Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

English Language and Literature Department

THE USE OF DARK HUMOUR IN EVELYN WAUGH'S *THE SWORD OF HONOUR* TRILOGY

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Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2024

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To all who have shared in my laughter,

illuminating my life...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

CANATAN, Aynur Zeynep. *The Use of Dark Humour in Evelyn Waugh's The Sword of Honour Trilogy*. Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2024.

Humour is a significant component of human expression, playing an essential role in various dimensions of human experience. It has the connective power and offers a distinctive lens through which societal norms and perspectives can be evaluated. Studies in this field have explored these functions, delving into the underlying mechanics and the effects of comedic elements on individuals and societies, particularly through the lenses of incongruity, superiority, and release theories. Within this context, dark humour emerges as a potent tool for addressing taboo subjects, confronting existential anxieties, and reflecting on life's absurdities. This thesis investigates the use of dark comedy in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy— *Men at Arms* (1952, Silah Arkadaşları), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955, Subaylar ve Beyefendiler), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961, Koşulsuz Teslimiyet)—by examining how Waugh employs satiric, ironic, grotesque, absurd, and parodic modes to critique the absurdities and tragedies inherent in wartime experiences. The analysis is grounded in theoretical frameworks that help elucidate how these comedic elements function within the narrative. Through a detailed examination of key scenes and character interactions, the thesis demonstrates how Waugh's dark humour serves as a critical lens through which he scrutinises the futility of human endeavours during war. Thus, this study argues that Waugh's deployment of dark comedy is a powerful device for exposing the inherent absurdity and futility of the human condition during wartime, revealing the underlying truths beneath the heroic narratives surrounding military systems, structures, and traditions.

Keywords

ÖZET

CANATAN, Aynur Zeynep. *Evelyn Waugh'un* The Sword of Honour *Üçlemesinde Kara Mizah Kullanımı*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Mizah, insan ifadesinin önemli bir bileşenidir ve insan deneyiminin farklılık gösteren boyutlarında önemli rol oynar. Bağlayıcı güce sahiptir ve toplumsal normlar ile bakış açılarını değerlendirmek için benzersiz bir mercek sunar. Mizah çalışmaları, bu işlevleri derinlemesine inceleyerek mizahın bireyler ve toplumlar üzerindeki etkilerini ana mizah kuramları, yani uyumsuzluk, üstünlük ve rahatlama kuramları perspektifinden araştırmıştır. Bu alanda kara mizah, tabu konuları ele almak, varoluşsal kaygılarla yüzleşmek ve varoluşun absürtlüğünü yansıtmak için etkili bir form olarak ortaya çıkar. Bu tez, Evelyn Waugh'un *Sword of Honour* üçlemesinin *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) ve *Unconditional Surrender* (1961) adlı eserlerde kara mizahın kullanımını incelemektedir. Bu inceleme, Waugh'un kara mizahın satirik, ironik, grotesk, absürt ve parodik modlarını nasıl kullandığını ve bu sayede savaş zamanındaki absürtlükler ve trajediler karşısında kendine özgü eleştirisini nasıl sunduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, uyumsuzluk, üstünlük ve rahatlama kuramları gibi mizah kuramlarına dayanarak, mizahın anlatı içindeki işleyişini anlamak için kuramsal bir çerçeve sunar. Kilit olaylar ve karakter etkileşimlerinin ayrıntılı bir incelemesi yoluyla, bu tez, Waugh'un eserinde eleştirel bakış açısını sağlamak için kara mizahı nasıl kullandığını göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, Waugh'un kara mizah kullanımının, askerî sistemler, yapılar ve gelenekler etrafında dönen kahramanlık anlatılarının altında yatan gerçekleri ortaya çıkaran bir araç olduğunu ve savaş zamanındaki insanın durumunun beyhudeliğini gözler önüne serdiğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Kara Mizah, Evelyn Waugh, *Sword of Honour*, *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen*, *Unconditional Surrender*, İkinci Dünya Savaşı

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ABBREVIATIONS

MA: *Men at Arms*

OG: *Officers and Gentlemen*

US: *Unconditional Surrender*

MO: Medical Officer

HOO: Hazardous Offensive Operations

INTRODUCTION

Humour is a significant component of human expression and has always been an inseparable part of it on a universal level. As Dustin Hellberg states, "[h]umor, irony, and metaphor are universally employed in every language and in every culture as far back as we can tell. . . . There was no eureka moment for humour, irony, and metaphor" (250). Regardless of the diverse use, contexts, and boundaries established by different cultures, it persists wherever humans exist, unaffected by varying societal codes and norms. Highlighting its omnipresent quality, Joseph Polimeni and Jeffrey P. Reiss state, "no culture exists that is unfamiliar with humour" (348), which emphasises how ingrained it is in human experience and how its ubiquitous existence transcends the factors that constitute the distinguishing characteristics of particular communities. This omnipresence underlines its role as a universal connector, bridging cultural and social divides.

Building on its universal nature, this thesis examines the complex use of dark humour in Evelyn Waugh's (1903–1966) *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1952–1961). By investigating Waugh's work through the theoretical frameworks of "incongruity, superiority, and release theories" (Monro 83) and by exploring satiric, ironic, grotesque, absurd, and parodic modes, this study reveals how Waugh employs dark comedic elements to critique military structures and challenge the conventional narratives of heroism and morality associated with wartime experiences. Moreover, this thesis reveals that Waugh's use of dark humour serves as a vehicle for expressing an exponentially growing disillusionment with the war, with the protagonist Guy Crouchback functioning as a channel through which this pervasive sense of disenchantment is poignantly conveyed.

The introduction provides an overview of the essential role humour plays in human experience, highlighting its universal presence and connective power across different

cultures and times. It delves into the main theories and applications of this concept, establishing a foundation for understanding its operation within narratives, while exploring dark humour as a distinct form that addresses taboo subjects, confronts existential anxieties, and reflects on life's absurdities. Utilising this approach, the first chapter analyses *Men at Arms* (1952), demonstrating how Waugh critiques institutional failures within the wartime context. The second chapter delves into *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), showing how Waugh's comedic approach further exposes the disintegration of societal structures and the disillusionment of characters. The third chapter focuses on *Unconditional Surrender* (1961), illustrating how Waugh's use of dark humour reflects the peak of disillusionment, as both personal and collective surrender to the chaotic and unpredictable nature of war becomes most intense. By offering a detailed analysis of Waugh's trilogy, this thesis elucidates the role of dark humour in deconstructing the glorified narratives surrounding wartime experiences and examining the concepts of heroism and honour in the context of war.

Examining the historical context of the Second World War is indispensable for comprehending the intricate layers of dark humour in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. The trilogy, set during WWII, reflects the profound societal and psychological shifts that characterised the era. The disillusionment following the First World War had already cast a shadow over the interwar period, fostering a sense of cynicism and scepticism towards grand narratives and political promises. This pervasive sense of frustration is captured in the words of Harry Patch, the last surviving fighting soldier of the First World War. In the biography *The Last Fighting Tommy: The Life of Harry Patch, Last Veteran of the Trenches, 1898-2009*, compiled by Richard van Emden, Patch reflects,

> By the time I was demobbed I was thoroughly disillusioned. I could never understand why my country could call me from a peacetime job and train me to go out to France and try to kill a man I never knew. Why did we fight? I asked myself that, many times. At the end of the war, the peace was settled round a table, so why the hell couldn't they do that at the start, without losing millions of men? I left the army with my faith in the Church of England shattered. (137)

