

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching

(Moves Towards A Rhetoric of Joking)

Willie Jones

Abstract

This essay takes for granted that we cannot fully understand a joke unless we share with the joker a culture in which the signs of that culture are our common currency: that we must be able to identify and interpret the signs before we are in a position to appreciate a joke's wit. While jokes may depend for their effect upon the juxtaposition of incongruous elements, we shall not realise that they are incongruous if we do not at the same time know in what conditions their appearance would be congruous, and we shall only know that if we are fully familiar with the culture out of which the joke springs. If, further than this, we wish to recognise and enjoy the wit of the joke, we shall have to be able to recognise that aptness with which the superficially mis-matched signs have been brought together by the maker of the joke. Should we study the jokes of a foreign culture as a means to understand that culture (a plausible thing to do), we shall only be able to do so if we are able to recognise that the signs of which the jokes are composed are essentially metonymic, which will mean that we shall need to work out the presuppositions and entailments that are built into the metonymies, strategies which the native of the culture to which the jokes belong is likely to carry out automatically without thinking. A non-native may need help, and the bulk of this essay is an analysis of cartoons — drawings, that is,

with captions — principally by the British artists Osbert Lancaster and Norman Thelwell, analyses which are designed to show how the metonymies — the signs for the things signified — along with their attendant presuppositions and entailments give rise to the apt and witty perceptions which will, if successful, make the joke not only telling but memorable as well.

Key Words: metonymy, displacement, wit

I. General Introduction

All jokes, however brief, may be thought of as anecdotes, since even a witty riposte requires an appropriate setting for its deliverance. The context, that is, sets off the joke, which in its context will strike us as witty, a word which comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word 'wit', which originally meant the "mind as the seat of consciousness". Language never stands still, however, and thanks to those metonymic side-steps by which languages grow, wit came in time to mean quickness of intellect, until today, especially, it signifies that particular quickness of thought which is able to produce the "apt, clever, unexpected, or humorous expression of thought or juxtaposition of ideas calculated to delight an audience". So says the Oxford English Dictionary.

Similarly, while 'witty' originally meant 'wise', sensible, whence intelligent, it now means 'amusing in a clever way'. A 'witticism', a word invented by Dryden, is an amusing remark, a clever joke. Witticisms, however, cannot exist by themselves, and if we wish to retell the joke, we have to tell the whole story in which the witticisms or joke was made, for it will only be by telling the whole story that we shall be able to reveal

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

whatever it was that made the witticism clever and apt.

A witticism is often the climax of the story, the point of the joke as a whole, and it is no secret that the “juxtaposition of ideas calculated to delight an audience” often depends for its effect upon the incongruity of the juxtaposition, as well as upon a heightening of the differences by the use of paradox, irony and absurdity, differences that must nonetheless reveal strange similarities if the witticism is to be seen as apt.

I shall argue that the apparent or surface impropriety of a joke’s climax or point depends for its success on a deeper, underlying propriety, and that the success of a joke depends upon the aptness with which the superficially incommensurable elements work together playfully, wittily.

The effectiveness of a joke depends therefore not only upon the effectiveness of its wit or intelligence but also upon the effectiveness of its rhetoric, and I shall argue that to be able to appreciate the wit of the various kinds of mis-matching which constitute the body of a joke, we need to be able to read the signs which go to establish the world of the joke. In rhetorical terms, I see these signs as metonymic “stand-ins” for all the implications, presuppositions and entailments that attend upon the signs as their natural causes or consequences. We manage to read the signs, of course, by those instantaneous mental processes that, as members of the culture in which the jokes are made, we make all the time without realising that this is what we are doing.

I am concerned, as I have been in earlier essays¹, to point to the ubiquity of metonymic strategies in our reading of the multivarious signs that surround us — whether verbal, visual, auditory, olfactory or gustatory — signs which we need to be able to interpret in order to survive. In order to survive, we need to be highly trained semioticians, rhetoricians, and logicians, which, in their own languages and cultures, everybody always is: we

learn these skills as we learn to make sense of our childhood environments. I believe that the crucial agent in all this, in the widest sense of the word, is the figure known to rhetoric as metonymy. This is a hobby horse that I have been riding for many years, and I am hopeful that it will carry me safely through the journey which I am about to undertake.

1,i Actually, I have, for many years, been debating with myself whether or not I am brave enough to consign the burden of this essay to the high seas of public scrutiny, but since “time and tide wait for no man” and since no time may ever be as good as the present moment, even if the tide is not quite at the full (or, as Shakespeare put it, “at the flood”), I have decided to set sail, trusting that my craft will prove to be sufficiently sea-worthy.

I use the metaphor of essay as ship partly in the hope that it will give the stale idiom about ‘time and tide’ a certain freshness, but principally because I wish, in a little while, to use it to argue, as I have done in earlier writings on this topic, that our interpretation of metaphors relies upon our recognising — if not always consciously — the implications inherent in the metonymic structure upon which a metaphor is built and that enable metaphors to carry out their work.

Whereas metaphor is traditionally classified as a figure of comparison, metonymy is usually classified as a figure of contiguity. Yet both figures, especially metonymy, can also, and perhaps more usefully be thought of in practice as figures of displacement. In the case of metonymy, the ‘real’ object or ‘true’ focus of the reference is displaced and is replaced by something with which that object or focus has a fundamental, often causal relationship.

An everyday example of the metonymic category known as “the container for the thing contained”² is the use of ‘The White House’ to

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

replace, to stand for (to stand in for), ‘the President of the United States and all his works’. An equally famous example is the use of the term “hands” to replace, to stand for, the man to whom the hands belong. This is generally classified as a simple synecdoche, since the contiguous relationship is considered to be “a part for the whole”, yet in such a phrase as the command “All hands on deck!” what will be required of the hands is the work that they will perform, and this is more like a metonymy, where the actor or functionary, the hands, stands for the action or function which those hands will be asked to carry out, their manual work.

All this might seem an odd way of going about things if unambiguous communication is the sole aim of discourse, but, should the English language be a reliable index, then the ubiquity of metonymy in everyday language suggests that it is by such indirect methods that the mind works. Ernest Gowers’ gospel of Plain Words never seems to have had much of a following, while the popularity of riddles amongst children and in pre-literate societies (not to mention the popularity of crossword puzzles) suggests that we *enjoy* having to work things out. Perhaps the human mind takes pleasure in making difficulties for itself, takes pleasure in having to make the deductions and inferences that the use of metonymy always appears to involve: it enjoys mental exercises that stretch it and thereby strengthen it. Why else should we take such delight in the jokes which certain varieties of metonymic and ironic displacements give rise to?

1,ii I return to the metaphor of essay as ship to explicate it a little further. Although the high seas are, technically speaking, areas of the oceans outside any country’s territorial jurisdiction, the ‘high’ in “high seas” is, metonymically, a consequence that presupposes its cause, strong winds, while entailing further consequences, the danger of being wrecked. Your

boat is not worthy if it has not been thoroughly tested: it can not therefore be trusted to withstand the assaults of the wind. At the same time, I play with two meanings of the term 'craft': one, to refer to a ship (a craft) and, two, to refer to a person's professional skill (his or her craft), while wishing to show how the second of these references, one's skill, will affect how well you perform the first, the making of whatever one chooses to make through the application of one's skill.

In all this, I am interested in the manner by which the rhetorical figure of metonymy acts as an integral and essential link in the logical workings of implication: by the manner in which metonymic and contingent signs stand as causes for consequences or as consequences for causes, where in all such cases the causal relationships and contingencies remain unmentioned, hidden, yet are not opaque since they must be 'read' if an utterance, or in this case a joke, is to be fully understood.

1,iii Although this essay will look specifically at jokes, they are jokes of a particular kind: jokes made through the collaboration of the verbal and the visual: what are known as cartoons. It is, as well, the latest in a series of essays that I have written about the centrality in semiotic studies of the rhetorical figure of metonymy, especially as it is linked to schemes of logic, particularly those that are concerned with systems of implication³.

Contiguous items may simply occur side by side without necessarily affecting each other, while a contingent relationship is one when the associated items, although their relationship is not predetermined or necessary, actually influence each other in some way or other, when one item, as it were, *leans* upon another. And I have suggested that when things that are related either contiguously or contingently stand in place of each other, this is metonymy, a figure specifically of displacement: when, that is,

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

something which is associated not merely contiguously but also contingently with something else stands in place of that something else, which can be either larger or smaller than itself, and which it will be expected to call to mind

A possible list of metonymies might include cause for consequence, container for the thing contained, the actor for the action, the name of the maker for the thing made (the inventor for the invention), the garment for the wearer, the utensil for the user, the motto for the institution, the functionary for the function, the representative for the office, the trace for the preceding incident, the gesture as a message, insignia for rank or status, adjunct for profession, and many of these vice versa. At any rate, we may say, in the most general terms, “the sign for the thing signified”, which therefore might, as well, take in colours for emotions, institutions and events, flowers for feelings, icons as signboards, animals for stereotyped characteristics, flags as code or for nations, and so on, all of which have symbolic functions.

In fact, the association between metonymy and symbol is rather close, and symbols may depend for their meaning upon hidden or forgotten metonymies, as the red and white of a barber’s pole stand for blood and bandages since the man who cut your *barbe*, your beard, was often a surgeon at the same time. (How the blue in a Japanese barber’s pole crept in I have not been able to discover.) We may never have known of these beginnings, but we are still able to recognise the symbol when we see it, and we need to recognise it if we wish to get our hair cut.

At any rate, we, as receivers of whatever message is being sent to us, must work out the nature of these interdependent relationships. If we are native speakers or long-time members of a culture we probably do this without realising consciously that this is what we are doing. If we are

second language learners or visitors to foreign shores, we need some help.

