A linguistic study of humour and allusions in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham*

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Abstract

Farmer Giles of Ham is a satirical story by J. R. R. Tolkien. It is full of humour and allusions. The diversity of these elements allows for a detailed linguistic study distinguishing different levels at which the humour can be found and the different ways in which it is achieved. In the present paper, we attempt to discuss these devices and levels of humour and draw some conclusions on their effects. Our study is reinforced by a discussion of theoretical preliminaries of humour analysis, including the classification of the different levels, forms and devices of humour, as well as a brief discussion of the most widely acknowledged theory of humour – the incongruity theory. Using this theoretical framework, we explore the possibilities of viewing the phenomenon of humour in literature from a linguistic perspective and attempt to show the utility of this perspective in literature studies.

Lingwistyczna analiza humoru i aluzji w opowiadaniu J. R. R. Tolkiena pt. *Farmer Giles of Ham*

Abstrakt

Farmer Giles of Ham (*Rudy Dżil i jego pies* lub *Gospodarz Giles z Ham*) to satyryczne opowiadanie autorstwa angielskiego pisarza J.R.R. Tolkiena. Jest pełne humoru i aluzji, których różnorodność pozwala na dokonanie szczegółowej analizy lingwistycznej, w której mogą zostać wyróżnione poziomy, na których zachodzi efekt humorystyczny, oraz środki, poprzez które tenże efekt jest osiągany. Autor niniejszego artykułu podejmuje się omówienia tych dwóch aspektów, oraz przedstawia wnioski płynące z przeprowadzonej analizy. Studium wykorzystuje uprzednio przygotowane zaplecze teoretyczne analizy humoru, zawierające między innymi klasyfikację różnych jego poziomów i rodzajów, oraz środków używanych do jego wytworzenia. Zawarty jest w nim również opis jednej z najbardziej uznawanych teorii humoru, a mianowicie teorii niespójności. Przy użyciu tych podstaw teoretycznych, autor chce pokazać możliwości, jakie daje spojrzenie na teksty literatury z perspektywy lingwistycznej, oraz ukazać użyteczność tego podejścia w literaturoznawstwie.

Słowa kluczowe

humor, teoria niespójności, aluzje, środki językowe, analiza lingwistyczna

> The present author would like to dedicate the present paper to Zbigniew Pełczyński, Professor emeritus of Pembroke College, Oxford, and friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, for his encouragement to read *Farmer Giles of Ham* and presenting the author with its first Polish edition received from J.R.R. Tolkien himself.

1. Introduction

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973), apart from being a famous author, was a distinguished philologist and professor

of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, where he had also received his academic education. His academic interests were Anglo-Saxon literature and many extinct languages, including Old English, Middle English, Old Norse and Gothic. During his academic years, he worked on the team of the Oxford English Dictionary and made a great contribution to its first edition. On the grounds of literature, he is perhaps best known for such classics as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, or the posthumously published *Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-Earth* which are set in his imaginary world of Middle-Earth.

The so-called Middle-Earth legendarium, however, is not the only literary undertaking that Tolkien had embarked upon, as in the course of his lifetime he had written several short stories unrelated to Middle-Earth, and these are *Leaf by Niggle*, *Smith of Wootton Major*, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* and *Farmer Giles of Ham*, the last of which is the subject of the present paper.[1]

Farmer Giles of Ham is set in a legendary time after the departure of the Romans and before the reign of King Arthur. Throughout the narrative, its main hero – Farmer Giles – has to face different perils: the first one is a stray giant whom he manages to scare away; the second one is a dragon invading the country, to whom Giles makes a promise to pay a ransom in exchange for sparing his life. However, when the dragon finally does that, Giles faces the king of the country, who claims his right to the dragon's money. The story ends with Giles driving the king away with the help of the Dragon and becoming the king himself.

The story was written in its early form to entertain Tolkien's children, but later it was enlarged and revised to be read out at a meeting of the Lovelace Club at Worcester College, Oxford, on 14th February 1938 where Tolkien was invited as a guest speaker. Hammond and Scull (2014: 16) state that "In the revised version he introduced most of the proper names, jokes, and allusions that enliven the book". By doing so, Tolkien had

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[1] *Farmer Giles of Ham* has been translated into Polish twice: by Skibniewska in 1962 and Frąc in 2008 (Tolkien 1962, 2008).

converted it from a children's story into a satirical story for adults (Hammond and Scull 2014: 66). Moreover, he refined it with a particular audience in mind, namely the Lovelace Club. Therefore it contains some allusions to life at Oxford University, which will be discussed in our analysis. As is apparent from the minutes of the meeting (Goodrum 2016) and one of Tolkien's letters (Tolkien 1981: 66), the reading of the story had a powerful humorous effect on the audience as it met with its exhilarated reaction. This encouraged Tolkien to publish the story in 1949. Its comprehensive critical edition by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull appeared fifty years later including elaborate notes on various details of the narrative.[2]

The present paper aims to analyse various instances of humour in *Farmer Giles of Ham* in the light of one of the most widely accepted general theories of humour – the theory of incongruity. The analysis concentrates on what is commonly referred to in the literature as Verbally Expressed Humour (VEH), that is humour expressed by means of language (Attardo 1994: 96 as quoted in Ritchie 2004: 13). We concentrate on its mechanisms from a purely linguistic point of view and aim to examine some linguistic devices that introduce humour at various levels. In order to do that, in the following section, we discuss several theories of humour and present various methods of classifying VEH which will inform our analysis of *Farmer Giles* and put the present paper in a wider context of the study of humour in general.

2. Humour analysis and its methods

2.1. Basic theories of humour

Humour is a very complex phenomenon and can be examined from many different perspectives. Researchers are certainly very far from being able to capture the nature of humorous phenomena within one, comprehensive and formal theory that

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[2] Our study includes extensive references to its revised (2014) version.

would, for instance, enable us to prime artificial intelligence with a human-like "sense of humour". This *essentialist approach* (as it is often called) stems from a presumption that there exists some essence of humour that is present in every humorous phenomenon. It is contrasted with *the anti-essentialist approach,* stating that humorous phenomena cannot be boiled down to a single essence or theory, which point is supported by scholars such as Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1990) or Goldstein and McGhee (1972: xxi) (Latta 1999: 5 as quoted in Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 97-98).