This quote encapsulates the profound disillusionment and existential crisis experienced by many veterans of the First World War, and reflects a broader cultural and societal disillusionment that emerged in the aftermath of the conflict. Patch's questioning of the rationale behind the war highlights the feeling of senselessness of the violence and the arbitrary nature of political decisions that led to mass destruction. The sense of futility is emblematic of the Lost Generation, which is a term often used to describe those who came of age during the war and were left grappling with the devastating consequences. As Winter suggests, "although every war death was wasteful, the deaths of thousands of educated and privileged young men brought about what was called a Lost Generation of future politicians, philosophers, and poets who never had the chance to fulfil their promise" (449). This term encapsulates the broader cultural and intellectual void left in the wake of the war, as entire segments of future leadership, creativity, and thought were extinguished, leaving behind a legacy of despair and unfulfilled promise. Moreover, the Second World War's scale and devastation, which far exceeded that of the First World War, brought about a more profound sense of disillusionment. As Richard J. B. Bosworth states, "the war exacted a death toll of at least 60 million, and probably tens of millions more than that," with "a majority of the casualties [being] civilians, a drastic change from World War I when some 90% of deaths were occasioned at the fronts" (368). The harshness of war, with its senseless destruction and the collapse of moral certainties, is mirrored in Waugh's dark humour, which often exposes the absurdity and futility underlying the mask of heroism and honour. Bosworth also highlights how "another casualty of the war seemed to be optimism itself" (368), suggesting that the sheer scale of civilian suffering and atrocities, such as those at Auschwitz and Hiroshima, led to a profound sense of disillusionment.

In this milieu of chaos, the psychological strain of war, whether on soldiers or civilians, manifests itself through various forms of expression, each seeking to acknowledge, process, and reflect wartime experiences. While some writers adopt a tragic tone to express the devastating aftermath of war, including mass death, cruelty, and dehumanisation, others, like Evelyn Waugh, employ dark humour to blur the lines between tragedy and comedy, moralism and indifferent laughter. Waugh uses this form

as a means to expose the irrational aspects of war and reveal the painful destruction of idealism, along with the unnecessary cruelty that obliterates every aspect of life.

Waugh's life and military service deeply inform the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, particularly in its portrayal of the absurdities of war. His characters often embody a sense of uncertainty, a trait that James Hall identifies as "a virtuoso caricature of uncertainty and self-disgust trying to wear the face of assurance and vitality" (188). This depiction of characters struggling with their identities and roles in post-war society mirrors Waugh's own disillusionment. Waugh's military experience began in 1940 when he joined the Royal Marines. Although he was 36 and had not fought in the First World War, Waugh was eager to be part of what he saw as a noble effort. As Selina Hastings states, "[a]t thirty-six Evelyn was at an awkward age, too old for immediate call-up, too young to have earned useful experience in the First World War" (384). However, he quickly became disillusioned by the inefficiencies and chaos of military life. Waugh's disillusionment began early in his service when he was stationed at the Royal Marine Barracks in Chatham, where he constructed an idealized vision of the military. As Hastings notes,

> [h]is disillusionment, which took place at many levels and over a long period of time, was harsh and embittering, made more so by the fact that during his early months in the Royal Marines circumstances enabled him to maintain that illusion almost intact…It bore little relevance to the mid-twentieth century at war. In those early days Evelyn had no doubt that Britain was fighting a just war, her commanders men of courage and honour. He wanted to be part of that noble adventure. (400)

This early contrast between Waugh's notions of military life and the reality he encountered is central to the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, where Guy Crouchback's journey echoes Waugh's own disappointment. As Trout suggests, the trilogy "not only attacks modern warfare . . . but also lampoons war fiction itself, subverting every imaginable convention" (125). Much like Waugh, Guy initially enlists with a deep sense of moral and spiritual purpose, seeing the war as an opportunity to reclaim a lost sense of honour and tradition. However, the unfolding chaos and absurdity of the war, with its incompetent leadership and disorganised missions, gradually dismantles his idealism.

Waugh uses his protagonist to reflect the disillusioning nature of his own military experiences, embedding dark humour into the narrative as a means to criticise both the absurdity of modern warfare and the broader collapse of traditional values. This interplay between personal experience and fiction reveals how Waugh's own disillusionment with the war becomes a lens through which the absurdity of human existence is exposed.

Waugh's experiences during the British evacuation from Crete in May 1941 profoundly shaped his depiction of military incompetence and chaos in *Sword of Honour*. As part of the Commandos under Major-General Robert Laycock, Waugh was sent to Crete to support the island's defence against a German invasion. However, due to poor intelligence and miscommunication, the Commandos found themselves in the midst of a retreat rather than an active defence. The situation was "a nightmare of unreality and unexpectedness" (Hastings 424), and left British forces in disarray, with evacuation plans barely functioning. This atmosphere of disorder and confusion deeply unsettled Waugh, contributing to his growing disillusionment with the military leadership. Reflecting on the operation, Waugh felt that he had taken part in a "military disgrace," sharing a deep sense of frustration over what he saw as the Allies' premature capitulation, believing that the island "could and should have been held" (Eade 236). This personal experience of failure and disarray provided a critical lens through which Waugh explored the themes of ineptitude, chaos, and disillusionment in *Sword of Honour*, where the broader failure of leadership during the war mirrored his own disheartening observations from Crete.

Waugh's disillusionment deepened during his time with 8 Commando, a unit he initially admired for its daring spirit but later criticised for its lack of discipline and competence. Stationed at Largs, Scotland, Waugh observed a stark contrast between the Commandos and the more disciplined Royal Marines. Hastings states that the officers of 8 Commando were a group of aristocrats and socialites who indulged in a life of luxury and excess, far removed from the realities of military service: "All the officers have very long hair & lap dogs & cigars & they wear whatever uniform they like" (415) This experience informed Waugh's portrayal of characters who embody the absurdities and incompetencies of

military life. Waugh's increasing frustration with the discrepancy between the military's romantic image and its chaotic reality is reflected in his depiction of Guy Crouchback's disillusionment with the war effort throughout the trilogy.

This depiction of societal frustrations aligns with a long-standing tradition of British writers who have employed satire—the dominant literary form of the 18th century—to critique societal norms and expose human flaws. During that century, dark humour emerged as a powerful tool for revealing societal ills through a blend of wit and moral criticism. This literary approach elicited both laughter and discomfort, forcing readers to confront the contradictions and injustices of their time. Satire became the prevailing mode of writing, serving as a vehicle for moral commentary and challenging audiences to reflect on the absurdity and cruelty of societal norms while exposing the hypocrisies embedded within them. As Stuart M. Tave notes, "[t]he subsuming category of ill-natured wit, of which raillery was the social form and satire the literary, was ridicule, and against this, the root of the evil, the severest attack was made: it was a baneful infiltration in poetry and in politics, in life and in literature, in philosophy, psychology, and divinity" (27). This highlights how ridicule, encompassing both social interactions and literary expressions, permeated all aspects of society and served as a formidable tool for challenging prevailing norms. By infiltrating poetry, politics, philosophy, psychology, and even divinity, ridicule disrupted conventional thinking and exposed underlying hypocrisies. It functioned not merely as entertainment but as a critical force that compelled individuals and institutions to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and their society. In doing so, satire and ridicule became instrumental in provoking thought, and encouraging self-reflection.

A pivotal figure in this tradition is Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), who, as André Breton suggests, can be considered "the true initiator of black humour" (3). In his work, *A Modest Proposal* (1729), Swift uses grotesque satire to expose and criticise the follies and vices of society. Swift's dark humour is evident in the grotesque and satirical suggestion to solve Ireland's famine by consuming infants, a shocking proposition delivered with biting

irony. This combination of absurdity and horror serves to highlight the inhumane cruelty towards the Irish poor, revealing a darkness of apathy. Swift's approach forces readers to confront the absurdity of a social problem through an exaggerated, yet disturbingly plausible, solution. The laughter it provokes is uncomfortable, which emphasises the disconnect between the brutality of the English/Protestant elite and the desperate condition of the Irish/Catholic impoverished.