1,iv Among its many functions, metonymy gives birth to idioms, and “Time and tide wait for no man” is an English idiom that has become a cliché. The trouble with clichés (or idioms) is that we generally use them, as we use familiar symbols, without really thinking about what they mean, or where they may have come from since their origins are often, over time, hidden by time: the association between the idiom, or symbol, and its source, its birthplace, has been lost⁴.

“Time and tide” represent figuratively, both metaphorically and metonymically, those overall states of affairs and external factors within which a human life is lived: time and tide are indifferent to human affairs and they do not wait for a vacillating human being to decide on “the right time” and “the best tide” for setting out on any journey or on any task that life throws up. Shakespeare works this out in a famous passage in *Julius Caesar*: “There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life Is bound in shallows and in miseries”, *JC*, 4, 3.

What Shakespeare is spelling out are the causal contingencies that underlie and support the overarching metaphor: he is making explicit the metonymic associations which the proverbial expression “Time and tide wait for no man” only implies. The hearer of the idiom has to work these out for himself: he must recognise by inference the associations and adjuncts, derived metonymically, that co-exist within the domain of the “discontinuous” metaphorical image upon which the general idea or “continuous” theme of the discourse rests: these adjuncts, both contingent and consequent, are spelt out by Shakespeare, but are left unspoken by whoever invented the proverb⁵.

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

1,v Jokes, however, seem to go even further in their delight in difficulty, and one of the special pleasures of a joke is that while it always takes part in, and revels in, this complex play of metonymy and implication, it will often make use of a familiar phrase in a context where, at first sight, it may not quite fit, but which in the terms of the joke has a surreal significance which forces us to think again and freshly about the meaning of the words we tend to use unthinkingly: the interpretation of jokes requires the application of even greater logical and forensic skills than those we need to interpret metaphors.

Writers on the subject assume, as does the OED, that jokes juxtapose two signs which do not usually go together — situations or conditions which do not match — and a joke makes a joke of (makes a witty comment about) their obvious incongruity, the mis-match of the pairing. Since such jokes force us to consider the meanings of the words we use and the situations in which we find ourselves, they may often, paradoxically, be profound.

It follows, therefore that if the relationship between juxtaposed signs is abnormal and must be recognised as being so, then we need first to be fully aware of what the signs signify in their normal, everyday settings: that if words or images are being mis-matched or juxtaposed incongruously to make a joke, we must know what such terms — verbal or visual symbols — signify as parts of a code that is regular and is recognised.

It will follow from this that we must ourselves, in greater or lesser degrees, be users of the code that is being played with, and it is, in fact, a truism that humour is so culturally conditioned, and is so limited by the cultural context, that when we study a second language or a foreign culture, jokes are the last thing that we are able (if at all) to understand. Consequently, I shall take it as axiomatic that in situations where jokes are told and understood, it is essential that the teller and the listener share a

common cultural context: *common knowledge* and *common ground*.

These are not the same thing, though: knowledge is something that we possess; ground is what we stand on to look out at the world, the standpoint from which we view the world. Although these may, to some extent, be interdependent in that the one can affect the other, it is possible for me to share knowledge with someone without sharing his point of view: our political leanings or biases, let us say, may be different. At the same time, I, myself, often find that I am quite unable to understand, or at least to appreciate, many of the American cartoons which are a regular feature of *The Japan Times*, although I am presumed to speak the same language as the maker of the joke: in fact, I share neither the specific cultural knowledge nor, at times, the social point of view (psychological, moral, philosophical, political) of those who create these jokes and those who enjoy them.

Given this, you may wonder why I sometimes use jokes in the form of cartoons — that is, drawings with or without captions — as teaching material when my Japanese students do not share the cultural context of the joker or his audience.

I do so in the hope that by learning to identify the signs, to recognise them for what they are and know what they are called in the English language (to give an English name to the signs both visual and verbal which constitute the world of the joke), we shall, first by learning how to identify the signs, thereafter come — by interpreting how (in the world of the joke) they are employed — to some sort of understanding of the culture (general as well as linguistic) to which they belong.

I am working, that is, from the assumption held by most semioticians that a culture is a constellation of signs: and my perspective, which in practice claims to be rhetorical, is, in the widest sense, semiotic. Words are the linguistic coins of a particular cultural code and so, too, are the

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

objects and artefacts which are particular expressions of that culture. They do not, however, function in isolation from each other: to be able to understand the one we need to have a pretty intimate knowledge of the other. Knowing one will call the other to mind, by a species of metonymic or contingent association.

When I use cartoons I do so in part as a means of helping my students to understand that they cannot study language as a thing separate from the culture of which it is a part. I am anxious that my students should appreciate that we can never understand anything in isolation: everything comes loaded with associations and connotations which, should they not be second nature to us, have to be deciphered and decoded.

When we read even the simplest text, say a three line report in a newspaper, we have to be able to pick up the unspoken associations that the terms are likely to convey to a native speaker. And by 'text' we can also, of course, signify 'picture', as tapestries are woven texts⁶, so that when we read any kind of text which has greater ambitions than a brief newspaper report we have to work out through deduction and inference those meanings that are not mentioned but are deliberately implied (or implicated) and which have to be recognised if the text is to be understood: we have, that is, to be able to "read between the lines".

We can therefore 'read' cartoons as we might read a purely verbal text as means to help us understand how our moment by moment decisions depend upon our ability to read the signs of whatever culture we have our being in and are moving about in, and to realise how essential it is to know what they presuppose and what they entail: how our survival depends on our making sense correctly of the multiplicity of signs that bombard us at every moment of our lives. In other words, we can use cartoons as a means to teach the academic discipline of semiotics, the 'scientific' study of signs.

At a more advanced level of semiotic understanding and competence, perhaps, we can use these works to help students learn how to form hypotheses and make deductions: how to apply Sherlock Holmes' "method". This is a kind of training in forensic techniques which, it seems, Japanese students do not usually receive anywhere in their schooling, not even at university. I have sometimes used the ITV Sherlock Holmes videos for the same purpose: to encourage my students to think of themselves as each a Sherlock Holmes, by teaching them how to read the signs that are everywhere around us and how to deduce from their imprints and traces the tale that they have to tell⁷.

1,vi In a recent book, *Jokes*, Ted Cohen concentrates his attention upon anecdotes, almost all of them American in provenance, and perhaps because America is such an ethnic christmas pudding many of them play upon ethnic differences, many of them have Jewish themes and make references to Jewish cultural codes. Since these, like all other kinds of joke will depend, as I have already insisted, upon the teller of the joke and the listener to the joke sharing a culture and probably sharing the attitudes of a group (or in England class) which belongs to that culture, I am not always able to understand these jokes: I am an outsider.

The word 'shibboleth' (an ear of corn, a stream in flood) was used by the ancient Israelites as a kind of test: those who could pronounce it were one of us: those who could not were outsiders, therefore enemies (Judges, 12. 4-6). Then, in the way that words develop meanings by metonymic side-steps, 'shibboleth' became a custom or habit, until now it means an idiosyncratic belief or unthinking platitude held by a person or by his class. Jokes can reflect shibboleths in most of these senses.

Of course, English jokes, too, can make fun of the Irish, the Scots and

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

the Welsh, but such kinds of joke have never struck me as witty since they often seem to involve an element of cruelty, which shows a *lack* of understanding; they are often repellent. Yet, even if there is no racial reference, there has to be complicity between the teller and the listener that may involve discrimination against (or laughter at) someone in the joke who does not belong to the same group (or class) or share the same cultural assumptions, although this need not invariably be so. Cohen may be right to think that many purely anecdotal jokes are of this kind. Yet though visual jokes, as I shall show, may be translated into verbal anecdotes, the stories they tell can often be more subtle, as well as more genial and generous.

Nevertheless, as I have tried to argue, we shall only be able to appreciate, and enjoy, the joke if we are able not only to recognise (to identify and interpret) the signs but at the same time to share many of the cultural preconceptions and presumptions of the artist. Within the world of British jokes we also find the play of certain class differences and assumptions that make the work of certain cartoonists popular with one group of people, the work of other cartoonists popular with some other group, or class. In the world of jokes, what makes one man laugh may stick in another man's gullet and make him choke⁸.

I am also taking it for granted, then, that a mis-match (or, as some might prefer it, an incongruity) is at the heart of most jokes, whether verbal, visual, or, as in cartoons, both; and we can only appreciate that there is a mis-match between signs if we know which everyday partners the signs usually do match up with, who their ordinary partners will generally be.

1,vii The kind of verbal and visual mis-match on which visual jokes depend specifically is an ironic clash between, sometimes, the context and the content, sometimes between details within the context, sometimes

between details within the content. I have thrown in the word 'ironic' there without any preamble, but I hope that it will justify its placing, since, in Rhetoric, irony is the figure of contradiction, mockery, discrepancy and dissimulation: the rhetorical figure of mockery by which one thing is said and another is meant is called *Dissimulatio*.

Cartoons, with or without captions, are a particularly fruitful source of jokes which rely on this kind of interplay between the discrepant, the parodic, the incongruous, and the source material of the body of this essay will be the work of two British cartoonists who worked, and published profusely, mostly during the second half of the twentieth century.

Yet before I look in more particular detail at the work of Osbert Lancaster (1908-1986) and Norman Thelwell (1923-), I shall look at four exemplary cartoons taken from the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*, which first appeared in 1962, and has been running strongly ever since.

Private Eye has a rather special place in British life, and is read by a certain class of British person: its humour, which can be mordant, does not appeal to everyone and is not likely to be understood by everyone. It appeals to an educated élite with a taste for acerbic social commentary and a sophisticated awareness of current trends and fashions in art and theory: an élite that is able to stand back and be both objective and critical.