There are nonetheless several long-standing theories of humour, or rather classes of theories (although not un-disputed) that are able to capture some important elements of what humour is. Most authors, such as Attardo (1994: 47 as quoted in Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 109), Raskin (1984: 31), Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004: 147), Berger (2017: 2-5) and Meyer (2000: 312), distinguish three main classes of these theories: relief, superiority and incongruity.

The relief theories – often associated with the work of Sigmund Freud – state that humour is a form of releasing some nervous tension (Hurley et al. 2011: 44; Berlyne 1972: 43-60). It is argued that when the tension is released, it creates a pleasant feeling (e.g. laughter). The relief theories aim to look at humour from a psychoanalytical perspective and put it in relation to a person's psychology (Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 109).

The superiority theories view humour in a more social context and state that it arises through a feeling of being better than somebody or seeing faults in something or someone and making fun of them (Billig 2005: 39; Lintott 2016: 348; Kuipers 2006: 143-145). Such a feeling is also defined as *sudden glory* by Thomas Hobbes (1840: 46), one of the advocates of that theory.

The most widely accepted theories of humour are those of incongruity (Ritchie 2004: 46; Ross 1998: 7; Hurley et al. 2011: 45; Franklyn 2006: 77). Their premise is that humour involves some type of incongruity or, in other words, it is

centred on introducing something unexpected or absurd in a certain situation – an element of surprise – that very often has an impact on our perception of that situation or sheds some new light on our understanding of it (Deckers and Kizer 1975: 215). The humorous effect occurs when the perceiver can understand the incongruous element and see its connection with the situation (Suls 1983: 41-42; Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 111). That is the reason why a joke is not funny for a certain person if they need someone else to explain it to them after failing to understand it on their own.

2.2. Linguistic approaches in studying humour

Apart from the basic theories of humour, various scholars, for instance, Raskin (1984) and Attardo (1989 as quoted in Attardo and Raskin 1991: 294) propose to look at humour from a strictly linguistic perspective and devised several linguistic theories of humour. The first one – the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) formulated by Raskin (1984) – states that each instance of humour expressed through language needs to be compatible with at least two opposite semantic scripts. A semantic script is, as Raskin writes, "a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it" (Raskin 1984: 81). In other words, it should be possible for language users to read a specific text in at least two opposite ways for the text to be humorous.

Raskin's theory was later extended by Attardo and Raskin (1991) resulting in the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), which classified the script opposition as being one of the six *Knowledge Resources* informing the structure of a joke, with the other five being: Logical Mechanism – logical connection between the opposing scripts (Masaeli and Heidari-Shahreza 2016: 232); Situation – reality described; Target – the person or object being referred to in the joke or ridiculed by it (optional); Narrative Strategy – the organisational structure of the joke; and finally Language – the medium necessary to verbalize the joke. It is worth noting that the

GTVH theory was later developed to take into account other humorous texts with a different structure than that of a joke (Attardo 2001).

These are the most popular linguistic theories of humour. They have been employed in various linguistic studies of humour in specific texts, for example in Antonopoulou (2002), Masaeli and Heidari-Shahreza (2016), Corduas et al. (2008) and Saude (2018). On the other hand, there are also linguistic studies which apply the general theories of humour, for instance, the incongruity theory, e.g. Magnotta and Strohl (2011) or Adjei (2015). This last approach will be assumed in our study, for reasons briefly outlined below.

2.3. Why incongruity?

Virtually any of the above-mentioned theories of humour could be effectively applied in a linguistic analysis of humour in *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Nevertheless, we deem the incongruity theory to be the most suitable for this task mainly because it concentrates more on the structure of the stimuli that evoke humour, i.e. humorous events etc., and less on our relation to these stimuli, as opposed to the superiority theory for instance. Additionally, we have chosen the incongruity theory because it fits well the narrative of *Farmer Giles* which is full incongruous elements and provides a big amount of data that can be analysed with the use of that theory. Finally, it is very simple and thus versatile in addressing various instances of humour, which is what we will attempt to demonstrate in our analysis. Therefore we now proceed to present the specific theory and methods that will be used in our analysis.

2.4. Types of incongruity

Ritchie (2004: 49-50), in his discussion of incongruity, describes two of its distinctions in the literature of the subject. These are *static* vs. *dynamic* incongruity and *inherent* vs. *presentational* incongruity.

In the first distinction, the first type of incongruity is called *static* as it arises from a certain absurd or incongruous configuration of objects or concepts and is perceived at once as a whole. As Ritchie (2004: 49-50) writes, "The static form of incongruity can be a property of a particular situation or configuration of elements, or even an event if it is sufficiently brief that it is regarded as instantaneous". A good example of this could be a concept of a dragon in sweatpants.

The second part of this distinction – the *dynamic* incongruity – is one that arises rather from a sequence of events or concepts incongruous to one another. As Ritchie (2004: 49-50) observes, "the oddity or incongruity does not involve a configuration of objects perceived all at the same time, but the temporal sequence of events or ideas creates the effect". An example here could be an elephant which tries to kill a fly on its head with its trunk and every time it slaps it, it misses and slaps itself on the head to the point when it knocks itself unconscious.

The second distinction tries to determine whether the incongruity lies in a situation or a concept itself – *inherent* incongruity – or depends on the way a certain situation is described creating an amusing effect – *presentational* incongruity. Both of the above-mentioned examples can be deemed as inherent, whereas an example of presentational incongruity could be, as Ritchie (2004: 50) proposes: "Oscar Wilde's description of fox-hunting as the 'unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable'".