During the Victorian era, dark humour emerged as a significant literary device for critiquing the rapid social transformations and moral contradictions of the time. The harsh realities introduced by industrialization and urbanisation, such as poor working conditions and widening economic disparities, were often illuminated through satire and irony. This approach allowed authors to address pressing issues like poverty, child labour, and social injustice in a manner that was both engaging and intellectually stimulating. By weaving wit and macabre elements into their narratives, Victorian literature exposed societal flaws and hypocrisies that were frequently overlooked by the norms of polite society.

In this context, Charles Dickens (1812–1870) incorporated a sharp critique of industrialization in *Hard Times* (1854). Through characters like Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, Dickens highlights the absurdity of reducing human life to mere statistics and facts. The humour comes from Gradgrind's unwavering belief in a purely logical and utilitarian worldview, which Dickens exaggerates to the point of absurdity. As David Cecil states, "Dickens' unique position as a humorist lies in his mastery of 'pure' humour, jokes that are funny not for the satirical light they throw, but just in themselves" (43), and this is evident in the inherently comical nature of Gradgrind's extreme rationality. Gradgrind's obsession with facts leads to the emotional and intellectual impoverishment of his family, illustrating how this rigid philosophy fails to address the complexities of human existence. The tension between Gradgrind's mechanical outlook and the emotional damage it causes creates a striking blend of critique and tragedy.

Similarly, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) uses humour to critique the absurdities of Victorian social conventions, especially the fixation on reputation, social status, and appearances. The plot revolves around characters adopting false identities and manipulating social expectations, revealing the ridiculous lengths to which people go to conform to society's demands. Wilde's humour stems from the exaggerated trivialities that the characters prioritise, such as outward respectability, while more meaningful concerns like sincerity and honesty are neglected. Through witty dialogue and farcical situations, Wilde satirises the superficiality of Victorian values, where the pursuit of maintaining one's image outweighs the importance of authenticity. The characters' preoccupation with maintaining an idealised image at the expense of their true selves highlights a society in which truth is subordinated to the farce of social performance, making the laughter both pointed and unsettling.

In the 20th century, a darker form of humour emerged as a powerful literary tool for authors confronting the era's profound upheavals. Unlike traditional satire, which employs wit and irony to critique societal follies with the hope of inspiring reform, this macabre approach delves into the absurd to highlight the inherent meaninglessness and contradictions of the human condition. The devastation of two World Wars, the rise of totalitarian regimes, and rapid technological advancements led writers to a deep sense of disillusionment and scepticism about progress and humanity's capacity for self-destruction. They harnessed this grim humour not merely to mock but to expose the bleak realities and existential anxieties of modern life. As James F. English asserts, "we must recognize irony itself as a thoroughly political practice and try to understand its appeal and its effectivity as a mode of cultural intervention in early twentieth-century Britain" (59). By infusing serious and often taboo subjects with morbid irony, authors highlighted issues like the senselessness of war, the oppressive nature of authoritarian governments, and the erosion of individual freedoms. This technique differed from satire by not necessarily seeking to correct or improve society but instead emphasising the absurdity and often hopelessness of the human predicament.

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) exemplifies this use of macabre irony in *Brave New World* (1932), where he critiques the dehumanising effects of technology, genetic manipulation, and social control in a dystopian future. In this world, people are conditioned to suppress emotions and accept artificial happiness through consumerism and the drug *soma*, creating a disturbingly serene society at the expense of individuality and freedom. The exaggerated normality of this controlled world reveals the unsettling moral cost of such progress. Huxley highlights the absurdity of a society that views superficial pleasure and stability as the highest ideals, even as it strips away human depth and autonomy, which forces readers to question the ethical implications of trading genuine human experience for artificial contentment, making the utopia appear more like a chilling dystopia.

George Orwell (1903-1950), a contemporary of Evelyn Waugh, further carries forward the legacy of British dark humour with his work *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). In this novel, Orwell highlights the disjunction between appearance and reality, exposing the sinister absurdities of totalitarian regimes. Orwell's critique relies on tragic irony and absurdity to depict the dystopian world he creates. For instance, the novel's concept of doublethink—where citizens are forced to simultaneously accept two contradictory beliefs—is inherently humorous in a dark sense because it highlights the grotesque manipulation of truth and the cognitive dissonance it creates. This kind of humour stems from the absurdity of being expected to believe in two conflicting realities at once, something that is so nonsensical it borders on the ridiculous, yet it is imposed with deadly seriousness in Orwell's world.

Pushing dark humour to its existential boundaries, Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) in *Waiting for Godot* (1953) explores the absurdity of human existence. The play's central premise—two characters endlessly waiting for someone who never arrives—creates a situation that is both tragic and humorous. The futile, repetitive actions of Vladimir and

Estragon, along with their cyclical conversations, highlight the futility of their situation and reflect life's inherent absurdity. Beckett's minimalist dialogue and the stark emptiness of the characters' lives evoke a type of laughter tinged with an awareness of life's meaninglessness. Rather than aiming to entertain, Beckett employs this approach to emphasise the bleakness of human existence, compelling the audience to confront the unsettling reality that meaning may forever remain elusive.

Evelyn Waugh holds his unique position in British literature for his employment of dark humour and social satire, a hallmark that permeates not only his *Sword of Honour* trilogy but also his broader oeuvre. Waugh's characters frequently find themselves in tragic yet absurdly humorous situations, navigating the disintegration of social structures and personal identities in ways that highlight the chaotic and unpredictable nature of life. In *Decline and Fall* (1928), Waugh introduces Paul Pennyfeather, a young man whose life is derailed by a series of farcical misfortunes, exposing the absurdities of the British class system and its institutions. Similarly, in *A Handful of Dust* (1934), Tony Last's descent from a life of complacency into a surreal and tragic fate in the Amazon jungle reflects Waugh's characteristic blend of dark humour and existential bleakness, with the novel's satirical edge cutting deeply into the vacuity of the British aristocracy. Distinctively, Waugh employed a "modernist technique without a modernist ideology," embracing narrative innovations like "authorial neutrality, temporal dislocation, associational psychology, and the suspension of the ordinary laws of logic," while avoiding the "self-indulgent vagaries" which he considered "modernism's main flaw" (McCartney 70). Even in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), a novel more concerned with themes of memory, faith, and redemption, Waugh maintains his satirical edge, particularly in his portrayal of the decline of the British aristocracy and its empty pursuit of tradition. Here, Waugh balances the novel's nostalgic tone with moments of sharp, understated humour, demonstrating his ability to reflect the contradictions of human nature and social decay.

To appreciate the depth of Waugh's humour, it is essential to recognize its historical roots. . The coexistence of human expression and comedy can be traced far back in history.

Though it might be impossible to detect and observe how levity was incorporated into daily language, written works from antiquity such as the ancient Greek collection *Philogelos* or *Laughter-Lover*, written in 4th or 5th century CE allegedly by Hierocles of Alexandria, provide valuable clues for comprehending how intrinsic and nontemporal humour has always been. *Philogelos* is comprised of 265 jokes, and this collection of jokes employs "[a] quasi-theophrastus gallery of social types [throughout the] anecdotes: cowards, misers, morons, drunks, effeminates and so on" (Baldwin 80). In his annotated translation, Baldwin provides the following anecdotes: "'That slave you sold me has died,' a man complained to an egghead. 'Well, I swear by all the Gods, he never did anything like that when I had him'" (80), and "'[a] man from Cyme was out swimming when it began to rain. So he dived to the bottom to avoid getting wet'" (80). Both of the anecdotes reveal how absentmindedness and naivety are timeless elements of humour that date back to ancient times. The humorous aspects of human nature are frequently employed and analysed by ancient playwrights, such as Aristophanes (c. 446-386 BCE), and philosophers, such as Plato (c. 428-348 BCE), and the longevity of these themes underlines their persistent relevance, serving as a mirror through which humanity can reflect on its own eccentricities across the ages.