2. Identifying the Signs

I am now hoping that as a result of what I have claimed in the Introduction it will be granted that a metonymic reference is a sign, a sign of a sign, the replacement within a code of one sign by another with which it has a contingent, operational or causal relationship. If we do not know the code, however, we shall not be able to identify the signs; we shall never know

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

what the signs refer to (what they are signs of, what they signify), nor shall we be able to infer all the logical relationships that their use implies, and so we shall never be able to give the signs a cultural context in which they can carry any meanings whatsoever.

Since we cannot in this magazine reproduce the drawings which this text selects and to which it refers, I have perforce to turn the drawings into anecdotes. Yet this ought not to be hardship either for the writer or the reader since it is not a difficult thing to do, and is, indeed, what I ask my students to do: to tell in words the story, both the before and after, all those things that the drawing both presupposes and entails.

All of this is to say that the drawing is one moment in an on-going tale and we have to work out from that single moment what has gone before and what will come afterwards. The signs that are given to us, metonymic in their operation, are usually the crucial, all-informing links in the chain of causally related events that we must, from the single link in the chain that is all we are allowed to see, then infer from that evidence.

2,i I take first an apparently straight-forward joke from *Private Eye*. It seems simple but is self-conscious and self-aware since it seems to comment, as many jokes do, on its own practice. A man is riding a bicycle. He is just passing a sign post that in Britain used to be called a fingerpost since it is shaped like an index finger; it is pointing its finger in the direction in which the man is riding: it is indicating his way; unkempt grass grows beside the road. That is all: there is no caption.

Everything is in the drawing. The man is wearing clothes that enable us to identify him with certainty; the sign post carries the name of the town to which the man is cycling. The man is wearing tight black trousers, a black cape, and on his white vest is printed a large S; the sign post is

directing us towards *Lourdes*, which is 7 km away. That is all we need to know to be able to appreciate the story that encapsulates the joke. Superman is riding a bicycle through the countryside to *Lourdes*, in a country which measures distances in kilometres. And he has not far to go. So far, so good: my students can identify Superman, who, it may be added, has a very anxious expression on his face.

Now, if we know anything about Superman, we know that his normal method of transporting himself from place to place is by flying there “under his own steam”: if he is riding a bicycle, we would naturally deduce that he is unable to function in his normal manner: being on a bicycle would presuppose that he cannot fly, and this would entail the anxious expression. It might also follow — as an entailment — that if Superman is worried because he cannot fly, it is likely that he would look for a cure.

So, even if we do not know what or where *Lourdes* is, we might suppose that he is hoping, at *Lourdes*, to find a cure. This would be a hypothetical presupposition. If I then asked a student “What sort of place is *Lourdes*?” (s)he might say “A hospital”. If she is thinking harder, she might say “A place where miracles are performed.” Such an answer would be a deduction based on a hypothesis, the hypothesis having been arrived at by means of observation and imagination — which is the Holmesian (and scientific) method of coming to conclusions.

Whether anybody would find this particular (and ironic) joke funny would be something else again.

2,ii Jokes, as the first example makes explicit, rely on our being able to identify and interpret signs to make their point: this is the point of the joke. They can therefore be — as is joke 1,i — a conscious exercise in semiotic. This may sometimes be hidden; sometimes, as in the next example, it may

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

be overt, and, again, be the whole point of the joke. In this instance, the artist actually draws attention to the fact that jokes are about signs, that signs are how we make sense of the things we meet, how we use signs to interpret what we come across in our daily lives.

A woman stands at her front door. Windows on either side of the front door indicate a middle class home. A man is walking away from the house, along a stone-flagged pathway, another indication of a middle class dwelling. The man is wearing a dark suit and a bowler hat; the woman is wearing a dressing gown. We infer from this that it is morning and that the man is going to work. This is confirmed by what the woman is holding: a brief case in one hand, an umbrella in the other, both held up, clearly indicating that she is wishing to draw his attention to them. She is calling out, "Melville! Your trappings."

Melville is obviously the man's (her husband's) name, and we can fill in her remark with the bits of the utterance that she has omitted (the omission of grammatical elements, *ellipsis* being another form of displacement with metonymic consequences): "Melville (wait)! (You have forgotten (to take)) your trappings." This implies that he needs to take, indeed that he *ought* to take, his trappings with him.

The key to the joke is obviously the word "trappings", whose meaning we have to identify: originally it meant the covering, or caparison, laid over a horse as an ornament; now, according to the OED, it also means "decorative features, dress, etc., especially as an indication of some status or position".

Now, the bowler hat, the umbrella, and the brief case are all signs: the well-recognised signs of a London City gentleman, a man who works in the City of London, as a banker or in insurance, at any rate in the world of finance: it is, in effect, almost a uniform, and so identifies him as a man of

that status in that position: without them we should fail to identify him. By themselves, they metonymically represent, and would infallibly identify, the man to whom they belong: trappings in this usage are metonymic emblems or insignia: adjuncts for the rôle signified.

While it is obvious that there is a serious mis-match between Superman, a bicycle and *Lourdes*, there is no obvious mis-match here. What we have though is something both more patent and more subtle. Without the accoutrements which would normally “go with” this man, objects which are the matching items necessary to identify his status and position in the eyes of the world, he is no longer himself: he lacks the outward signs of his position, and is therefore incomplete. The joke is thus also, and clearly, about the vital importance of signs as signifiers. (Please see note 13, where I have a final late inspiration, too late, alas, to insert into the body of this text.)

2.iii It may be that all jokes are in this manner self-reflexive since they call the reader’s attention to their manner of working; they take delight in their own cleverness. This is certainly true of jokes that make a deliberate “play on words”, a play of which the reader must be aware — or the joke will be “lost on him”.

A man wearing the uniform of a Chicago gangster — broad-brimmed hat, broad-shouldered white trench-coat, fancy shoes, a thin moustache — is speaking to a girl in the sort of underslip that a showgirl changing between acts might wear; she is facing a dressing table. On the floor lies an automatic gun: a guitar is propped against the wall beside the door. These signs all unmistakeably represent, even for someone who is not American, an American gangster-cum-theatre ambience. The joke is purely in the words, except that we have to recognise before we hear the man speak that

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

he is a criminal: “I’m wanted in every state in the country. Why don’t *you* want me?”

Strictly speaking, the figure that in English is called a ‘pun’ and in Greek ‘paronomasia’ makes use of a term (a word) that has more than one dictionary ‘meaning’ in a particular context where the two (or more) meanings of the term are simultaneously present, and both must be recognised for the point to be understood, as at the beginning of this essay I meant the word ‘craft’ to be so appreciated. In a language like Japanese, which has a great many homonyms and homophones, puns (**goroawase**) are an extremely common form of joke. Mediæval rhetoricians, too, spoke of this figure as “more often found in games and jokes”.

In this cartoon, we have a sort of reversed pun, when two of the meanings of the verb ‘to want’ are used as if they had the same meaning; this figure is known in Rhetoric as *antanaclasis*. Anyone who belongs to a culture which, in public places, posts pictures of criminals accompanied by the word “WANTED” knows that the person in the photograph is wanted by the police. “Why don’t *you* want me?” implies, when complete, “Why don’t you want me as a friend, lover, sexual partner?” This is almost too obvious to spell out, and many native speakers might groan if they came across it (puns have been called “the lowest form of wit”), but it would not be so obvious if you come from a culture where these terms, or their equivalents in that culture’s language, do not do double duty and where the ironic discrepancy between their two significations might not be well understood.

Although there is not, at first sight, any obvious mis-match or incongruity at work here either, since in each sentence the word is used perfectly correctly, the mis-match is in the placing of the two sentences side by side: the people implicated in the first do not want the same thing that the person

who is being spoken to in the second might be presumed to want.

2,iv My fourth example works on several levels of implication and signification, and the reader will have to make a number of deductions based on the evidence: (s)he will be able to do so only if (s)he is able to identify both the figures in the drawing and the utterance that forms the caption.

Many native speakers will recognise the caption since it is in fact a word for word transcription of a notice of dismissal that an employer might hand to an employee, or might post on a notice board with a list of appended names: it is a word for word copy, *with one crucial exception*. We have to recall the original sentence while recognising that one of the original words has been displaced and a word with the opposite meaning put in its place, thus reversing the original meaning and so utterly changing the implications (the implied meaning) of the sentence. Rhetoricians have a name for this device, too: it is another play on words, *commutatio*, where, by changing a word, you invert the meaning of an utterance. We must then interpret the utterance in terms of the drawing to which it is the caption.

A man sits on a large cushion on a dais facing a semi-circle of black shapes balanced on smaller cushions. Since he is wearing the robe and head-dress of an Arab sheik and as it is the Arab fashion for women to be shrouded from head to foot in black, we infer that the black shapes are women. We have at once deduced from their clothes that they are Arabs; from the women's subservient position in relation to the man's we further deduce that they are his wives. Through the minaret-shaped window in the background we see a group of oil derricks. We therefore deduce that the man is a *rich* Arab sheik. I would argue that all these details are metonymic signs and that they serve as evidence which enables us to deduce the rest of the story.

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

As for the caption, the sheik is saying, in the words of a manager of a British company in financial straits, “I’m sorry, but due to the recession, some of you will be issued with redundancy notices on the basis of first in first out.”

I do not need to tell a British ‘reader’ of this text how to read the joke: the sentence as it stands is quite comprehensible, but the usurping word is the first of the two “first”s. Such redundancy notices usually read “...on the basis of *last* in first out”, which, in the original context, would imply that the company is prepared to show greater consideration towards those who have worked for it and served its interests longest.