Ritchie (2004: 50) combines these two distinctions and thus discerns four possible types of incongruity: static inherent (combination of objects/concepts funny on its own), static presentational (combination of objects/concepts funny thanks to the way they are presented), dynamic inherent (sequence of events funny on its own) and finally dynamic presentational (sequence of events funny thanks to the way they are presented). It is important to note that all of these forms of incongruity can be found within Verbally Expressed Humour,

which makes this distinction useful for the analysis presented in this paper.

2.5. Levels of incongruity

Apart from distinguishing the types of incongruity, one can distinguish several levels at which incongruity can occur. First of all, the Verbally Expressed Humour can be divided into verbal humour (depending on the linguistic elements e.g. ambiguity in puns) and referential humour (depending on the reality described e.g. situational humour in jokes) (Ritchie 2004: 13). However, for the use of the present paper, we propose a further distinction of these levels, which is presented in Figure 1.
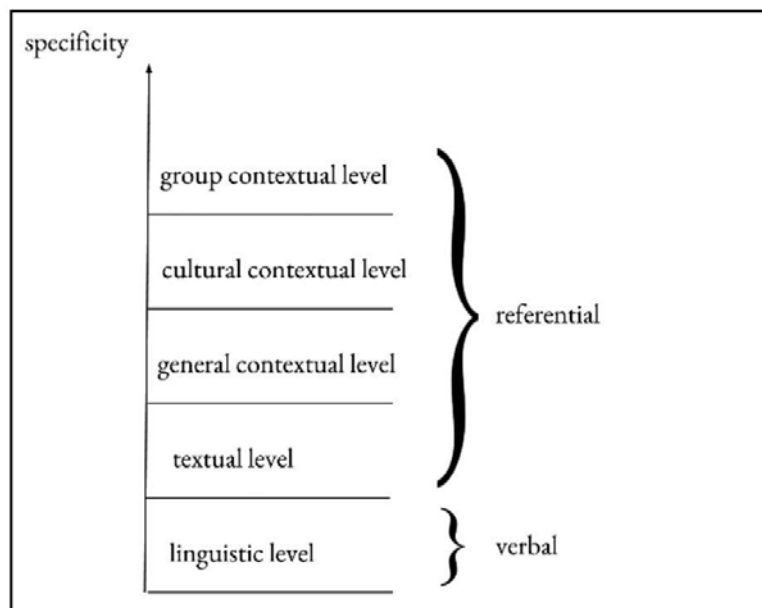
Figure 1

The distinction proposed is based on the question of what knowledge one should possess in order to understand certain humorous element, whether it is just the knowledge of the language (*linguistic level*), the knowledge of a certain text (for example, a story) in which it occurs (*textual*), the general knowledge of the world (*general contextual*), the knowledge of the specific culture and its customs (*cultural contextual*) or finally the knowledge of a certain circle or group of people (*group contextual*). In order to understand linguistic (verbal) humour, one should just understand the language in which it is expressed, and to understand textual humour, one should know the contents of the specific text and so on.

Thanks to such distinction, it can be explained, for example, why certain jokes are funny only to one group of people and not others, as in order to understand them, very detailed knowledge of this circle and its manners and ways of life is required. Such jokes are most commonly referred to as *inside-jokes.* As will be shown in the analysis, Tolkien included several inside jokes in *Farmer Giles of Ham* which will be discussed as well.

2.6. Devices causing incongruity

Having established what the types and levels of incongruity are, one can also list several ways or devices through which the incongruity (and, consequently, the humorous effect) can be achieved.

A very common device is a joke, being a very short story or anecdote with a humorous ending, which comprises of a build-up (a narrative or a dialogue describing a certain situation) and a punchline (final portion of the text with a surprising turn, which evokes some incongruity). But apart from a joke, which is a rather hermetic unit and, in most cases, does not require any context to be uttered, there are many ways in which humour occurs in other uses of language, for example, day-to-day conversations. Dynel (2009) defines it as conver-

sational humour. She distinguishes various devices which can make a conversation humorous, and these are as follows:

- lexemes – lexical units used for a humorous effect which are relevant to the whole utterance; most of them are neologisms, or novel words with a new meaning, often formed through various word-formation processes, e.g. "*adultery* – a state of being an adult" (Dynel 2009: 1287);
- phrasemes – similar to lexemes, except that these are whole phrases and not individual words or compound words;
- wittisisms and retorts:
    o witticisms – clever remarks used in conversation and giving it some new meaning, resembling a punchline in a joke;
    o retorts – unexpected, often cheeky responses to some utterance;
- stylistic figures:
    o simile/comparison – usually of absurd nature, which causes incongruity;
    o metaphor – based on an incongruous conceptual similarity between the object of the metaphor and the device of the metaphor, e.g. *He's got a PhD in procrastination*;
    o hyperbole or understatement (meiosis) – exaggerating or diminishing something which causes an incongruous or sarcastic effect;
    o paradox – a statement showing internal contradiction, e.g. *That was very unkingly of the king*;
    o irony – a statement with the literal meaning opposite to the implicit meaning;
- puns – statements based on a linguistic ambiguity at some level, which can have at least two interpretations and thus are incongruous;
- allusions – statements either referring to some other text or situation, often changing slightly its original form or meaning or directly quoting some text relevant to the situation;
- register clashes – describing something with unnecessarily elevated language or unnecessarily trivial language causing an incongruous effect;

- teasing:
  - mocking or imitative response to some utterance, jocularly challenging;
  - banter – an exchange of teases;
- putdowns/mockery:
  - ridiculing something or someone;
  - self-denigrating humour – a kind of putdown ridiculing oneself.

This classification can be contrasted with another one proposed by Shade (1996: 2-5) who divides verbal humour into twelve categories: pun, riddle, joke, satire, limerick, parody, anecdote, farce, irony, sarcasm, tall tale and wit. However, for the purpose of the present paper, we will use the classification suggested by Dynel, as it is more precise and linguistically oriented. Of course, the completeness of such lists may be always disputed, as in some cases, perhaps, incongruity could be induced by some other factor or in some other way. Nonetheless, the devices listed above are the most common ways of introducing a humorous effect and occur very frequently in *Farmer Giles of Ham* – as will become apparent in the analysis. Besides, Dynel mentions the devices of conversational humour, and even though these devices have similar effects in various uses of language (everyday conversations, stories, plays, songs etc.), they vary depending on the type of those uses, e.g. other devices can occur in stories and everyday conversations.