Humour serves not only to entertain but also as a reflective tool for humanity. On a grander scale, it provides an alternative lens for examining the predominant norms and feelings of the zeitgeist. Jerry Palmer suggests that "humour is an apparatus which subverts the nature of the occasion such as the dignity of a religious or military ceremony" (11). Even institutions regarded as the most glorified and sacred pillars of society, such as military or religious organisations, can be subverted through it, revealing underlying truths beneath appearances. These institutions, despite their crucial role in sustaining a sense of community, are not immune to the subversive power of humour, which permeates all forms of expression, especially literature,because of humans and their misdeeds in these institutions. Literary humourists, with their acute observational skills, detect the unseen and transmute their observations into intellectually and aesthetically stimulating written works. In this regard, Mikhail Bakhtin considers laughter as

one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter. (66)

As Bakhtin articulates, humour and laughter open up new areas of comprehension and new possibilities for narration. Employing it provides new paths for exploring peculiar aspects of the world that only a humourist can detect. Henri Bergson adds that "the comic spirit has a logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities: it has a method in its madness" (2). By asserting its own logic of madness, as Bergson claims, it rejuvenates the world, illuminates what is old and decayed, and shifts awareness to overlooked parts, thereby making the world anew.

Due to its peculiar function and inner dynamics, humour has long intrigued scholars, prompting extensive theoretical exploration. These theories attempt to identify and elucidate the mechanisms that evoke humorous amusement under specific conditions. D. H. Monro's *Argument of Laughter* (1963) is a seminal text in humour studies, providing a thorough classification into four main categories: superiority, incongruity, release, and ambivalence. Monro examines the contributions of key philosophers to these theories, assigning the superiority theory to Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who suggests that laughter arises from a sense of sudden glory or dominance over others. The incongruity theory, associated with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), suggests that humorous amusement emerges from the perception of something unexpected or out of place. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is linked to the release theory, where it serves as a mechanism for releasing pent-up psychological energy. Monro also engaged with Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whom he primarily associated with the superiority theory. Bergson's concept of the comic highlights how rigidity in behaviour, which fails to adapt to the fluidity of life, becomes laughable. According to Monro, this rigidity invokes a sense of superiority in the observer, aligning Bergson with the superiority theory. This notion of rigidity will be further explored in the following pages, particularly in the context of Bergson's intricate views on how mechanical behaviour contrasts with the dynamic, adaptable nature of life. Although Monro includes the

ambivalence theory theory in his classification—suggesting that humour arises from "conflicting emotions" (210), this thesis will focus on employing the incongruity, superiority, and release theories. These three theories offer more clear frameworks that are more directly applicable to the analysis of dark humour in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. The ambivalence theory, with its emphasis on the internal conflict of emotions, lacks the structural clarity needed to dissect the external, societal, and character-driven forms of dark humour that Waugh employs. By concentrating on these theories, the thesis aims to provide a more coherent and analytically rigorous exploration of humour, allowing for a clearer understanding of how it functions within the specific context of Waugh's work.

To begin the analysis of the main theories of humour, it is essential to consider the superiority theory, a foundational concept in its study. Plato's *Philebus* (c. 4th century BCE) serves as a seminal text in understanding this theory. In this work, Plato introduces the notion of deriving amusement from the flaws of others, encapsulated in his assertion: "when we laugh at the ridiculous aspects of our friends, the admixture of pleasure in our malice produces a mixture of pleasure and distress" (50), which shows the philosophical roots of the superiority theory by illustrating how individuals experience humorous pleasure through a perceived sense of superiority over others. This foundational idea highlights the emphasis on the interplay between pleasure and a sense of elevated status over those being laughed at.

Expanding on Plato's exploration, the superiority theory was further developed by later philosophers, most notably Thomas Hobbes. Monro surveys the contributions of various philosophers to the discussion of humour and emphasises Hobbes's significant role. Monro states, "there can be no doubt about the claim of Hobbes to be the chief and most vigorous exponent of the superiority theory; and no doubt, either, about the extent of his influence" (83). Hobbes, regarded as the touchstone of the superiority theory, builds on Plato's notion of implicit malice by defining laughter as a response to the perception of one's own superiority over others.

Hobbes's interpretation of the superiority theory suggests that laughter arises from a

> *sudden glory*. . .is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much laughter at the defects of others, is a sign of pusillanimity. (38)

Hobbes's notion of sudden glory implies that laughter is not a spontaneous reaction but is deeply rooted in a psychological process of self-elevation. The recognition of another's imperfection triggers this self-applause, as individuals juxtapose their own perceived excellency against the deficiencies observed in others. David Heyd conveniently classifies Hobbes's account as follows:

> there are various situations which typically give rise to this feeling of glory: (a) success in one's own actions beyond one's expectations; (b) the perception of infirmities and defects in others; (c) the perception of infirmities and defects in one's own past (as long as they do not carry any "present dishonour"); (d) the conception of some absurdity abstracted from individual persons. The laughter evoked by these types of circumstances is, according to Hobbes, always connected with feelings of superiority. . .(286)

As mentioned above, Hobbes identifies the circumstances that stimulate the feeling of glory, and the laughter which emerges as a result of the aforementioned circumstances is connected to feeling a sense of superiority. This particular connection between humorous amusement and the sense of superiority is particularly crucial in darker forms of humour, which can be detected in literary works where humour arises from the recognition of characters' exaggerated flaws. Michael Clark further elaborates on Hobbes' account on "the sudden glory" as follows: "Finding something humorous involves a feeling of triumph and superiority, and this is why we laugh at human incompetence, clumsiness, clowning and misfortune. Sometimes the feeling is one of moral superiority, as when we are amused by incidents involving sex, drinking or human greed" (20). Clark's interpretation emphasises that humorous amusement involves a sense of triumph and superiority over human inadequacies, incompetence, or moral failings. This perspective aligns with Hobbes's assertion that laughter frequently stems from a self-congratulatory recognition of one's own comparative advantage.

Other than the superiority theory and its emphasis on a self's advantage in humour, one must also consider the incongruity theory to better grasp the rich framework of comedic mechanisms. While the superiority theory emphasises its hierarchical nature, the incongruity theory shifts focus to the cognitive dissonance that arises from the juxtaposition of seemingly clashing ideas, situations, and concepts. As Joshua Shaw explains, the essence of the incongruity theory is that "[t]he incongruity theory claims that humour involves delighting in a departure from some regularity or norm" (115). This theory suggests that humorous amusement emerges from the pleasure derived from stepping outside the boundaries of rationality through a sudden perception of the unconventional relationship between two or more unrelated elements.