There is, in the first place, an obvious and ironic mis-match between the words and the context, since words suitable to a business context have been transferred to a matrimonial context where they are hardly appropriate, while, in the second place, the displacing of ‘last’ and the insertion of ‘first’ implies ironically that the first in, the older wives, who will presumably have now lost their beauty and thus their attractiveness, are the most dispensable. We therefore infer that their lord and master prefers to keep the wives who are younger and presumably more beautiful, regardless of the long and (one imagines) dutiful service of the older wives. We therefore have an ironic reversal of the meaning of the original message, with a consequent need to reassess the reasoning behind the utterance. What does the alteration imply? What do we infer from the alteration? We have inferred that Arab men give preference to young and beautiful wives. Many Arabs might consider this to be a racial slur.

3. Sir Osbert Lancaster (1908-1986)

Sir Osbert Lancaster was one of the great Englishmen of the 20th

Century. He did not lead governments or command soldiers, captain successful athletic teams or climb the highest mountains. He was an architectural historian, a designer of stage productions, a memorialist, a man with exceptional powers of perception and an inimitable gift for rendering his perceptions in drawings, most famously in cartoons that, apart from gaps during the war years, appeared every day for nearly fifty years in *The Daily Express*. He was, like any great novelist or painter, a semiotician of the highest order, although he might not have been familiar with the word, and might have been suspicious of it if he *had* known it.

3,i He was not entirely silent during the war, and in 1942 he drew an exemplary cartoon. In the background, a line of moorish battlements and a palm tree tell us that we are in an Arab country; this is confirmed by the dress and dark colouring of two men, one of whom is looking with some puzzlement at a figure dressed in an all-over black gown, a white veil over the lower part of the face, balancing a vase on the head, all signs that the wearer of the gown is an Arab woman. These signs are contradicted by other signs, however, which underlie them and so are more trustworthy: the 'woman' is smoking a cigar, holds a walking stick, and beneath her robe, which we read as a disguise, she is wearing pin-stripe trousers and western shoes; the eyes are obviously light in shade and their expression is rather belligerent.

One of the two men is asking his friend, "Well, if it isn't the Widow Fatima, who is it? Just tell me that?" Although the joke was topical and referred to a visit that the man in question had just paid to North Africa (a secret visit until he was safely back in Britain), some of my Japanese students, nearly sixty years later, can answer that question without knowing anything of what occasioned it. Walking stick, trousers, shoes, eyes

are all clues: but the vital clue, without which the others would only tell us that the wearer of the gown is an Englishman in disguise, is the cigar: it is the defining metonymic feature, the sign for the thing signified: our answer will be unequivocal: "Winston Churchill!"

3,ii A master manipulator of signs, Lancaster observed the current scene with a very sharp eye for the whimsicalities of fashion, and it is therefore remarkable that so many of his jokes are still funny, still pertinent, all these years later.

A drawing which appeared in *The Daily Express* on December the 12th, 1967, is a case in point. A doctor and a nurse are standing at a window looking out into a street; we know that he is a doctor since he is wearing a stethoscope, the metonymic sign of a medical man⁹; the nurse is in uniform. The houses across the street are typical of the Queen Anne architecture found in Harley Street, the London street where high-class medical specialists run practices: here it is functioning as a sign, just as 'Fleet Street' still means newspapers even though most newspapers moved out some years ago. Out in the street, a wind is blowing up a few autumn leaves, as three girls hurry by, hugging fur capes to keep themselves warm.

The doctor and the nurse show no sympathy for the poor frozen girls, indeed they are smiling, as if in happy anticipation of something pleasant, and the doctor's words, by implication, confirm this: "You mark my words, Matron — it'll be cystitis that keeps the old pot boiling this winter!"

The expression "Mark my words" means "Listen to what I am telling you and remember it: what I say will come true". "To keep the pot boiling" is an idiom, with all of an idiom's attendant metonymic presuppositions and entailments. A pot in this idiom is a sign for the utensil (the container) in which we cook food (the contained), and so signifies food: to

keep a pot boiling we shall need fuel; to supply fuel (and keep the pot supplied) we shall need an income, money with which to buy food and fuel¹⁰.

Since cystitis is a urinary complaint, to which women are more susceptible than men, and if, as we suppose (or infer) him to imply, women suffering from that complaint are going to provide him with an income, we can also deduce that he is a urologist (a specialist in urinary complaints). Yet what is his evidence for thinking that enough people will be suffering from cystitis to provide him with enough income to pay his heat and food bills throughout the winter?

Well, there is one small detail that I have deliberately left out of my account, and again it is the vital detail, which we have to spot for ourselves in order to make the inference. The three young women are wearing mini-skirts, and women who wear mini-skirts in winter are laying themselves open (as it were) to the likelihood of developing cystitis. This winter, I have often thought of this cartoon, as many young women, school girls among them, have gone about Sapporo in mini-skirts, the most unsuitable clothing for Sapporo's winter climate.

This, too, is the basic point of Lancaster's joke: it is a satirical comment (although, being Lancaster, his comments are mostly rather gentle) on the folly of following unsuitable fashions just because they are fashionable. By means of a joke he, like all the best jokers, is saying something quite serious. We, the readers, however, must work this out for ourselves, by attending to the clues that Lancaster has given us, and by following the chain of reasoning that links them all together.

3,iii We can sometimes date the introduction of a fashion from a Lancaster joke: 1967, for instance, must have been the year that mini-skirts came in. Yet, while mini-skirts appear to be with us forever, other fashions come

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

and go. In June, 1958, Lancaster uses a fashion of that particular year to make a semiotic joke, yet also to warn us that we may interpret signs too quickly, and so mistake them, mis-read them if we are not fully awake to the culture in which those signs are used¹¹.

A man wearing a dinner jacket is sinking into a chair, his hand over his eyes. Two women, one middle-aged, one young, both wearing evening dresses, are looking at him with astonishment. The clothes indicate that these people are going to a dinner party of some kind, even to the theatre, perhaps, and going out rather than coming home, since the man has obviously been shocked by something he has only just seen, from which, as he sinks back down into his chair, he is shielding his eyes. The women are shocked by whatever he has said as a result of his shock. The drawing by itself tells us all this.

The man and the women are familiar Lancaster characters: Willy, the Earl of Littlehampton, Maudie, his wife, and their daughter. Lady Littlehampton is the character, from the beginning of Lancaster's career to its end, through whom he makes many of his most shrewd and penetrating observations, and of course she is an aristocrat. The world in which she lives is the world of the gentry and the upper middle classes, the class into which Lancaster himself was born, while at the other end of the town children went about without shoes, a fact of which Lancaster was acutely aware, but it does mean that his humour has a class component which may have made it unappealing, or even incomprehensible, to those who may not have had the patience to attend to what Lancaster, a man of wit in both the earliest and modern senses of the word, observed so honestly.

Lady Littlehampton is saying, with some heat, "My dear Willy, if only you weren't so hopelessly out of touch you wouldn't go leaping to ridiculous conclusions!" We therefore deduce, since this is conventionally implicated

by the grammar, that Willy has jumped to a conclusion — that is, he has made a decision too quickly on insufficient evidence — and he has done so because he is not fully in touch with the changes going on around him in his own culture. Signs, in other words, may deceive us if we are not familiar with the context in which they are used.

He has, in fact, mis-read the meaning, or significance, of the dress worn by his daughter. She is wearing what looks a little bit like a tent, and consequently it is, in general outline, similar to the maternity dresses worn by women who are pregnant. Clearly, this is the dress that her father has assumed she is wearing, and we deduce that he must have said something like “My God, my daughter (who was at the time unmarried) is going to have a baby!” What he does not know, because he is “behind the times” as well as out of touch, is that the fashion of that year was Christian Dior’s A-line, and it is a dress of this kind that his daughter is wearing: appearances can be deceptive.

3,iv We can also date the first use of expressions that have since become well known but that were at the time coming into fashion and therefore were *à la mode*.

In February, 1971, Lady Littlehampton had occasion to chastise her dog as it slinks over the carpet, tail between its legs and ears drooping. She is saying, “And don’t pretend you don’t know what I mean by “environmental pollution”.”

Clearly the dog has made a dog mess on the carpet, which is not what most people would normally refer to as “environmental pollution”, but the joke is of that quite familiar kind when language is used which is out of scale with the situation about which it is being used, an example of hyperbole or *amplificatio*, where “a greater word is used for a lesser thing”, what

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

I am calling incommensurability of scale. The wit is in seeing how these two apparently disparate situations can be brought together, and in a joke its inappropriateness will be funny.

There is more: although no dog will know what the words “environmental pollution” mean, the mis-match is strikingly apt, since it is obvious from the dog’s cowering, slinking attitude that it does know, simply from Lady Littlehampton’s attitude and her tone of voice, exactly what she means and exactly what it is that he is guilty of: it does not know and yet it *does* know.

3, vi As well as being a semiotician, Lancaster is also a social historian, for we can date not only fashions but also those events with which we are now familiar as happenings in recent history, or that, being timeless, continue to occur, which makes the original jokes still relevant today.

Lord and Lady Littlehampton are at home on the 26th of October, 1962, at a time when, as is clear from the newspaper on Lady Littlehampton’s lap, the issue of American missile bases in Britain was a pressing political problem. Lord Littlehampton, who is polishing a double-barrelled shot gun (a metonymy for weapons of all kinds), is answering a question, whose import we can easily deduce from his reply: “Well, dear, the principal difference as far as I can see is this — a DEFensive weapon is one with my finger on the trigger, an OFFensive weapon is one with yours.”

The point, as the Americans clash with the rest of the world over their missile shield, is still with us in 2001, and Lancaster is working with several levels of irony that are still pertinent; the intelligence and succinctness with which they are expressed are still impressive: I doubt if the distinction has ever been better put. Lady Littlehampton has understandably been unable to see how any weapon can actually be defensive, as this is a self-contradiction; her husband knows that whichever side we are on, we see

other's actions as aggressive, our own as defensive: this is a fact of human nature that time is unlikely to change.