This being so, we would like to introduce yet another device that is common in literature, namely grotesque. It can be roughly defined as a figure (a character, object or even a situation) in literature which violates some characteristic features of its prototype. In other words, it is an absurd distortion of a prototypical image of a certain thing. It is the essential element of satire, which is a form of ridiculing and mocking certain behaviour or a person. It can be found in various places in *Farmer Giles*. Grotesque and satire can be classified as a type of literary sarcasm, which is also meant to mock and ridicule something. Under this category we can also

find such devices as irony, hyperbole, meiosis, mimicry and mockery, also quite common in the story.

2.7. Closing remarks on the methodology

While analysing each instance of humour in the story, we will attempt to answer questions such as:

- – In what way is it humorous?
- – On what level is it humorous?
- – How is the humour achieved?

Using the criteria presented in this section, we will be able to categorize and even quantify the humour in the story and closely examine its mechanisms. We will try to find the mentioned types and levels of incongruity and the devices used to induce it.

The discussion of the humorous elements could be arranged in many ways, either chronologically or according to the type, level or device of incongruity. Even though the first arrangement would be a more natural one, for the sake of clarity we have arranged our analysis by the most commonly used devices correlated with the levels of incongruity. Thanks to this method, we can extract the most important humoristic elements and avoid getting lost in the unnecessary minutiae of the narrative. In the analysis, we will concentrate on devices such as:

- – puns and wordplay (linguistic humour);
- – register clashes (linguistic humour);
- – intratextual links, paradoxes and situational humour (textual humour);
- – anachronism (general and cultural contextual humour);
- – grotesque and general sarcasm (general and cultural contextual humour);
- – extratextual allusions (cultural and group contextual humour).

These are the most common devices introducing humour (in the form of incongruity) in *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Their various instances are analysed in the following section in accordance with the methodology presented before.

3.   Analysis and discussion of humour in the story

3.1. Introductory remarks

Just to show the scale of the humorous phenomena in the story, we have vertically aligned all utterances of the narrator and the characters in the story in one column. Every utterance introducing some form of humour (conforming to the criteria discussed in the previous section) to the story, is marked in the column. The entire story, arranged utterance-by-utterance, is presented in the Figure 2.
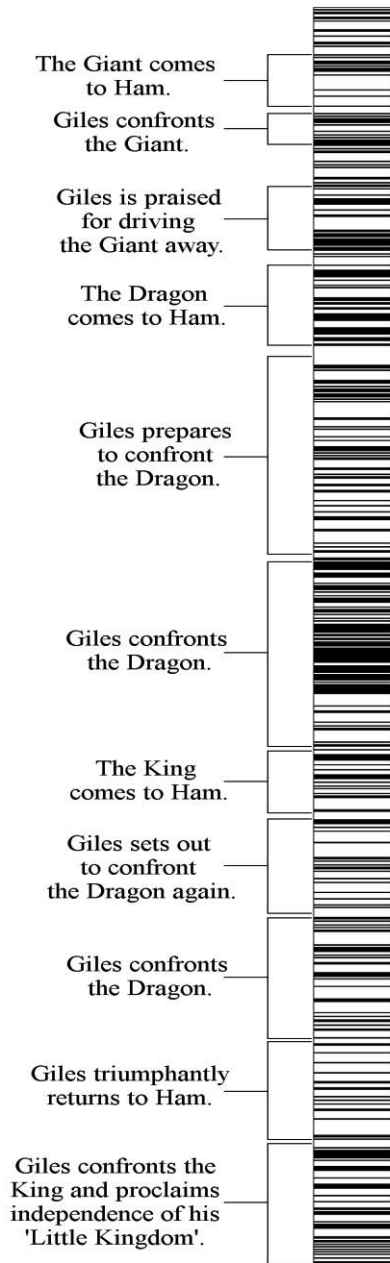
As can be seen, the utterances containing humour are quite frequent and fairly equally distributed in the whole story. This is very crucial for the effect it presumably had on the audience (the Lovelace Club) as thanks to the frequent emergence of the humorous elements, the amusement of the audience could be kept at a relatively high level throughout the reading.

From a statistical point of view[3], out of the total of 1007 utterances in the story (excluding the foreword which was not present in the version for the Lovelace Club), as many as 375 contain some form of humour or are a part of a larger structure introducing it (e.g. a build-up for a joke, or develop-ment of some humorous detail). The humorous utterances amount to ⅓ of the whole narrative.

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[3] For similar approaches to humour analysis see Attardo (2001) and Cor-duas et al. (2008).

Linear arrangement of the narrative
(humour marked in black)

The Giant comes
to Ham.

Giles confronts
the Giant.

Giles is praised
for driving
the Giant away.

The Dragon
comes to Ham.

Giles prepares
to confront
the Dragon.

Giles confronts
the Dragon.

The King
comes to Ham.

Giles sets out
to confront
the Dragon again.

Giles confronts
the Dragon.

Giles triumphantly
returns to Ham.

Giles confronts the
King and proclaims
independence of his
'Little Kingdom'.

Figure 2

Of course, some may raise the objection that humour can lie beyond determined structures and it is either impossible or useless to try to quantify it within such units. We do not deny this multidimensional nature of humourous phenomena. Nevertheless, when we narrow humour down to incongruity and establish different types of concrete devices that introduce it, we can at least determine whether a given utterance includes any of such devices or not. By distinguishing the utterances that include these devices and thus introduce incongruity, we can see the distribution of such utterances within a larger portion of text. This may not provide us with an exhaustive coverage of *all* humour that can lie in the story but at least gives us an idea of the frequency and distribution of specific devices that can, in turn, be markers of incongruity – an important substrate of humour. Therefore let us now take a closer look at various forms of humour that can be identified in the story using the proposed criteria.

