two ideas in mind, one can then create a sort of maxim: if the humor within science fiction either originates from the novum or is about the novum, then the reader both understands the novum in more human relatable terms but also is subject to a misrepresented reality that forces the reader to ignore possible complications of the novum's existence. That being said, the comic's existence within science fiction becomes uncomplicated when the humor comes from or is directed at other aspects of the work.

If the humor does not affect the central novum, then the text remains firmly science fiction. It is here that identifying a central novum becomes important. The central novum, one can argue, is integral to the plot and idea of the story as a whole, whereas some other nova exist merely as the effects of generating a world. Eliminating the effect of non-essential nova still results in problems for Suvin's definition; however, unless the humor affects the central novum, the text's ability to be classified as science fiction under Suvin's theory remains due to the importance of the central novum. This would be similar to changing the type of ball American football is played with. If one alters the ball, the game is still essentially the same. No rules have changed. However, if one were to alter the field size and shape, then the game very much changes and ceases to resemble anything like American football. Science fiction as a genre is in the same situation.

Familiarization theory applies to science fiction like no other genre and its effects are vast, changing the inherent nature and definition of the genre itself. Critics and

scholars cannot afford to ignore these effects when interpreting and critiquing science fiction texts because they ultimately challenge the way they read the texts. However, understanding how humor can alter interpretations can lead to new enlightening readings of classical, canonical texts that could bring even more readers to the genre. Because of humor's ability to eliminate the nova's cognitive estrangement, it would be easier to have newer readers begin with humorous texts, like those of Vonnegut, Heinlein, or Robert Silverberg, instead of throwing them headlong into Ursula Le Guin. In essence, familiarization theory cannot be ignored.

CONCLUSION

Studying humor in the realm of literature can be a trying experience because of its seeming lack of credibility stemming from past major works. Its theories—like superiority, relief, and incongruity—at times seem too simple to be applied universally, leaving frustration behind when a favored theory no longer works. Further, many theories simply ignore the effects of laughter on the reader or listener, leaving it up to marketing advertisers to analyze the effects of humor on its audience while they, at the beginning, used problematic models to measure humor's worth. Humor's long written history began with philosophers and literary critics, and it should never be ignored by their progeny.

Entering into this long and troubled field though is familiarization theory that seeks to improve upon previous theories and explore the effects of laughter. Familiarization theory supports other theories of humor because they too are built upon the same foundation. If we cannot understand what the self and other are, how they are formed, and how they interact with each other, then it becomes difficult to understand how other theories of humor fundamentally work. Knowing that the self is essentially our mind that creates the other by simply existing at a certain stage of development and that they, by the nature of Hegelian language, merge into a single conglomerate Universal Mind, a single I, is foundational to grasping how humor works in and of itself. We cannot simply ignore these fundamental components.

Standing upon the shoulders of giants, familiarization theory attempts to understand what happens when readers and people laugh at an other. What does it mean

to laugh at a group of people that others always avoid and have that same group laugh with you? Familiarization aims to explain this question and many more. Utilizing othered groups like POWs and company brands, familiarization vied for its place in the realm of theory. By examining the effects of laughter, people can understand how laughter affects interpersonal and social relations, and could have ramifications from relationships with an othered relative to dealing with high profile individuals with whom a person has had no real social interaction before. Beyond all this, however, is the singular purpose of examining humor in science fiction, the genre whose specialty is the investigation of the other.

Humor's presence in science fiction, as shown, creates the same effects that readers usually assume about comedy: it provides a release of tension and uses the superiority theory to allow readers to see characteristics that often embody vain ideas or lesser morals in relation to themselves. However, humor here also familiarizes the unfamiliar, creating both a positive and negative effect. Nevertheless, humor injected into science fiction constructs an interesting relationship between the two where humor has a distinct effect on the way readers conceptualize, internalize, and interpret science fiction. Either way, the effects of humanization on science fiction are wide ranging, from allowing the other to be seen as less dangerous because it connects easier to the human side to limiting the definition of science fiction itself. It can be seen as a teaching method, a therapy method, for integrating new ideas and technologies. Research has shown that using humor in classrooms increases the retention rate, for example, of various concepts, both abstract and concrete. Conversely, humor directed at *nova* undermines the concept of science fiction itself, stripping away the thing that separates science fiction from

fantasy or other genres. In this way, humor limits Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement in these comic contexts, unless we wish to say that humor is inappropriate in proper science fiction. Belittling the use of humor only returns humor to its corner of study and use, and as seen, humor's importance is paramount to teaching in a way, which corresponds to an even earlier definition of science fiction. So, if humor alters the reach of cognitive estrangement and humor cannot be and should not be eliminated from science fiction, then it follows that definitions of science fiction needs to take into account humor's effects. As Mark Twain said, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand."

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