Lancaster is making use here of a hidden idiom, of which we have to be aware. The phrase "the man with his finger on the trigger" refers by metonymy to the person who holds the position of commander-in-chief of an army, or is in the position to declare war. This is the metonymy at the heart of the metaphor: When we pull the trigger, the gun goes off: When the man in charge gives the word, the war begins. These days the word 'button' might be substituted for 'trigger'.

Cartoons have to work swiftly, and cartoons of this kind, where social and political issues are involved, must ensure that the simplest strokes and the simplest words will carry the greatest weights of meaning. Such statements as Lord Littlehampton's might be thought of rhetorically as epigrams or *sententia* ("a concise and striking general statement"), which may make use of some of the figures of omission, *detractio* ("the omission of a word or phrase which be understood from the context") and *brachiepeia* ("extreme brevity").

3.vii Lancaster will even indulge in what philosophers call an *analytical sentence*, one which analyses itself: for instance, agoraphobia means fear of open spaces; but he adds to it to make a joke. On December the 2nd, 1959, Lady Littlehampton and her daughter are waiting for a bus after having been shopping at Harrods: this we deduce from the signs, of which only parts are given us. Lancaster regularly and deliberately leaves things out and we must deduce the whole from the part: it is our job to supply what is missing. The ladies are standing beside a pole with a London City Transport emblem and the word STOP: the word BUS is missing, yet it is vital that we understand that it will be a bus which is due to stop here.

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

Lady Littlehampton is saying “Agoraphobia, dear, means fear of open spaces and all the No 9s have got it badly.” “It” means “agoraphobia” and “have got it” means “are suffering from it”, as in “I have got a cold”. If the ladies are standing by a bus stop we infer, as a presupposition, that they are waiting for a bus; we further infer that the No 9 is the bus that they are waiting for.

If the buses are afraid of open spaces (a neat mis-match which becomes, as they often do, a species of metaphor), this implies that they are still in the bus terminal, which implies that no NO 9s will have passed by for rather a long time. If Lady Littlehampton is aware of this, it presupposes that she has been waiting for a long time: this might entail that she was consequently getting rather cold, and increasingly cross.

3,viii Sometimes, Lancaster makes comments on situations out in the world at large if they are sufficiently well-known to be generally understood. In January, 1971, he drew an armoured car, its gun still smoking, passing beneath a banner which reads ‘Welcome Home To Our Beloved Leader’; two palm trees indicate tropicality; two soldiers, both African, are standing in the car. One, a signaller, with earphones on, is listening to a message; the other, a staff officer, has a military moustache and the red tabs of a British senior officer. These are signs that tell us we are in what was once a British colony. The officer is saying brightly, “Ah, well, that’s the way it goes — one day you’re on the air, the next you’re on the menu!”

We deduce that a leader in exile, perhaps in London, has come home to lead a coup, and that he has overthrown the leader who was in power the day before. We have two metonymies here: to be on the air means that you are broadcasting, and since the radio station is the first thing that the leaders of a coup attempt to seize, to be on the air is thus significant

evidence that you are in power, and are the authority; to be on the menu means that you are being served up as food, which means that you will be dead, reduced to somebody else's meat. So: one day you are in power, the man at the top, the next you are a dead nobody, being served up as no better than an animal.

That's the way it is, Lancaster is saying: the whirligig of African power struggles. The hint of cannibalism is not, presumably, accidental. The irony is in the event itself, and the wit is in the comment, again a *sententia*, albeit a black one. Many people today, though, might find the implications racist and unacceptable, however true to the facts.

3,ix In September, 1970, Lancaster drew a couple sitting side by side in an aeroplane; we deduce the aeroplane from the details. The man's moustache, facial features and suit are signs that he is a retired British officer; a woman whom we take to be his wife sits beside him; in the row behind sits an American, a fact that we deduce from his bow-tie and round glasses. They have all raised their hands, from which we deduce that somebody has said "Stick them up!", or words to that effect. We deduce from this that the aeroplane is being hi-jacked, a thing that was happening quite often around that time.

The man is looking anxious, but the woman is saying, with a glint in her eye, and presumably a note of confidence in her voice, "Do you remember telling me that the trouble with the Arabs was that they were temperamentally incapable of organisation?"

The remark presupposes that Arabs are relevant in this context, and so we may deduce that the hi-jackers are Arabs, as, at the time, most of them were. We deduce, too, that the man knows something about the Arabs, and since he knows that they are not given to organisation, that he must have

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

had regular dealings with them: it is possible, given his military appearance, that he may have commanded a group of Arab soldiers at a time when the British governed certain Arab countries as protectorates.

His comments about the unreliability of the Arabs are likely to have been made in tones of exasperation; her comment, on the other hand, is turning this disadvantage into an advantage, since she is implying, well, if they have never been able to organise things properly, they won't be able to organise this hi-jack, either, so don't worry, we shall be all right. What was bad in one situation turns out, ironically, to be good in another. This message is implicated and has to be worked out.

3,x Lancaster makes a joke about rich Arabs which some readers might think stereotypical and unfair, but which can be defended on the grounds that it is reporting quite accurately on what was known to be happening. Lancaster knew nothing of political correctness, and died before it became necessary that he should: he would be making great fun of its dogmas were he still alive.

A sign above a door announces 'Miss World 1974'. A door-keeper, an old soldier perhaps, is wearing the kind of uniform with epaulettes and cuff markings that indicate his function. He is looking with some surprise at a man with a dark semitic countenance, thin beard and Arab robes who has just arrived. We see the bonnet of a Rolls Royce, and the man is holding a bag marked with a dollar sign (rather an unsubtle gesture for Lancaster, perhaps): the signs mark him as immensely rich. He is asking the door-keeper "Has the bidding started yet?"

On the surface the man has made a category mistake: this is a contest, not an auction: he ought to be asking if the *voting* has started yet; at a deeper level, he is right. We know that girls who win Miss World Competi-

tions often find themselves being bought and sold, not perhaps by Arabs but by film studios and the like. The mis-match proves in fact to be highly appropriate and we shall be amused, if we are, by the way that the displacement of 'voting' by 'bidding' yokes the two words together into a single perception that shows their underlying, and insidious, connection: in this instance, feminists might approve.

3,xi Lancaster also had a shrewd eye for the vagaries of intellectual as well as other kinds of fashion, especially when these fashions appear pretentious.

At the end of December, 1951, Lady Littlehampton took her children, then aged about eight or nine years old, to the theatre to see *Peter Pan* by James Barrie, as we read from a poster on the wall at the back. Her son is stifling a yawn, her daughter is rolling her eyes heavenwards, two signs of boredom or contempt: they are studied gestures which are meant to convey stereotyped meanings: they may of course be simulated.

At any rate, we are meant to read the gestures as implying that the children are thinking, or that they wish their mother to believe that they are thinking, "Oh, that was kids' stuff!" Lady Littlehampton, however, is clearly cross, and is saying "I suppose if I'd told you it was by Sartre you'd have thought it wonderful!" Again, the ironies seem to work on several levels.

Jean-Paul Sartre was the hero of the left-wing intellectual élite in the years after the Second World War, but it is unlikely that Lady Littlehampton's children would, at their age, have heard of him: if they had, they would not have been able to read him: if they had claimed to have read and understood him, this would undoubtedly have been pretense. Human nature being what it is, however, those wishing to be thought up to date

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

intellectually would at that time have automatically rejected anything written by James Barrie and would have attempted to show themselves familiar with the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Lancaster is not mocking the children, as such: he is mocking those who follow the fashion simply because it is the fashion, a weakness which academics and intellectuals are just as likely to display as those who dress themselves in the designs of Christian Dior or Yves St Laurent. Lancaster achieves this aim, which is to mock pretension, by using the children as pretenders to knowledge or wisdom that they clearly would not have had, and it is this mis-match of children and a notoriously difficult philosopher which sharpens the point: we might infer that adults who pretend to knowledge that they do not have are no better than children showing off.

3,xii Twenty years later, while making much the same joke on the vagaries of fashion, he got it rather brilliantly wrong, while fundamentally getting it perfectly right.

It is 1971, as a calendar on the wall tells us. A woman with untidy hair, wearing jeans and no shoes, is stirring a saucepan at a stove. Her son, equally shoeless, is wearing only shorts. A line of washing hangs from the ceiling, while also on the wall is the print of a bearded face and the word Che. In 1971, Che Guevara was the hero of the day amongst the intellectual left and everyone else who aspired to be thought revolutionary.

This included many members of the aristocracy who were ashamed of their favoured birth and adopted the habits of what they supposed were the working class in order to deny their own class, and although from their clothes and the apparent poverty of their room, you would suppose this mother and child actually to be poor, or at any rate working class, this interpretation is contradicted by other evidence. The small boy, who has

the blonde curls of a boy at a private preparatory school, is saying, “Mummy, darling, what *were* the Beatles?” Only children of the upper classes are likely to call their mothers “Mummy, darling,” and speech is still, in Britain today, more powerful evidence of class than clothes, houses or furnishings.

The immediate point of the joke is that in 1971, when the revolutionaries of the world decorated their rooms with Andy Warhol’s print of Che Guevara, many people obviously thought that the Beatles were *passé*, past their prime and out of date. Nonetheless, the boy has obviously heard of them, has heard them being talked about, since he stresses “*were*”, which implies that he is seeking information about something that his mother has just been speaking of since she is looking at him with open-mouthed astonishment. They were “before his time”, though, and he does not even know that they were human beings since he asks “*what* were” they rather than “*who* were” they: either that, or, being (as I deduce from his words) a bright little boy educated at a private school, he may be being disingenuous.