Monro selects key theorists to elucidate this concept due to their foundational contributions to the understanding of incongruity in humour. He states that Immanuel Kant, who argues that "laughter is an affect arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing" (161), is often regarded as "the father of the incongruity theory" (Monro 147). However, Monro also states that it was Arthur Schopenhauer who "developed this idea fully" (148) by providing a more comprehensive analysis. Schopenhauer explains that "the source of the ludicrous is always the paradoxical and therefore unexpected subsumption of an object under a concept which in other respects is different from it" (91). He further elaborates on the mechanics of incongruity through the lens of sudden perception, explaining how the disruption of expected patterns can produce a humorous effect as follows:

> The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. It often occurs in this way: two or more real objects are thought through one concept, and the identity of the concept is transferred to the objects. . . . All laughter then is occasioned by a paradox, and therefore by unexpected subsumption, whether this is expressed in words or in actions. (76)

This quote shows how Schopenhauer's analysis suggests that humour arises from a sudden recognition of incongruity between a concept and the real objects associated with it. This can happen when multiple objects are unexpectedly grouped under one concept, or when a single object doesn't fit well with the concept it is associated with. This unexpected alignment creates a paradox, causing laughter by disrupting our usual way of thinking. Schopenhauer highlights that humour fundamentally relies on this cognitive disruption, where the unexpected and absurd connections between ideas and objects lead to a comedic effect. Noël Carroll further explains how incongruity is employed by literary humourists by suggesting that

> Conflicting viewpoints supply . . . incongruity. In comic narratives—including novels, plays, and films—it frequently happens that certain characters misperceive their circumstances. . . . The audience is aware of this and tracks the spectacle under two alternative, but nevertheless conflicting, interpretations: the limited perspective of the mistaken character and the omniscient perspective of the narrator. Inasmuch as these viewpoints effectively contradict each other, the incongruity theorist counts them as further instances of incongruous juxtaposition. (24)

As Carroll suggests, humorous narratives make use of incongruity by creating a dramatic irony in which the mistaken character, perhaps because of his/her limited information, misinterprets what is happening around him/her while the reader is supplied with the required information to assess the occurrences accurately. Here, the humorous amusement emerges due to holding two contradicting interpretations, that of the oblivious and mistaken character and that of the informed reader simultaneously, which creates the incongruous effect, resulting in humorous amusement. The initial incongruity creates a puzzle to untangle, and "upon being confronted with an incongruity, we begin to rally ourselves to meet a potential challenge, but assessing the stimulus to be an absurdity we relax our guard or lighten up, thereby undergoing an experience of levity" (Carroll 49). The cognitive stress caused by the juxtaposition of seemingly contradicting elements transmutes into humorous amusement as the absurd pattern is recognised by the reader.

While Monro aligns Henri Bergson primarily with the superiority theory due to Bergson's focus on the comic as a manifestation of rigidity and inelasticity in behaviour, a closer

examination reveals that Bergson's ideas resonate significantly with the incongruity theory. Bergson's analysis in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) emphasises the contrast between the mechanical and the living—between the rigidity and fluidity of life. This contrast manifests itself as a fundamental incongruity, aligns closely with the incongruity theory of humour. Bergson's notion of the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" (37) can be seen as a form of incongruity that disrupts the natural flow of life, making such behaviour laughable. Recognizing Bergson's work as fitting within the incongruity theory provides a clearer understanding of his contributions to humour studies. Bob Plant's analysis highlights this by stating that "as Bergson's account hinges on the disparity between our worldly expectations (for normal, 'supple' behaviour) and what actually transpires (stunted, repetitive behaviour), it can be described, like Kant's, as an 'incongruity' account" (125). This perspective on Bergson's work offers a clearer explanation of why certain behaviours or situations are perceived as humorous.

Building on this perspective, Bergson elaborates that humour arises when rigidity is imposed upon the natural fluidity of life, resulting in awkward mimicry of life's "inherent suppleness" (38). This can be observed in various manifestations: the "ceremonial aspects of social life" (44), incidents that draw attention "to the physicality of a person when their moral character is at stake" (51), or scenarios where individuals are "perceived as objects" (58). In each case, Bergson identifies the intrusion of automatism and mechanicality into the sphere of living, elastic vitality, thus creating a humorous incongruity. Bergson's framework illuminates the deeper psychological and social mechanisms at play in the creation of comedic effect.

In addition to the superiority and incongruity theories, the relief theory argues that humorous amusement functions as a release from excess mental energy. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) illuminates the mechanics behind the discharge of mental energy, suggesting that laughter results from the release of pent-up nervous energy, providing relief from psychological tension. Building on this foundation, Freud offers a complex formulation in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), where he differentiates between various types of jokes that release tensions generated by the mind's efforts to inhibit impulses toward nonsense, childish playfulness, and displays of aggression and sexuality.

Spencer elucidates the mechanics behind the discharge of mental energy as follows:

> A large amount of nervous energy, instead of being allowed to expend itself
> in producing an equivalent amount of the new thoughts and emotions which
> were nascent, is suddenly checked in the flow. The channels along which the
> discharge was about to take place are closed. The new channel opened—that
> afforded by the appearance and proceedings of the kid—is a small one; the
> ideas and feelings suggested are not numerous and massive enough to carry
> off the nervous energy to be expended. The excess must therefore discharge
> itself in some other direction; and in the way already explained, there results
> an efflux through the motor nerves to various classes of the muscles,
> producing the half-convulsive actions we term laughter. (305)

According to Spencer, humorous amusement functions as a physiological system that operates with its own mechanics. This process is triggered when the mind distils distressing situations or feelings into trivial matters, easing discomfort and resulting in laughter as a by-product of this release.

Freud furthers Spencer's argument by stating that "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge" (147). Following Spencer's vein, Freud suggests that laughter results from the discharge of excess energy, but he provides a more complex theory as he explains how pleasure in jokes is generated: "A joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously; once again, then, the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible" (100). As emotions deemed inappropriate by social conduct are repressed, they accumulate nervous energy. This pent-up energy is released through jokes, resulting in relief in the form of laughter. Freud describes this release as "an indefinable feeling, rather, which I can best compare with an 'absence', a sudden release of intellectual tension, and then all at once the joke is there—as a rule ready-clothed in words" (164). Freud likens this sudden release of intellectual tension to dream-work, suggesting that

the characteristics and effects of jokes are linked with certain forms of expression or technical methods, among which the most striking are condensation, displacement, and indirect representation. Processes, however, which lead to the same results—condensation, displacement, and indirect representation—have become known to us as peculiarities of the dream-work. (156)

This recognition of similar patterns between dream-work and joke-work opens a fruitful discussion about jokes and their potency as a relief from repression and nervous energy.

In explaining the comic, Freud describes it as "something unintended we find in human social relations. It is found in persons, in their movements, forms, actions, and traits of character—originally perhaps only in physical characteristics, and later in mental ones . . . [and] situations where these conditions for the comic attach to his actions" (184-185). For the pleasure in the comic to arise, an external impetus is needed. The comic differentiates itself by its dependency on context: "The comic turns out first of all to be the psychical effort spent in the act of imagining something on the one hand, and the actual content of the thing that is being imagined on the other" (Freud 186). A mental imagining of the ideal creates a surplus of mental energy compared to the actuality of the event, resulting in laughter through the release of this energy. This comparison employs noticing comic differences, which "would be found either a) by a comparison between another person and our self, or b) by a comparison wholly within the other person, or c) by a comparison wholly within our self" (Freud 220). Although noticing comic differences might resemble the superiority theory, Freud's account focuses on the expenditure of the surplus energy caused by the imagination of the expected result.

Freud uses examples of gallows-humour and the rogue to illustrate how humour emerges from repressed or unused affect that, when released, generates laughter. His examples include: "The rogue who is being led to execution on a Monday exclaims: 'Well, that's a good start to the week'" (223), or "when on the way to execution the rogue asks for a scarf for his bare neck so that he doesn't catch a cold" (223). In these cases, the rogues, facing execution, likely experience devastating emotions. The nervous energy

accumulates as it is not expressed, and by turning execution into a regular Monday or a cold day, they display their overwhelming emotions as daily annoyances, causing the excess affect to be expended and laughter to emerge. As the rogues rise above their dire circumstances, Freud claims that humour is "the triumph of narcissism" (163), referring to the way humour induces a feeling of invulnerability, enabling a person to transcend their circumstances and protect the ego from distress. Despite facing ultimate danger, through humour, the rogues are not defeated and provide protection for themselves, illustrating its consoling function.