3.2. Linguistic humour: puns and wordplay

Tolkien, being a philologist, loved to weave puns and jocular wordplay into his narratives. *Farmer Giles of Ham* is a chief example of this, with many puns that can be identified throughout its narrative.

The first instance of a pun occurs at the very beginning of the story, where it is said that Giles lives in the village of Ham which is described as being "only a village" (p. 39). This is a form of verbal (linguistic) humour, as the meaning of *Ham* in Old English is simply 'village' (Hammond and Scull 2014: 198). For the audience at the Lovelace Club (with many of them having some understanding of Old English), the meaning was undoubtedly explicit, so its unnecessary explanation produced an incongruous effect.

Another example of linguistic humour is the interjection "Blast!" uttered by the giant when shot by Farmer Giles from

a blunderbuss.[4] It is based on the ambiguity of the word *blast* with one meaning being an interjection, and the second being an onomatopoeic expression for an explosion or a shot from a firearm. It is rather ironic for a giant to use this word while being shot at.

Linguistic humour can also be found in a dialogue between Giles and his dog when it wants to warn Giles against the giant coming: "'What's *come to you*, you fool?' 'Nothing,' said the dog; 'but *something's come to you.*'" (p. 44). It includes wordplay on the ambiguous phrase *come to somebody* with idiomatic meaning 'to come to one's mind' (especially speaking of something crazy) and literal meaning of something actually coming to someone. In the pun, the dog refers to the giant *coming* to Giles' fields.

Another example of a pun is when the giant (previously said to have been near-sighted and deaf, and having lost his way) is said to be "making off about *nor-nor-west* at a great pace" (p. 48). This pun is made by using the shortened form *nor-nor-west* standing for 'north-north-west' in which the morpheme *nor* can also mean negation suggesting that the giant did not have any idea about the direction he had been walking in.

Yet another pun in this fragment occurs when the giant (having been described before as very stupid) tells his relatives that he might return into Giles' lands "when he has a mind" (p. 58). This pun is based on the idiomatic reading of the phrase *to have a mind* meaning 'to fancy doing something' and on its literal, word-for-word reading.

Another wordplay can be found at the end of the story where Giles' wife (having been described before as a very obese woman, just like her husband) "made a queen of *great size* and majesty, and she kept a tight hand on the household accounts. There was no *getting round* Queen Agatha – *at least it was a long walk*" (p. 130). The first part, mentioning "great size" is obviously based on the literal and metaphorical meaning of 'being great'. The second is a constructed joke, suggesting at

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[4] See section on 3.5. on anachronism.

the beginning that it was difficult to oppose the queen (idiomatic reading of *to get round somebody*) and later shifting the reading of that phrase from non-literal to literal with the phrase "at least it was a long walk". We can see here the distinction between static and dynamic humour, as the first sentence is of the static kind (perceived instantly without any sequence) and the second sentence is of the dynamic kind (requiring a constructed sequence to introduce a humorous effect).

Those are, of course, not all of the puns and wordplays that can be found in *Farmer Giles*, but they are sufficient to expose Tolkien's skills in that area and the details of the construction of his puns. Now we will analyse another device introducing linguistic humour, namely the register clashes.

3.3. Linguistic humour: register clashes

As mentioned in section 2.6, register clashes occur when the unnecessarily elevated style is used in a rather trivial context or vice versa.

The primary example of a register clash in *Farmer Giles* is the use of Latin in various places of its narrative. It is connected with the historic placement of the story, as stated in the foreword "before Arthur or the Seven Kingdoms of the English" (p. 34), a time when Latin was still used as an official language in names and documents and English was the language of the common folk and regarded as "vulgar" (in the sense of 'plebeian'). What creates this register clash is the contrast between grandiosely sounding Latin names and expressions and their commonly sounding, unsophisticated English counterparts. It is often used for a sarcastic and mocking effect by the narrator.[5]

This register clash can be seen, for instance, at the beginning when Farmer Giles is introduced:

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[5] See section 3.6.

> In full his name was *Aegidius Ahenobarbus Julius Agricola de Hammo*; for people *were richly endowed with names in those days*, now long ago, [...] However, those days are now over, so I will in what follows give the man his name *shortly*, and in the *vulgar form:* he was *Farmer Giles of Ham*, and he had a red beard. (p. 37-38)

It is apparent here that even the names of the ordinary people were so elaborate (just as those of the Romans), so the names of the more nobly born ought to have been even more elaborate, for example, the name and titles of the King: "Augustus Bonifacius Ambrosius Aurelianus Antoninus Pius et Magnificus, dux, rex, tyrannus, et basileus Mediterranearum Parfium" (p. 54).

Moreover, as mentioned previously, Latin was the official language of the court and all of the King's speeches and documents were written in it, so the parson (who knew Latin of course) had to translate all of them to be read to the villagers of Ham. This creates a sort of incongruity between the characters, as the king, using Latin (and plural number while referring to himself), appears to stand out of the whole story in which every character speaks "normally" and uses unsophisticated language. This sort of clash between Latin and "the vulgar" is eliminated when Giles becomes the king of his Little Kingdom as "the vulgar tongue came into fashion at his court, and none of his speeches were in Book-Latin" (p. 130).

Other examples of the clash between Latin and "the vulgar" include the name of Giles' ancient sword *Caudimordax*, or *Tailbiter* in the vulgar, or the names of other characters such as the Dragon – *Chrysophylax*, or the blacksmith – *Fabricius Cunctator*.[6]

Apart from the Latin-vulgar clash, there occur also other clashes of style in the story. One of such clashes can be found in the fragment when the King sends Giles a sword in appreciation of his fight against the giant: "*so prompt an expulsion of a giant so injurious* seemed worthy of note and

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[6] For more discussion of the Blacksmith see section 3.4.

some little courtesy" (p. 53), which is incongruous because of the inversion creating very pompous effect contrasting it with the common style of the rest of the narrative.