By an irony which I am sure Lancaster would have appreciated, all my students know very well who the Beatles are, but none of them has heard of Che Guevara.

The mis-match, which not all readers might have spotted even then, and fewer still might spot now, is between the appearance of the mother and the boy’s speech, while the Beatles and Che are being matched and compared as fashionable icons. I deduce that Lancaster is at least implying a mis-match between their current fame and their lasting value. Thirty years later, we may be intrigued to see which of the icons has in fact survived: creative artists last longer than revolutionaries¹².

3,xiii Several years earlier, in 1964, Lancaster produced a drawing rich in

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

metonymic details that become powerfully symbolic, a drawing that proved to be prophetic.

A row of sandbags lies between two groups that confront each other across it. In the foreground, an elderly woman is lying propped against the bags, a double-barrelled shot-gun in her hands. Beside her stands an elderly man, his left-hand index finger placed on her back, his right hand raised, the palm facing outwards. The mere profile of another man is seen behind him. Above them, on a standard, flies a flag, bearing a Union Jack in the corner and the motto *There'll Always Be A Bournemouth*. Approaching them from the other side of what is clearly meant to be a barricade come two young men followed by two young women, of whom we only see the heads.

Age is a factor here: so are the clothes. The woman with the shot-gun is wearing a tweed suit and flat hat, the mark of an English country gentlewoman; the man, who has a Kitchener moustache, is also wearing a tweed suit, a regimental tie, and a deerstalker hat; the man whose profile is all we see is wearing a pince-nez and a boater. These clothes signal that they are upper middle-class, probably wealthy, whose pastimes are shooting and boating, both in Britain at the time, upper middle-class pursuits.

The two young men are dressed in the clothes worn by those who ride motor-cycles; one of them has a skull and cross-bones on his chest, while the way in which they are holding their arms is pointedly aggressive. They are Hell's Angels, pirates, whose intent is clearly to wreak havoc amongst their enemies.

Then there is the flag. A popular song during the war, a song meant to encourage patriotism and the desire to defend one's country, was entitled *There'll Always Be An England*, so that the displacement of 'England' and the substitution of 'Bournemouth' is obviously meant to be charged with

significance: which it is. The three on this side of the barrier will not be defending Britain; they will be defending Bournemouth, and what it stands for.

What is Bournemouth? It is a town on the south coast of England, warmer than other parts of Britain, a wealthy place, the home of many retired members of the middle and upper middle classes. Metonymically, it represents wealth, a privileged class, comfortable living conditions, an elderly population. This is what the three on this side of the barrier are defending. Not the world represented by those on the other side of the barrier, who are also English: they stand for the young, the impoverished, the working class or the unemployed, and, we may deduce, the North of England, a colder more industrial place which has always seen itself in some sort of rivalry with the South.

What, therefore, this drawing represents, by means of the signs which stand as representative of their respective worlds, is a civil war: on one side the elderly, rich southerner; on the other side the young, working-class northerner.

Thirty years later, all this came to pass. One Bank Holiday, two football teams, one of them from the North of England, were scheduled to meet in a Cup match in Bournemouth. The town authorities pleaded with the Football Association to relocate the match; the Football Association assured the town that there would be no problem. The supporters of the northern football team descended in train loads on Bournemouth, went on a rampage and did an untold amount of damage.

All this, and yet that wasn't the initial point of the joke. It was somehow incidental, all part of the imaginative worlds which Lancaster could create from a simple situation. The joke was about hair (and the Beatles). The military gentleman's right hand signals Halt, his finger on

the woman's back signals Hold It. He is telling the young men to halt; he is telling the middle-aged woman to wait. The woman is speaking: "But, Colonel, they haven't got any whites of their eyes!" From this, we may deduce that the Colonel has said something like "Wait, don't...the whites of their eyes". We might deduce from the context that the colonel is saying Dont Shoot, and we might deduce this even if we did not know that British riflemen are taught not to shoot at their approaching enemies "until you see the whites of their eyes", which means that the enemy will have to have come very close. (American riflemen are supposed to shoot off at anything however far away it is, or however unsuitable a target it may be.)

And we cannot see the whites of their eyes because their hair hangs down over their foreheads and hides them. In 1964, *The Beatles* were in their heyday, and we were all, or nearly all of us, allowing our hair to grow longer than our fathers approved of.

4. Norman Thelwell (1923-)

Norman Thelwell was born in 1923, and, as far as I know, he is still alive. His family was much humbler than Lancaster's, but like Lancaster he has written delightful memoirs about his early years, although Lancaster's have a patrician elegance that Thelwell might have enjoyed but would not have emulated.

Like Lancaster he grew up in a town, but unlike Lancaster, his great love has been the life of *rural* England, of farms and farmers, the sports and pastimes of the countryside, horses and bird life, and these have been the main subject of his drawings, which are often masterpieces of evocation, for, where Lancaster relies like a Zen painter on a small number of significant details, Thelwell will sometimes load his drawings with an extraordi-

nary wealth of matter, not all of it equally significant though all of it delightful; he is especially good at drawing trees, for the sheer love of them. Like Lancaster, he has a gift for the significant, often lapidary, phrase, which, in conjunction with the drawing, seems to sum up a world of comment, since he, too, used his drawings to reflect on major issues of the day.

4.i Thelwell has enjoyed drawing the country in its many aspects, but one of his lasting preoccupations has been the damage caused by pollution. Over the years he drew many cartoons (most of which appeared in *Punch*) which at the same time as they made jokes about pollution also made sharp and pertinent comments about its evils, somehow all the sharper for being so witty. These drawings were collected in a volume called *The Effluent Society*. This is a direct allusion, of course, to John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, published in 1958, an immensely influential book. Thelwell's book, first published thirteen years later (in 1971), could still rely on everybody recognising the allusion, while the change of a single letter was able to make a witty, and major, statement about pollution: an affluent society is an effluent society: a wealthy society is a wasteful society.

He makes the point very directly in a drawing of two men adrift on a raft: their hair and beards are long; there is no evidence that they have any food; yet they are smiling happily as they contemplate boxes and tin cans and beer bottles floating along on a fairly lively sea. There seems a discrepancy in their response to the objects that they are looking at: "Hello!", says one of them, "We can't be far from civilisation." The irony may be obvious, but it is nevertheless quick-witted: Thelwell has found what T. S. Eliot would have called an "objective correlative" for his insight: civilisation used to be marked by a sense of order, decorum, and delight in

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

the refinements of cultivated life; now, it signifies squalor, lack of consideration, ugliness, and waste.

4,ii The affluent society is also a destructive society, lethally so if you are a small animal. Two small boys are walking on the grassy verge of a country road, trees on either side. One of the boys carries a book entitled 'Nature Notes' and he is saying "So far I've spotted thirteen hedgehogs, four rabbits, a squirrel, three rooks, a chaffinch and a pied wagtail".

This is what we would hope that a small boy on a nature ramble would see, but the road is being used by traffic — a coal lorry, an oil truck, a car — as a racing track, and on the surface of the road lie the slaughtered remains of rabbits, hedgehogs and their like. Where the boys would have expected to see live animals, all they have seen have been dead ones, killed by man's enjoyment of the powers let loose by the internal combustion engine. It is not difficult to change 'internal' into 'infernal'. Thelwell is not the only one to have said as much, but he has said so with sharpness and point, and the kind of wit which makes us smile but also reveals the darker side of our amusements.

4,iii One of Thelwell's favourite devices is to juxtapose two things which belong to the same domain or category, but exist at opposite ends of whatever scale one might draw to measure their extent: his jokes regularly play on incommensurability of scale. A man is leaning on his garden fence, watching another spraying his roses; he is remarking, "I prefer to have green-fly and a clear conscience". If our conscience is not clear, it is because we have done something which we believe to be morally wrong. The speaker is implying that if I am spraying my roses to kill aphids, or green-fly, then this is tantamount to murder and I ought to have a guilty

conscience about it. This comment takes to an extreme — it is a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* — the view that all life is holy, and both questions the view and questions our own acceptance or not of what life is and what it means to kill. Do aphids, like hedgehogs and pied wagtails, have a right to live?

4,iii Thelwell addresses this question many times, and though he is always, through his drawing, creating a comic image, his purposes seem fundamentally serious. The discrepancy between the situation and the response creates the joke, but at the same time the deeper questions are not being mocked. A man is standing in grass beside an overturned stool and picnic hamper, while plastic cups and knives are scattered about the grass, signs that someone has moved quickly and knocked everything over in (her) flight. In his hand he is holding, rather professionally, a small snake, and is speaking to someone (presumably his wife) who is out of the picture: “Don’t be hysterical! They’ve got as much right to live as we have.” We have to deduce that she has said, hysterically, “Kill it! Kill it!”

4,iv Car dumps also interest him, especially when they are in the countryside and constitute an eye sore. A wrecked car shares a dump with oil barrels and old baths; a lorry with a crane has come from the Urban District Council, to lift and remove the car, so we suppose, since two council workmen are preparing to do so. We suppose the men to be council workers, not only because they are wearing a uniform, but because the letter U. D. C. on the tailboard of the lorry stand for ‘Urban District Council’, which thus enables us to identify the men as council workmen, doing an official job; they are not scrap metal merchants.

A woman stands in front of the car, her left hand raised in the gesture

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

which signifies Halt, her right hand spread in a protective gesture in front of the damaged bonnet of the derelict car. She is saying, "Over my dead body! There's a robin nesting in the sump." Clearly, her remark is part of an exchange, which might go like this: "What are you doing?" "We've come to remove the car." "Over my dead body (that is, You'll have to kill me first)" "Why?" "There's a robin nesting in the sump."