The traditional classification of humour theories—namely, the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the release theory—provides valuable frameworks for understanding the mechanics of humorous amusement. As Sheila Lintott summarises, "[w]e might say that the incongruity theory focuses on the cognitive aspects, superiority the emotive, and relief the physical of comic amusement" (347). While these cognitive, emotive, and physical aspects supply an abundance of resources for analysing humour, Tzachi Zamir emphasises the need for a disjunctive account to achieve a complete understanding of humour. Zamir argues:

> A theory of laughter would be best served by preserving the explanatory potency of each as part of a unified theory via some disjunctive account. . . . Endorsing a disjunctive framework does not imply accepting all existing theories simply because they exist: one's disjunctive account can certainly deny the aptness of one or more of the existing proposals. . . . Those who favour a theory of laughter based on the desire to project onto humans a desire for superiority over others may dismiss claims that liken our minds to elaborate pressure cookers with laughter pictured as a release valve for suppressed energy. (181)

As Zamir emphasises, employing a disjunctive account offers several benefits in comprehending the multifaceted nature of humour. The layers of variables inherent in humorous expression and amusement suggest that the specific factors identified by different theories may overlap, coexist, or exist in symbiosis. By leveraging the strengths of each theory and forming a comprehensive disjunctive account, one can achieve a more holistic understanding of its function. This integrated approach becomes particularly pertinent when examining dark humour, which often combines elements from various

theoretical frameworks to achieve its distinctive effect. Dark humour, characterised by its use of macabre, ironic, or absurd elements to address serious or taboo subjects, can be better understood through a disjunctive framework that acknowledges the interplay of cognitive dissonance, emotional superiority, and psychological release.

The complexity of dark humour is further illuminated by philosophical interpretations of absurdity. Philosophers have explored the inherent contradictions and suffering of human existence, often framing these themes through an absurdist lens. For instance, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus (1913-1960) underlines the contradictory nature of existence by emphasising humans' inclination to live in the future while holding the knowledge of the inevitability of death. This human tendency to strive for life amidst the reality of mortality resembles a tug-of-war, which Camus describes as such: "At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman" (19). Camus illustrates the inhuman essence of the world with the example of the indifferent and external forces that shape human existence: "Just as there are days when, under the familiar face of a woman, we see as a stranger we had loved months or years ago, perhaps we shall come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone. But the time has not yet come. Just one thing: that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd" (20). This example illustrates moments when the familiar becomes alien, such as seeing a loved one as a stranger, reflecting the need for connection and meaning in an indifferent world. This abrupt detachment underlines the primitive hostility of the world, which is unresponsive and detached from human desires. The "denseness and strangeness" of the world highlights the inherent conflict between humans' quest for meaning and the world's inherent meaninglessness.

John Morreall views humour as one of the most potent reactions against the inhuman essence of the world. He suggests that "[i]f we simply shift to a more cosmic perspective than we usually adopt, then not only our present concerns but the whole history of our species looks insignificant. . . . [A]ny incongruity can be funny. . . . The human condition itself is funny" (124). On an individual level, the inherent incongruity embedded in human existence is painful. However, as Morreall suggests, shifting to a more cosmic

perspective alleviates this pain and situates laughter as a solution. This approach aligns with Bergson's assertion that "the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple" (5). Through intentional dissociation from the pain inflicted by an inhumane world—what Bergson refers to as "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" (5), humour emerges as a means of coping with existential absurdity.

Humour's function as consolation is further elaborated by Simon Critchley:

> The consolations of humour come from acknowledging that this is the only world and, imperfect as it is and we are, it is only here that we can make a difference. Therefore, the redemptive power of humour is not, as it is in Kierkegaard, the transition from the ethical to the religious point of view, where humour is the last stage of existential awareness before faith. Humour is not nuomenal but phenomenal, not theological but anthropological, not numinous but simply luminous. (17)

According to Critchley, humour has an intrinsic connection to the human condition and possesses the potential to illuminate human existence despite its imperfections. Serving as a means to comprehend the world as it is, rather than seeking refuge in otherworldly concepts, it offers a unique perspective. Critchley argues that humour provides a clearer understanding of the human condition through its consoling function. He states:

> The subject looks at itself like an abject object and instead of weeping bitter tears, it laughs at itself and finds consolation therein. Humour is an antidepressant that does not work by deadening the ego in some sort of Prozac-induced daze, but is rather a relation of self-knowledge. Humour is often dark, but always lucid. It is a profoundly cognitive relation to oneself and the world. (102)

This quote highlights the reflective power of humour, where the subject, upon viewing "itself as an abject object," chooses laughter over despair, demonstrating a shift from sorrow to self-consolation. Critchley presents it as an enhancement of self-knowledge, emphasising that "[h]umour is often dark, but always lucid," which underlines its revealing power. This allows individuals to confront complex and difficult aspects of life, ensuring that it remains a tool for engagement and resilience in the face of adversity.

As a tool for engagement and resilience, humour relies on an awareness of existential realities and the rebuilding of pathways between the recognizant self and the inherently malicious, inhumane other. The quality of darkness is more evident in some types of humour than others, pointing towards the necessity of recognizing the definitive qualities of dark humour, which Birch defines as "a kind of humour which flourished from the late 1950s through to the 1970s in America, characterised by morbid or provocative treatment of subjects like death and disease" (1100). André Breton, who edited *The Anthology of Black Humor* (1997), plays a pivotal role in the conceptualization of this form. Breton situates dark humour in opposition to "joviality, wit or sarcasm," describing it as "partly macabre, partly ironic, often absurd" (10). This emphasis on morbidity, irony, and absurdity highlights its distinctive nature, leveraging these elements to confront and often subvert conventional narratives.

Dark humourists reveal the underlying entropy, irony, and absurdity of existence, employing a stance that exposes "a sense . . . of the theatrical (and joyless) pointlessness of everything" (Breton 11). The narrative energy accumulated through the juxtaposition of incongruities, ironies, and absurdities works to "reduce everything that then seemed all-important to a petty scale, desecrating everything in its path" (Breton 11). With its transformative power, dark humour disrupts and disintegrates patterns of infallible foreknowledge and hopeful anticipation, thereby opening up new narrative possibilities.

Patrick O'Neill introduces the concept of comedy of entropy to illuminate the nature of dark humour, emphasising its characteristics as "the humour of lost norms, lost confidence, the humour of disorientation" (154). This term encapsulates how dark humour navigates the entropic tendencies within systems and structures, referring to the concept of entropy, which denotes a gradual decline into disorder and chaos.. O'Neill suggests that it transforms this disarray into a source of amusement by exploiting the inherent incongruities. This transformation is "based … on an essential incongruity, the comic treatment of material which resists comic treatment" (O'Neill 156). Elements that might initially appear tragic are stripped of their sentimental attributes which render them

as playful materials by exposing the fundamental incongruity. To articulate a theoretical framework, O'Neill describes five modes of entropic humour that build upon this incongruous foundation: "the satiric, the ironic, the grotesque, the absurd, and the parodic" (156). These modes collectively provide a comprehensive lens through which the use of dark humour can be critically and reflectively examined in literary contexts, highlighting its capacity to subvert traditional narratives and engage with complex themes.

In this context, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler define satire as "in it, the author attacks some object, using as his means wit or humour that is either fantastic or absurd" (211). Connecting satire with dark humour, O'Neill asserts that "satire is the soil in which black humour takes root" (157). To create works that reflect lost norms, lost confidence, and disorientation, one must first identify and highlight these missing elements. Like satire, dark humour requires a close look at systems and structures. However, "satire is characterised by a firm belief in its own moral efficacy," while dark humour shows "an emphatic lack of belief in its own efficacy as an agent of moral education, and didactic confidence gives way to a fascinated vision of maximum entropy, total disorder" (O'Neill 157). This key difference is important to understand that satire tries to correct societal flaws through moral critique, while dark humour embraces chaos and disorder, finding amusement in life's absurdity without offering solutions or moral lessons.