Another high-to-low clash occurs when the parson speaks to the dragon: "'*Vile Worm*!' he said. 'You must bring back to this spot all your *ill-gotten* wealth'" (p. 92). This would have been actually a natural way of speaking to such a legendary creature as a dragon, but it is incongruous because the dragon himself paradoxically has a very common and polite style of speaking: "*Excuse my asking*, but were you looking for me *by any chance*?" (p. 82) or "'Chrysophylax is my name,' said he, 'Chrysophylax the Rich. *What can I do for your honour?*'" (p. 86). The manners of the Dragon are quite similar to another dragon of Tolkien, namely Smaug in *The Hobbit*, whose manner of speaking Tom Shippey (2000: 69) compares to a twentieth-century upper class Englishman speaking with "elaborate politeness, even circumlocution, of course totally insincere".

Finally, a register clash occurs when Giles meets the King who wants to reclaim the treasure Giles' got from the Dragon. Contrary to what might be expected while meeting such an important person, Giles (being a very simple-minded man) greets the King with a simple "good morning". His nonchalance infuriates the King to the point where he, ironically enough forgets to use his own, elevated style: "'Give *me* my sword!' shouted the King, finding his voice, but *forgetting his plural*" (p. 125). What is more, Tolkien uses here something which could be called "register exchange", because Giles (most probably speaking in the name of himself and the dragon) uses the plural number when he cheekily answers: "Give *us* your crown!" (p. 125).

Such an artful and frequent usage of a register clash, reveals Tolkien's mastery when it comes to language. It gives a hint of his vast philological knowledge, exceptional even among Oxford academics. This was most probably one of the reasons why *Farmer Giles* was so highly appreciated by the Lovelace Club.

3.4. Textual humour: paradoxes, links and situational humour

As explained in section 2.5, the textual level of incongruity is based on the knowledge of the text and is text-specific. In other words, it is effective only when it is put in relation to the reality described in the text. For example, there is a blacksmith in *Farmer Giles* who is very pessimistic and loves to predict that some disaster is coming, yet he is, somewhat paradoxically, called Sunny Sam by the villagers.

This paradox introduces incongruity and thus is, in itself, humorous. Moreover, once it is introduced, it is utilised several times within the text in the form of an intratextual link (referring to some other place of the text to introduce humour). Whenever something bad happens in the story, a triumphant reaction of the Blacksmith is mentioned, even though probably he would not be mentioned at all if the bad thing had not occurred. Such allusions are made in the form of quick interjections. For example, when the Dragon promises to return to pay his ransom on the day of the feast of St Hilarius and Felix, the Blacksmith does not like the sound of those names (which is caused by the association of Hilarius with the English *hilarious* and the Latin *Felix* meaning 'happy')[7] or elsewhere, when the Dragon does not come on the promised day, the Blacksmith "walks about whistling". Such allusions, even though they are entirely redundant for the narrative, add more humour to it and make the reader (or hearer) "connect the dots" within it, making it more humorous.

A similar example of such intratextual links are the mentions of the Miller every time something good or bad happens to Giles. It is humorous because they are said to be "bosom enemies". Every time something good happens to Giles, it is mentioned that the Miller is angry or envious of him, and

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[7] In this element we can see the mingling of the levels of humour, as it is combined with linguistic humour. Tolkien often mixes different types and levels of humour in the story to produce a uniquely humorous effect.

every time something bad happens to Giles, the Miller is happy or laughs.

Apart from the paradox of the pessimistic blacksmith being called Sunny Sam, another paradoxical element of the story is the reaction of the villagers to the news about the coming of the Dragon. In spite of what could be expected, the news meets with a rather cheerful and nostalgic reaction (before they learn that the Dragon is quite dangerous). That reaction is because of a tradition mentioned in the story of cooking Dragon's Tail for Christmas, which was a real dragon tail in the old times.[8] This situation is an example of textual humour because it requires some explanation of certain details in the text itself (the story about cooking Dragon's Tail) to be understood as funny.

There are many other instances of textual humour in the story, either paradoxes, links or funny situations, such as that with the Giant, who erroneously thinks that the shot from a blunderbuss in his face was a horsefly bite, or the scene with the Dragon's panic escape being chased by Giles and his angry mare, or finally the scene with the parson of the village Oakley "rather rashly" trying to "dissuade the Dragon from his evil ways" before being eaten (p. 67). Many of these funny situations are inextricably linked to the features of various characters and their grotesque nature. Nevertheless, they somehow let the grotesqueness become more evident and contribute to the absurdity of the story and its overall funniness.

3.5. General and culture contextual humour: anachronism

Incongruity, being the most important ingredient of humour is introduced also by anachronism. What is meant by that term is a misplacement of some feature or object in time (an intentional chronological or historical error), which produces an incongruous effect.

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[8] See section 3.7. on allusions.

The best-known example of it in *Farmer Giles* is, of course, the blunderbuss, which is used by the Farmer to drive the giant away. The blunderbuss (a large sixteenth-century gun) is anachronistic because the story is set in purely medieval, legendary times in which firearms do not yet exist.[9]

Another anachronism in the story can be found in the offer made by the Dragon that he will pay each of the villagers "two golden guineas" if they set him free (p. 89). The guinea was an eighteenth-century British coin, which was originally minted of gold from Guinea, Africa (Hammond and Scull 2014: 212). So the fact that the guineas appear in *Farmer Giles* is purely ahistorical. Both of these anachronisms are of the *inherent* type of incongruity (lying in the situation itself and not in the way it is presented).[10]

An anachronism of the second, *presentational* type of incongruity can be found in the comparison of the Dragon carrying a great deal of treasure on his back by to the "royal pantechnicon". A pantechnicon is defined by Hammond and Scull as a "name of a bazaar of all kinds of artistic work [or] a large warehouse for storing furniture, and colloquially by extension, a furniture-removal van" (Hammond and Scull 2014: 217). The first use of the word dates back to the late nineteenth century so it is anachronist to use it in *Farmer Giles*. It is *presentational* because it lies in the description of a certain situation, adding a humorous effect.