Many people might think that there is a discrepancy in seriousness between the situation and the woman's reaction, which they may find funny, but a further discrepancy is even more telling, and more witty: she is wearing the tweed suit and hat of a middle class country woman, just the kind who would telephone a local council to complain about eyesores and demand that they were removed; but round her neck she is wearing a pair of binoculars, the sign of a bird-watcher, and thus we have an ironic contrast between her likely attitudes and behaviour as a member of her class and her hobby.

On a much larger view of things, the joke makes, on a small scale (which is Thelwell's way), a serious comment on the much greater issue of how you balance your priorities.

4,v We have a bird's eye view of the tops of two factory chimneys, belching clouds of black smoke. Two workmen are sitting on the edge of the chimney top, eating their lunch. One is saying to the other "Mind if I smoke?" Since the men would never, of course, be sitting where they are, we might smile at the mis-match of men eating their lunch on the lip of a tall factory chimney, while the mis-match between types of smoke is a simple discrepancy in scale, yet the juxtaposition provokes a more serious question, whose irony might amuse us, if more darkly: Do you mind if I *kill* you? Cigarette smoke? Smoke from a factory chimney? Which is the

more carcinogenic?

4,vi A man in gumboots and shirt sleeves stands beside a pond, edged with flag-stones. He is holding up a spade on whose flat blade lie a number of dead fish; dead fish float on the surface of the pond. He is shouting to someone outside the picture, presumably (we presume) his wife: "Have you been spraying your roses again?" This is one end of a scale at which the other end is the poisoning of the whole environment by chemicals designed to protect or improve some particular part of the environment. People living in Hokkaido will remember the time when thousands of fish were killed after fertilizer used for golf greens had leached into a neighbouring river.

4,vii In a beautiful valley, workmen are erecting vast electricity pylons. "We're very lucky," observes one, "when you think about it, working in such beautiful surroundings." Again, the irony does not need to be underlined: that as a result of their work, the surroundings will no longer be so beautiful. Nonetheless, this additional observation needs to be worked out: we have to deduce the unspoken comment from the evidence that we are given, and we would have to share the view that pylons are unsightly (there are those who think them beautiful).

At the same time, electricity pylons and chemical sprays are metonymical signs for the whole process of modernisation: modernisation may bring benefits but it has harmful side effects. Thirty years ago, such drawings were an attempt, by making people smile, to set them thinking about what we are doing to our environment: now, with the evidence of global warming all about us, we know that Thelwell's warnings were not otiose.

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

4,viii Thelwell has published many collections of his drawings, under a variety of headings, some about horses and the people who ride them, some about fishing, some about gardens, some about space, some about living in suburbia, and some about how people spend their leisure hours.

Several of these are about yachts. A ocean-going yacht is passing a man on a raft: the man on the raft is on his knees, his hands clasped, clearly praying: please help me. The man on the yacht is saying, "I'm sorry, mate, it's a single-handed race". In other words, we infer "If I were to rescue you, there would be two men in the boat, and I should be disqualified: success in the race is more important than your life". "Mate", in the context, is a cruel term to use since it is supposed to mean friend, comrade: its use is false, a fake friendliness covering a cold-hearted ruthlessness. Don't trust anyone who calls you "mate".

Translated to a larger context, this is saying that my success is more important than your life: success in my world is more important than life in yours. That is, the discrepancy between the context and the comment reflects a discrepancy of another kind: between a man's selfishness and his obligations: between those who have and those who have not, between, at the other end of the scale, wealthy countries and poor ones.

4,ix In another yachting scene, closer to the shore, cliffs in the background, the wake of a motor boat can be seen passing on a curve across the bows of a yacht, whose sails are trembling, presumably from an impact: the bows of both boats are damaged. The wake is a trace of what, from its evidence, we can suppose has occurred to have left that trace (see Holmes).

The driver of the motor-boat seems worried and not in control of his craft; the yachtsman, dressed in proper blazer and cap, is calmly using flags to send a message in semaphore, a code of signs. All these details seem, in

the most general sense, to be signs, and, I would argue, they are metonymic in their behaviour: they are consequences of causes, whose trace is left behind on the water, in their wake. Yet when I ask my students to describe what they see, most of them seem to have noticed none of these things; at least they are unable to say that they have.

The wife of the driver of the motor-boat, is saying, angrily, "Did you see what he called you?" Since the yachtsman is using semaphore not words as his code, the wit here is to replace the normal word "hear" with the word "see", which is, of course, a collocational mis-match: we perceive things that we are "called" through the ear not the eye.

At a deeper level, the joke is also about signs themselves and how we interpret them: systems of signs are codes, and we have to know the code before we can interpret the signs. Clearly, the wife of the motor-boat driver is able to read semaphore, and is thus able to understand the message that is being sent by the yachtsman: she hears what she sees.

So, we have to ask ourselves, what did the yachtsman call the driver of the motorboat? If we translate the semaphore into the code of words, symbols that we might hear, we would have to imagine what the driver of one car might say to the driver of another car that at an intersection had, perhaps, run into him: "You bloody fool. Why can't you watch where you are going?" He would have called him "a bloody fool". There is also a nice mis-match between the calmness of the yachtsman's demeanour and the violence of his supposed words.

4,x A woman is sitting on a picnic hamper beneath rocks at the sea side; she has drawn her coat up over her head; her husband, so we presume him to be, has done the same with his coat, for it is raining. A transistor radio is hanging on a cord around his neck. He is speaking and is clearly happy;

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

his wife is looking at him furiously. There is a mis-match between their separate reactions: she is furious because it is raining and the picnic is spoiled; she is also furious with him because something that he has just heard on the radio is of much greater significance to him than a spoiled picnic. He is saying, and he is delighted, "This could save the match for England".

We deduce that he has been listening on the radio to a commentary about a match, a sporting contest, that is being played between England and some other country; we deduce as well that whatever the game is, it is a game that will be stopped by rain; we deduce further, since both grammar and semantics implies it, that at this point in the game the English team is losing. By a process of elimination, and by applying our knowledge of how games are conducted, we deduce that the game cannot be soccer or rugby or tennis and must be cricket.

The rain which is upsetting his wife pleases him because the England cricket team will not lose the match, as they were obviously going to do had it not rained. There is thus a discrepancy between the values of husband and wife. This is not specific to the world of the joke, however: it is shared with the world outside the joke: that England should not lose a test match (cricket) is more important for most men than that a picnic should be ruined. One of Thelwell's skills is actually to take everyday attitudes and find a situation that, as a metonymic sign, can represent that outside world: the sign will call to mind all the other occasions when such attitudes might be expressed, and because it is often slightly absurd, it will be witty. The true wit here is in finding the example which typifies.

4,xi A man stands in front of a door, through which he is about to pass. We deduce that he is inside his house, on the point of going out, for he is

addressing a remark over his shoulder to someone who, we deduce, is still in the house. He is dressed in a tweed suit, symbol of the countryman off duty, a bag of golf clubs over one shoulder, a fisherman's basket over another, a fishing rod in its canvas case in his hand. We assume that the person he is addressing is his wife, for he is saying "What on earth do you want your knitting for?"

As with many of Thelwell's drawings, we have to recreate the conversation of which this is the significant moment: the moment which tells of what has gone before and of what will come later. We suppose that the conversation, at its simplest, has gone something like this. "Come along. Hurry up." "Please wait a moment." "Why?" "I want to find my knitting." "What on earth do you want your knitting for?" This is where we then have to supply her reply.

It is common knowledge that if you are going to play a game of golf or go fishing, this is likely to take all day: both are lengthy, protracted activities. His question assumes, or appears to, that she will be quite happy to watch him play golf or fish; that she will not want to occupy her time with her own pursuits: it implies, on his part, arrogance, selfishness and male insensitivity. Her reply is likely to imply that they do not, on this issue at least, share common ground, and might therefore go something like this: "Do you think that I am going to spend all day watching you fish and play golf, twiddling my thumbs doing nothing while you enjoy yourself. I want something to occupy my time." Her husband is too much of a male chauvinist to appreciate this.

4,xii It is clear that Thelwell, as well as being an ironist, was also fond of puns, visual as well as verbal, and he was attracted, for instance, to the implications of the way in which the word "shoot" had been adapted by the

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

cinema as in the expression “to shoot a film”.

This very week, I have seen this joke used again, but spelled out: a rifle and camera in the drawing, the word “shoot” in the caption. Thirty years ago, Thelwell was much more subtle: he never actually used the word “shoot” and he never showed a gun: a camera in situations where a gun might once have used was enough to set up the associations which would have enabled his readers “to appreciate the joke”.

As corn is being harvested and the square of standing corn in the middle of the field gets smaller and smaller, a group of men with cameras stand around it to film the rabbits as they run from hiding: once it would have been guns.

A decoy bird is used to attract a passing kestrel (Hopkins’ windhover), a camera in a hide ready to film it: once shotguns would have waited for the ducks to decide on seeing the decoy that it was a safe place to settle. Where this kind of knowledge disappears it becomes necessary to supply it, and the joke seems to lose much of its force. We can only appreciate a joke (the word that collocates in this context) if we share common knowledge and the common ground that would encourage us to look at what we know in the same kind of way.

Perhaps it is hopeless to expect my students to supply this. Yet so many of Thelwell’s drawings might so easily be given a Japanese context that I shall continue to try.

4,xiii A man standing on a wooden pier in helping another man up from the river into which he has obviously fallen. Factories line the far bank; in the foreground a large pipe is pouring filth into the river; the man who has been in the river is black with the filth. His rescuer is saying “I’m glad you won’t be needing the kiss of life”, which means, I am glad that you are

conscious and will not need me to try to get you to breath again by applying my lips to yours: I am glad, therefore, that I shall not have to smell the vile smell nor taste the vile taste of the polluted river. We have, that is, to understand both what is presupposed and what is entailed by the remark in that context, in that situation.