O'Neill's perspective emphasises that dark humour is not about fixing society but about revealing its irrational and often harsh realities. As Lisa Colletta states, "[w]ithout faith in meaningful moral development, comedy no longer serves a corrective satirical function but instead offers the pleasurable protection of laughter in the face of injustice and brutality" (5). This "pleasurable protection" shows how dark humour, even though it uses a satirical lens, does not aim to correct but rather to help people cope and navigate the world as it is. This allows for a resistance that is both insightful and rebellious, and by recognizing the limits of moral teaching, dark humour offers a unique space for contemplation and resilience.

Following the satirical mode, irony emerges as a fundamental aspect of dark humour, playing a critical role in its overall structure. Irony is defined as a "mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from, and usually opposite to, the professed or ostensible ones" (Childs and Fowler 123), and it is another inseparable quality of dark humour. By showing one thing but implying another, irony intentionally creates an empty space between what is said and what is actually implied, allowing for a multiplicity of meanings. This creates a layer of complexity and depth, enabling readers to engage in an active interpretation of the underlying truth. O'Neill states that

> while humour points to the real . . . irony points to the gap separating the real from the ideal, and embodies the disjunction in the inauthentic discourse of ambiguity. As the gap widens . . . irony responds less and less to the magnetic attraction of satire, more and more to that of the grotesque, and becomes in the process the dominant mode of entropic comedy in its own right. (158)

This statement highlights the transformative power of irony within dark humour. The ironic mode highlights the contrast between the real and the ideal, revealing the disjunctions and inconsistencies. As O'Neill suggests, when the gap between the real and the ideal becomes irrecoverably wide, irony serves as a pleasurable yet ruthless truth-telling practice, bringing attention to what is irrecoverable. This function of irony is further elaborated by Ted Gournelos and Viveca Greene, who describe it as a "potentially useful tool by which one can open up new ways of speaking about an issue, even though the possibility of it being offensive and foreclosing discourse is always present" (xxiv). Therefore, irony can be seen as an effective tool for engaging with subject matter in a critical manner, creating a fertile ground where humour and intentional offence can be employed.

Similarly, another significant component of dark humour is the grotesque, which plays a vital role in unsettling the audience. The grotesque is defined as "present[ing] the human figure in an exaggerated and distorted way" (Childs and Fowler 101). Although the term often refers to the deterioration and disfigurement of the human body, limiting the grotesque to corporeal impairment would prevent a full comprehension of its mode in

dark humour. Wolfgang Kayser defines the grotesque as "the artistic expression of that estrangement and alienation which grips mankind when belief in a perfect and protective natural order is weakened or destroyed" (188). This perspective broadens the understanding of the grotesque beyond physical abnormalities, emphasising its role as a response to the collapse of both internal and external structures. The grotesque, therefore, becomes a tool for expressing the profound disorientation and alienation experienced when established orders and beliefs are destabilised.

The manifestation of the grotesque is deeply tied to the socio-historical conditions of its time. As Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund suggest, "[t]he grotesque . . . functions according to its audience expectations in time and place: its effects of discomfort, discomposure and uneasiness reliant on the historical standards of 'normalcy' and what is proper" (11). This indicates that the grotesque is not a static concept but one that evolves according to the cultural and historical context. The grotesque embodies the uneasiness and discomfort caused by the destruction of a protective natural order, exuding unsettlement due to the violation of temporal normalcy and propriety. O'Neill elaborates on how the grotesque mode functions within the realms of dark humour: "The grotesque always emphasises the unresolved clash of incompatibilities, and it is this primary incongruity in the very nature of the grotesque, compounded by the secondary incongruity of combining the exaggeration of the grotesque and the understatement of irony, which causes our simultaneous horror and exhilaration" (159). As O'Neill suggests, the primary incongruity of the grotesque lies within the grotesque elements themselves, confronting conventional norms and expectations. This discrepancy is the precursor to what can be qualified as grotesque. When combined with irony—where understatement meets overstatement—a secondary incongruity emerges. This combination heightens the unsettling and exhilarating effects, making the grotesque a powerful tool for challenging and expanding our understanding of societal norms. The grotesque thus functions not merely as a reflection of physical deformity but as a complex narrative device that disrupts and critiques the perceived stability of social and natural orders, aligning with the broader aims of dark humour to provoke thought and reflection.

Another critical component of dark humour is the absurd, which underlines the inherent meaninglessness of the human condition. Absurdity is defined as "the tension which emerges from the individual's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either" (Childs and Fowler 1). This definition highlights the cruel neutrality of a universe that offers no conclusive evidence to validate the purpose-seeking attempts of its inhabitants. In their quest for meaning, purpose, and order, humans encounter what Camus describes as the "divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, [the] nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together" (23). The absurd encapsulates the agonising undertone of human existence, characterised by the simultaneous yearning for purpose and the perpetual disappointment engendered by an unresponsive world.

Martin Esslin further elaborates on the nature of the absurd, describing it as "the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach" (xix-xx). This view emphasises the fundamental mismatch between the mind's search for order and the disorderly, indifferent reality it faces. The clash between these elements often results in the denouncement of rationality and a perception of humans as fundamentally powerless agents in their lives. The inherent incongruity within the absurd aligns closely with dark humour, as noted by Elaine B. Safer, who asserts that "the conflict between the quest for meaning and the upset at finding none creates an emerging tone in which distress and joke, horror and farce collide. This tone has been called black humour" (105). The absurd mode is thus deeply ingrained within dark humour due to its emphasis on the incongruity between meaning and meaninglessness, purpose and purposelessness, seriousness and indifference. The absurd not only serves to highlight the disjunction between human aspirations and the indifferent universe but also functions as a critical tool for exploring the depths of human experience, providing a fertile ground for the interplay of mental distress and amusement that characterises dark humour.

In addition to the ironic and grotesque modes, the parodic mode of dark humour plays a crucial role in revealing underlying truths through subversive mimicry. Parody, defined

by Childs and Fowler as the mode that "searches out, by means of subversive mimicry, any weakness, pretension or lack of self-awareness in its original" (167), aims to expose the discrepancies between the perceived and actual nature of the subject matter. This mode relies heavily on the lack of self-awareness in its target, creating a space to critically highlight and reveal harsh truths. O'Neill divides the parodic mode in dark humour into two sides: active and passive. He explains:

> On the passive side we have black humour in all its modes of expression . . . characterized implicitly by the sense of values lost and the apparent acceptance of total disorder. On the active side, we have a form of entropic humour, which we may call 'metahumour' characterized by the sense of values parodied and the transvaluation of "modes of ululation" into the parodic and paradoxical celebration of entropy. (161)

As stated by O'Neill, the parodic mode of dark humour actively celebrates entropy by transforming the expected into the unexpected, subverting the original subject matter, and creating disorientation. This subversion creates a fertile context for a critical approach toward established values. By mimicking and exaggerating the weaknesses of its targets, parody serves as a powerful tool for both critiquing and entertaining, aligning with the broader goals of dark humour to challenge and reflect on societal norms. The active and passive dimensions of parody thus enhance its capacity to question and destabilise established narratives.

All of the modes mentioned above provide a comprehensive model that integrates various modes of dark humour, each contributing to a dynamic interplay that resembles a chain reaction, where they trigger, follow, and complement each other. O'Neill summarises their relationality as follows:

> The satiric mode of entropic comedy . . . unsuccessfully urges the necessity of reconciling the real and the ideal, while the ironic mode watches the gap become unbridgeable. The grotesque mode goes further in that it undermines the autonomy of the real, . . . and the validity of the guarantee implied by the notion of a linkage between real and ideal. (160)

Within the framework of dark humour, each mode serves a distinct yet interconnected function. The satiric mode is observant and diagnostic of societal flaws, vices, and

corruptions, utilising sharp observation. The ironic mode highlights the contradictions between appearances and realities, fostering a reflective engagement with these discrepancies. The grotesque mode, with its unsettling nature, challenges conventional norms by distorting reality to provoke critical thought. The absurd mode, emphasising the inherent irrationality and meaninglessness of human existence, underlines the existential plight of seeking purpose in an indifferent world. Lastly, the parodic mode playfully mocks established conventions through exaggeration, revealing underlying truths and inconsistencies.