What anachronism does, apart from being incongruous, is that it brings the legendary story closer to the modern reader. It makes it more familiar. That is somewhat paradoxical, as the same device that makes the story more absurd, makes it at the same time more natural. This strengthens its incongruity even more because that is precisely its function – introducing something unexpected and yet possible to be linked in some way to the situation. [11] In the case of anachronism, the

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[9] It is also connected with an allusion which will be extensively discussed in section 3.7.

[10] See section 2.4.

[11] See section 2.6.

anachronistic elements are incongruous with the story and yet more natural to the reader, who can trace this incongruity and thus understand the humour.

3.6. General and culture contextual humour: grotesque and sarcasm

As observed in section 2.6, one of the most prevalent humorous elements in *Farmer Giles* is grotesque. Many of its main characters and elements of the narrative have some bizarre and absurd features which evoke cultural and general contextual incongruity. The characters with grotesque features include Giles himself, the Giant, the Dragon, the Blacksmith and to some extent the King's knights. They all contradict the cultural stereotypes of their kind. Each of them is briefly analysed below.

The main hero of the story, Farmer Giles, seems at first to be a rather typical, independent English yeoman with no strange features (except for the fact he owns a blunderbuss). However, his character becomes more grotesque as he practically becomes a warrior and prepares to face the Dragon. Tom Shippey in *Author of the Century* describes him as "a kind of anti-Beowulf, with his extremely amateurish preparations for fighting the dragon". Instead of chainmail, Giles has the blacksmith stitch metal rings onto his old leather jerkin. Here follows the description of his dressing for battle [our emphasis]:

> Then Giles put on his top-boots and an old pair of spurs; and also the leather-covered helmet. But at the last moment, he *clapped an old felt hat over the helmet*, and *over the mail coat he threw his big grey cloak.* `What is the purpose of that Master?' they asked. `Well,' said Giles, `*if it is your notion to go dragon-hunting jingling and dingling like Canterbury Bells*, it ain't mine. It don't seem sense to me to let a dragon know that you are coming along the road sooner than need be. And a helmet's a helmet, and a challenge to battle. *Let the worm see only my old hat over the hedge*, and maybe I'll get nearer before the trouble begins.' They had

stitched on the rings so that they overlapped, each hanging loose over the one below, and *jingle they certainly did*. The cloak did something to stop the noise of them, but *Giles cut a queer figure in his gear*. They did not tell him so. (pp. 78-79)

Giles clearly breaks the stereotype of a brave and gallant knight, being a very grotesque version of one. Not only does he have strange looks for a knight, but he also lacks courage and goes to find the Dragon to save his reputation, hoping that he never finds the dragon at all. The fact that he manages to chase the dragon is only thanks to luck and his grey mare (who is said to be the true hero of the story in one of its earlier versions) (p. 177).

Another grotesque character is the Giant. His grotesqueness is predicated on the fact that he is "near-sighted and also rather deaf" (p. 40). This is not a feature which one would expect of a typical giant. This takes effect in the absurdity of this character and makes his emergence in Giles lands way less serious giving it a strong satirical flavour.

Yet another grotesque character is the Dragon, who, again contrary to the expectations, is very cowardly and has a very cultured manner of speaking[12]. This feature of the Dragon contributes to the humorous nature of his every encounter with Giles, and the fact that Giles manages to chase him down the village road and finally make him pay his ransom and carry it to the village on his own back. The grotesque nature of both "villains" in the story makes it very absurd and incongruous, contributing largely to its humorous effect.

Finally, the grotesqueness manifests itself in some minor characters, such as the Blacksmith Fabricius Cunctator (literally 'lingering producer') who is very reluctant to do any work in his smithy. Quite similar to him, are the King's knights, who are reluctant to fight the dragon and are preoccupied with fashion, etiquette and tournaments instead of real combat.

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[12] See section 3.3.

Apart from grotesque characters, the satirical nature of the story can be seen in its sarcastic narrative style, often mocking and making fun of the characters. Here follow several examples of his style:

> When the king speaks to the people of Ham: "Augustus Bonifacius rex et basileus was *graciously pleased* to address them." (p. 95)

> When the Dragon eats the parson of Oakley: "*Rather rashly* the parson had sought to dissuade him from his evil ways". (p. 67)

> When the Dragon assaults the King's knights while they are talking about the order of precedence in the court etiquette: "*The argument concerning precedence stopped short.* All the horses shied to one side or the other, and some of the knights fell off: The ponies and the baggage and the servants turned and ran at once. *They had no doubt as to the order of precedence.* [...] their steeds took charge of them, and turned round and fled, carrying their masters off, whether they wished it or no: *Most of them wished it indeed.*" (p. 107)

The grotesque and sarcastic style of narrative combined is one of the story's main sources of incongruity and humour. It is them that give the story its unique flavour and the air of funniness. But right next to them are the allusions made by Tolkien to several aspects the English culture and the Oxford academic life. The main allusions are discussed in the next section.

3.7. Culture and group contextual humour: allusions and references

The main allusions in *Farmer Giles* discussed here include:

– allusions to the Editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*;
– allusions to philologists (Tolkien's profession);
– an allusion to Oxford Colleges' traditions.

They are subsequently analysed in the above order.

3.7.1. "The Four Wise Clerks of Oxenford"

Perhaps the most famous allusion in the story is the above-quoted mention of "The Four Wise Clerks of Oxenford" who try to define a blunderbuss (Tolkien 2014: 45-46). It is a double allusion, as it occurs at both group and cultural contextual levels.[13] The head of the phrase "Clerks of Oxenford" alone is a cultural contextual allusion to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: "A Clerk there was of Oxenford" (as quoted in Hammond and Scull 2014: 201). Whereas the fact that there were four of them is an allusion at the group contextual level to the four editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a project Tolkien himself was involved in (Hammond and Scull 2014: 201).