4,xiv I could go on, endlessly explicating cartoons such as these, and when I do so in the classroom it is, as I have suggested, to help my students to attend to all the signs that drawing like these contain, to identify them and to give them meaning in an overall interpretation of what the joke is all about.

Since, although they are old, the cartoons of Lancaster and Thelwell are still relevant as social comments on our own times, or because they are so well drawn and in themselves as drawings so pleasing to the eye, and as their captions always require of us that we shall set them in the context of an extended conversation, we are forced to attend to all the relationships which, as individual signs, they have with all those parts of their domain that are not mentioned or referred to directly, but that have to be brought “into the picture”, brought into play, if the story that the joke is telling is to be understood.

4,xv Sometimes, Thelwell dispenses with captions, and these are often the easiest cartoons to interpret. In one, cars are entering and leaving a National Park, which has become a vast car park: the comment is clear: while cars enable us to reach an amenity designed for rest and restoration, the number of cars who make use of it effectively destroys its benefits.

In another, a man in pyjamas leans out of a bedroom window, a broom in his hand, with which he beats at the underside of an overpass along which

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

heavy traffic is racing just above his head: his futile cries that he would like to be able to get to sleep will go unheard. The ironies create the joke and can be appreciated easily.

Neither of these cartoons is hard to understand and no one will find it difficult to interpret them: all advanced countries suffer from similar problems. In a third example, however, while the contents are easy enough to describe, the significant detail which makes the joke limits understanding of the joke to those (and only those) who have knowledge of a practice that English schools abandoned long ago, known only through tradition.

A boy sits on a pony, facing the corner where two walls of a room meet: the walls are of brick, which suggests a stable, and the boy is wearing a crash helmet on which the letter D has been painted. The pony is standing with humble patience; the boy is looking furious. The secret is the D. In less enlightened times, a child who had performed badly at school would be made to wear a pointed cap with a D on it and forced to stand in the corner, while the other children might have mocked him.

The D stood for “dunce”, which is a malformation of “Duns”, as in “Duns Scotus”, the extremely clever mediaeval philosopher who was so clever that his enemies considered him a fool; but, clever or not, the word Duns, dunce, came by metonymic sidestepping, to mean “a Fool”. The little boy, or his horse, has made a bad mistake, and is being punished by being made to “stand in the corner”, wearing, to make the point, a dunce’s cap. That he is standing in the corner with a dunce’s cap on his head presupposes that he has been foolish and is therefore being punished. The joke is in the displacement of the hat and the “school” context: this is a riding school.

4,xvi One final example: a woman stands at an open window, leaning out

into the garden, where, on the lawn, an enormous number of birds, of many different species, are all looking at her expectantly. She is saying, rather crossly, "Winter's over!"

We must work out from the grouping what is presupposed by her remark and what the remark entails. The end of winter implies a change in conditions, which presupposes that during the winter, when conditions were different, the relationship between the woman and the birds was different, too. We suppose, from the birds' attitudes, that they are expecting her to feed them, which leads us to suppose that this, during the winter, is what she did, which will presuppose that conditions were then too hard for them to feed themselves.

The end of winter entails the coming of spring, which entails in the context that the conditions will improve and that the birds will be able to find food for themselves. What, of course, the woman is actually saying is "I am not going to feed you. Go Away!" I would take this to be a conversational implicature¹³, an implication that we can only interpret in terms of the conversation in which it occurs, once we have attended to all the presuppositions and entailments.

Conclusion

I draw to a close only because I have probably over-run the space at my disposal and because deadlines press. If I continued with these analyses, it would only be to reinforce with more examples how the kinds of joke in the best sorts of cartoon do their work. Yet as an Englishman looking only at English cartoons, I have probably overlooked many features of jokes in other cultures that would extend the kind of taxonomy of jokes of which one might like finally to have some sense.

On Wit: The Aptness of Mis-matching (Willie Jones)

Still, I am fairly sure that whatever we might add to the characteristics which I have suggested operate in the jokes that I am familiar with — incommensurability of scale, irony, paradox, plays on words, incongruities of all kinds, displacements, discrepancies in implied values — one of the abiding features will be the need for the teller and “reader” of a joke to share common knowledge in order to understand the joke’s content, and common ground to share its attitudes and thus appreciate it with sympathy, because only thus will the reader (or if the joke is oral, the listener) be able to work out what is unspoken but implied by the metonymic signs that constitute the matter of the joke, the material of the anecdote of which the joke is the climax.

It will require hard work on our part to uncover and “bring to light” the presence of contingent signs that are not given but that must be understood as being either presupposed or entailed if we hope to be able to experience the joke in its fullness. Yet this hard work, and the solutions it will reveal, constitute the pleasure that we feel when we “see” a joke, when we get the point. Our pleasure in a joke’s wit, in its maker’s cleverness, will be complemented by our corresponding pleasure in our own ability to grasp it.

And if a joke is to impress us with its wit, with the aptness of its odd and incongruous combinations, it has to demonstrate the underlying patterns of similarity which make the comparison apt, just as figures of comparison like metaphors (which in a way jokes seem to shadow) depend upon our recognition of those connections between the compared domains that render the metaphor effective. These apt juxtapositions open our eyes to the complexities of our environments and the events of our lives, while they make use of the symbols, verbal as well as otherwise, that we play with every day to come to some sort of accommodation with the world and our place in it. Jokes, when they are good, seem to do this remarkably well:

but only clever men and women, who have wit in the original sense, are good at making jokes, anecdotes that we think witty. And we enjoy them because we are not clever enough ourselves to think of them *for* ourselves: we are tickled by another's wit.

All of these features can be subsumed under the heading of semiotics. Yet if one is looking at it from a more traditional point of view, we can discuss them, as in a sketchy way I have tried to do, under the heading of Rhetoric: the arts of persuasion.

One of the most significant of the figures of rhetoric, turns out, I believe, to be metonymy and its links not only with the making of symbols but also with modes of thinking that have since the time of Peter Ramus in the sixteenth century been thought of as falling within the domain of logic: that is, the devices of implication which require of us the ability to read across, between and behind the lines, to seek for clues and their traces, and to develop the habit of following them: to take the sign and understand what it stands for, what it is associated with, what it leads from and what it leads towards.

Notes

1. Over the years I have written a series of articles about metonymy: this is number seven. My first essay in this series was published in 1984 in *The Northern Review*, Hokkaido University, No 12: 'Identifying Metonymies'.
2. James Thurber gives a lovely account of metonymy in his short essay 'Here Lies Miss Groby' (*Vintage Thurber, Vol I*, Penguin Books, 1963, and also *The Thurber Carnival*, also Penguin).
3. My fourth essay in the series about metonymy was published in *The*

Northern Review, no 19: 'The Implications of Metonymy'.

4. The fifth and sixth essays in the series were published in *The Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, Hokkai Gakuen University, Nos 5 and 6: 'The Sources of Collocational Choice' (1995), and 'The Figure in the Idiom' (1996).
5. I write about this distinction in my first essay, 1984. I. A. Richards spoke of the general context as the tenor (the overall theme), the metaphorical term as the vehicle, the term which carried the metaphor. I have found the terms 'continuous' for the theme and 'discontinuous' for the metaphor, first introduced by J. David Sapir (*The Social Use of Metaphor*, U. of Pennsylvania, 1977), more helpful. The discontinuous term, the metaphor, is foregrounded; the continuous theme is the background.
6. The word 'text', along with 'textile', 'texture' and 'context' come from the Latin verb, *textere*, to weave.
7. Sherlock Holmes believed in the imagination. We imagine what might have happened. We act on the supposition that it did happen. If our hypothesis turns out to be correct, we deduce what would follow from this. The story (and video) *Silver Blaze* is an admirable demonstration of Holmes's use of the hypothetico-deductive method of detection.
8. I hope that this is an original metaphor, but I cannot be sure. I am afraid that I may have cribbed it from someone else, but if so, I cannot say who that would have been.
9. I was always tremendously shocked when medical students at Hokudai would regularly come to Siekyo for lunch with stethoscopes in the pockets of their white overalls. I took this to be a form of showing off ("Look at me! I'm a medical student!"), but it was disgraceful that the hospital should have allowed the stethoscopes to be taken outside and

scandalous that the students should have risked contaminating their essential instruments for the sake of self-glorification.

10. In the phrase “board and lodging”, the word ‘board’ refers to the table on which food is placed, and so metonymically stands for food; when we step into a plane, we board it, a term taken from the boards which once formed the main deck of a ship, when, literally, one went ‘on board’.
11. We run a risk when travelling if we are not aware that gestures which we may make at home without trouble may be interpreted differently in other countries, as one of my students once discovered: he raised two fingers in a shop to signify that he wanted two (of whatever it was) and the shop attendant was so insensed that my friend thought he was going to be assaulted there and then: the gesture in Britain is an insult.
12. For the last twenty years, it has been *de rigueur* in almost every kind of work of literary criticism or sociology to bow down before the name of Michel Foucault. I have just read that the days of post-modernism are numbered and that his name is disappearing from the bibliographies of such books: *sic transit gloria mundi*.
13. It is perhaps inappropriate to reserve this comment to the final note, since it might have formed a major part of my argument, and will do so if I ever have a chance to revise this piece. Paul Grice distinguished between conventional implicatures such as “Shut the door”, which conventionally implies, grammatically and semantically, that the door is open, and conversational implicatures, which can only be interpreted in the particular conversation in which they occur. “Your trappings” (2,ii) can only be interpreted in the specific context in which the words are uttered. If the woman had uttered the words while holding up a bridle and a saddle, the implications would have been very different.