The further irony arises from the latter part in which the narrator sarcastically dismantles the perhaps not-so-wise-after-all clerks' definition of a blunderbuss (which is an actual quotation from the real OED) sentence by sentence, making it look entirely incompatible with the reality.

> A blunderbuss is a short gun with a large bore firing many balls or slugs, and capable of doing execution within a limited range without exact aim. (Now superseded in civilised countries by other firearms.)' However, Farmer Giles's blunderbuss had a wide mouth that opened like a horn, and *it did not fire balls or slugs, but anything that he could spare to stuff in.* And *it did not do execution, because he seldom loaded it, and never let it off.* The sight of it was usually enough for his purpose. And this country was not yet civilised, for the blunderbuss was *not superseded.* (p. 45-46)

The two allusions are quite auto-ironic of Tolkien, as he was not only a real clerk of Oxford himself but also he was involved with the OED and he once said of this experience: "I learned more in those two years than in any other equal period of my life" (Carpenter 1977: 121). It may be, though, that Tolkien makes fun of the Editors as Tom Shippey writes that Tolkien,

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[13] See section 2.5.

"perhaps as a result" of working on the OED "continually disagreed with [it] and even went out of his way (in Farmer Giles of Ham) to mock" (2000: 33). Nonetheless, these allusions form an inside joke (on the group-contextual level) designed for people familiar with the circles of Oxford University and the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

3.7.2. The parson grammarian

Another allusion related to Tolkien himself is the allusion to his profession – a philologist. It can be found in the reference to the Parson: "He was a grammarian, and could doubtless see further into the future than others" (p. 93). As Hammond and Scull observe, "A *grammarian* is an expert in grammar or languages in general, a philologist. However in the Middle Ages popular belief held that grammar (chiefly Latin) included knowledge of magic and astrology" (Hammond and Scull 2014: 213).

Shippey, in *The Author of the Century*, citing the OED, states that grammar was associated with "gramarye = Occult learning, magic, necromancy". Moreover, he observes that in spite of Tolkien making fun of the view that philologists may have some insight into the future, the Parson manages to accurately foresee what is going to come, by suggesting Giles take a rope when going to find the Dragon, which proves very vital later in the story. This leaves a hint that there might be some truth in this old belief (in a metaphorical sense of course) and that philologists should be taken seriously. Shippey also writes that *Farmer Giles* "shows Tolkien at ease with himself" making jokes and laughing even at himself and his profession (2000: 322-329).

3.7.3. Oxford college traditions

A very interesting part of the story is the description of a tradition of serving a Dragons Tail at the King's court at Christmas, which is why, as mentioned earlier, the people were

excited about the coming of the Dragon. The Tail is said to be carried by one of the knights to the King's table to the sound of music (p. 56-57). Hammond and Scull observe that another tradition is very similar, namely the Boar's Head Ceremony, which is held at the Queens College, Oxford (Hammond and Scull 2014: 205). Mentioning the ceremony with the Tail, Tolkien most probably alludes to the Boar's Head Ceremony, with which the audience at the Lovelace Club was certainly familiar. The allusion is deepened when Tolkien mentions that the Tail is no longer real, but made of cake and almond-paste.

This allusion is very vital because it associates the academia with the King's court which is, as Shippey writes, characterized by "magniloquence, book-Latin, style at the expense of substance [...] and a reluctance to take old tales seriously" (2000: 324), which is a point largely condemned by Tolkien in many of his works, including *Farmer Giles* and the essay *On Fairy Stories* originally planned to be read to the Lovelace Club. This can be viewed as a satire on certain tendencies among scholars and was probably very clear to the members of the Lovelace Club.

3.7.4. The implications of the allusions

The allusions included in *Farmer Giles* can be regarded as crafted specifically for the audience at the Lovelace Club. Apart from being humorous themselves, they seem to have a some-what educational function and carry an important message that Tolkien probably wanted to weave into his seemingly innocent and light-hearted story. That message extends onto the whole story which, as Shippey (2000: 323) writes, "makes a point and a rather aggressive one" about the value of fairy tales and the importance to take them seriously.

4. Conclusions

Even though the above analysis does not cover all the instances of humour and allusion in the story, it attempts to

give its cross-sectional view and uncover the patterns and constructional details that can be found in its humorous elements. Based on the analysis, we can draw several conclusions regarding the humour in the story and its effects on its original audience and its readers today.

First of all, the humorous elements used by Tolkien in the narrative are very diversified and numerous. This makes the story more entertaining for the recipient and shows Tolkien's exceptional skills with humour and narrative construction which are apparent in many of his literary works.

Moreover, the humour occurs at many levels, including linguistic, textual and contextual, which makes the story appealing to a wider audience (even in spite of the inside jokes that were meant for the Lovelace Club). The diversification of the levels and devices increases the incongruity of the humorous elements as their emergence in the story is even more unexpected, which adds more depth to the story and keeps the reader/hearer more engaged.

Apart from this, as shown in Figure 2, it is apparent that the incongruous elements are equally distributed in the story, which arguably keeps the entertainment at a relatively high level throughout the reading. An even higher concentration of these elements can be seen at the story's climactic points (e.g. "Giles confronts the Dragon" or "Giles confronts the King..." etc.). This may strengthen the humorous effect as well, especially that if it were not for its satirical flavour, these climactic points could be, in contrast, presented in a more elevated and legendary style. This way the pathos that would regularly appear in a legend is replaced by humour.

Besides, the incongruities in the story such, as ana-chronism, by making it more distant from its legendary or mediaeval setting, make it closer to the contemporary reader. This can arguably have a good introductory function for people who are sceptic about legendary stories and fairy tales. The fact that it is funny serves the idea Tolkien had about reviving old stories and reasserting their relevance.

It can be argued that a linguistic approach to analysing literature can provide us with interesting information on the style and techniques used by authors to create various effects in the reader. It also can increase our understanding of humorous phenomena in general as it enables us to distinguish various aspects of humour and unwind its complexities so that they can be addressed and examined in an appropriate way.

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