When examined collectively, these modes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of dark humour. They coexist in varying degrees, each contributing to its capacity to critique, reflect, and entertain. By intertwining these modes, dark humour achieves a comprehensive approach to exploring and challenging societal and existential issues, making it a potent tool for both social commentary and psychological resilience.

Dark humour often thrives in times of crisis, serving as both a coping mechanism and a form of social criticism. For instance, Willie Smyth's examination of its use following the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986, which resulted in the death of seven crew members, highlights this dual function. Smyth concludes that "[t]he Challenger jokes reveal how people distance themselves from the disaster, from intimations of their own mortality, and from the moral posturing of an intrusive media" (260). Functioning as a protective barrier against the emotional turmoil induced by mass deaths, it highlights its significance in maintaining psychological resilience.

Similarly, during the Spanish flu pandemic, dark humour emerged as a coping strategy amidst widespread tragedy. Nikita Lobanov states that the pandemic "became a health crisis suspended between dark hilarity and tragedy. Stories, some funny and others simply absurd, such as adverts and 'miraculous' snake-oil merchandise, multiplied in the wake

of the first wave of the flu" (406). It functioned as a protective measure against the inner turmoil caused by mass deaths, highlighting the role of humour in maintaining psychological resilience. The absurdity and irony inherent in stories like those surrounding the Spanish flu allowed people to confront the harsh realities of the pandemic while preserving their mental well-being.

In times of war, dark humour also plays a significant role in confronting authority and alleviating the harsh realities of military life. Nathan Wise investigates the use of humour among Australian Imperial Force working-class soldiers during World War I, focusing on its confrontational function towards authority. These soldiers viewed military service pragmatically, often enlisting for pay, pensions, or other benefits, and they approached it as a job. This perspective led to strikes and protests when living conditions became unbearable. In one diary entry, Cecil George Monk describes a mock funeral ceremony held for sausages as a form of implicit protest: "One fellow walk[ed] in front with an open book, a couple with a dish of sausages, and a party with brooms as reversed arms, the parade halted in front of the officers mess. The acting parson read with a loud solemn voice as they were dropped in the sea. Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, the soldiers can't eat you, So the fishes must" (9). Wise explains that this humorous protest served multiple purposes:

> [A]ny aggressive action would bring the full attention of the military authorities with their near limitless power of judgement and punishment over enlisted men. Thus humour was incorporated into protests to pacify potentially violent situations, to reduce the aggressive tone of the complaint, and to appeal to the officer class's sense of humour in seeking a satisfactory solution without retribution. (228)

This account demonstrates that humour was employed by soldiers as an elusive method to protest unpleasant living conditions while avoiding direct confrontation with military authorities. Additionally, the distancing and protective functions of dark humour helped soldiers maintain their morale and avoid sinking into misery, aligning with Freud's concept of the "victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability" (162). This explanation underlines how it operates in relation to the ego, allowing individuals to position themselves above their circumstances.

The increase in the use of dark humour among societies during times of crisis is evident. However, the most intricate expressions are found in the works of literary dark humourists. O'Neill identifies certain characteristics commonly shared by these writers, such as "the same detachment, the same irony, the same mocking apocalyptic tone, the same parodic undercutting of all systems, the same one-dimensional characters, wasteland settings, disjunctive structure, and self-conscious delight in artistry . . . [and] a refusal to treat what one might regard as tragic materials tragically" (148). These authors are not only keen observers but also skilled alchemists, transforming disturbing subjects into sources of dark humour. Through their sharp observation, they extract it from the most gruesome aspects of human existence, transmuting pain into amusement..

Building on this idea, the interwar period (1918-1939), marked by profound societal anxiety and a pervasive sense of powerlessness, catalysed the development of a distinct dark humour in British literature. British novelists, grappling with the aftermath of violence and the looming threat of further conflict, found themselves in a world where traditional values had been upended, and certainty was a luxury of the past. In this context, comedic expression was not abandoned but transformed into something that resonated deeply with the complexity and ambiguity of the time. As Colletta observes,

> British novelists between the wars are haunted by a sense of anxiety and powerlessness, marked by feelings of loss and uncertainty and shot through with the trauma of violence and the threat of further brutality. However, despite the violent events and unhappy endings, many works from the period insist on being funny, exploring the central themes of Modernism—alienation, uncertainty, instability, mechanization, and fragmentation—through a grim form of comedy. .   .(1-2)

Overburdened by the trauma induced by the war, which revealed humanity's fatal mistakes and their implications, and overwhelmed by feelings of lost values and increased uncertainty, literary dark humourists of this time diverged from their contemporaries by employing a grim form of comedy that exhibits a "deeply ambivalent humour, where what is being satirised is never entirely clear, making their humour distinctly darker than is generally presumed" (Colletta 2). These writers exposed the discrepancies and

underlying horrors of their times. However, in their works, "the social content remains but its social purpose all but disappears" (Colletta 2). Lacking the moralistic agenda of their precursors, they resonated with the zeitgeist, reflecting the ambivalent and uncertain atmosphere of their era through their use of humour.

Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, which Cyril Connolly, an English literary critic and writer, regards as "unquestionably the finest novels to have come out of the war" (qtd. in Brennan 10), exemplifies the use of dark humour in the context of World War II. In this trilogy, Waugh employs this form to present a critical gaze upon the war and the human condition during wartime, inviting readers to confront the often uncomfortable truths lurking behind the heroic and patriotic narratives that typically define the war and military institutions.

A key aspect of Waugh's dark humour is its resistance to offering clear-cut moral or ideological comfort, a characteristic that modernises his satirical approach. As Colletta observes, "[t]he uncertainty and ambivalence and a lack of forward movement are precisely what makes Waugh's satires so darkly humorous and so particularly modern, for the comfort of a stable critique is denied to the reader" (Colletta 84). This deliberate ambiguity serves to destabilise the reader's expectations, aligning with modernist tendencies to question and deconstruct traditional frameworks. By withholding the reassurance of a coherent satire, Waugh forces his audience into an active engagement with the text, where they must navigate the disorienting and absurd realities of war without the guidance of a clear moral compass.

Throughout the trilogy, the lack of a stable critique mirrors the chaotic and fragmented nature of wartime experience, compelling readers to confront the absurdity and futility that pervade the human condition in such extreme circumstances. Thus, Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy stands as a powerful testament to the use of dark humour as a means of critiquing the profound disorientation and moral ambiguity that characterised the wartime

and post-war milieu. In doing so, Waugh's narrative does more than entertain; it provokes a sustained critical reflection on the complexities and contradictions of human experience during war, resonating with Connolly's assertion of the trilogy's exceptional significance in war literature.

CHAPTER 1
INEFFICACY OF MILITARY BUREAUCRACY AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURES IN *MEN AT ARMS*

Men at Arms, the first book in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, opens with the outbreak of World War II, following Guy Crouchback's awkward yet humorous journey through the British military. The novel provides a detailed look at the absurd bureaucratic aspects of army life. Despite the farcical elements, the story highlights Guy's deep Catholic faith and his adherence to traditional values, embodied by his devout father, Mr. Crouchback. Guy's profound loneliness and isolation, often bordering on despair, form a persistent backdrop in *Men at Arms*. The narrative portrays Guy as the last representative of a once-noble family that has faced personal and financial setbacks. His mother died young, his eldest brother, Gervase, was killed in World War I, and his other brother, Ivo, starved himself to death. Guy himself marries Virginia, a non-Catholic socialite, only for her to leave him for a mutual friend. Unable to remarry due to his faith, Guy faces a future devoid of family legacy that contributes to his melancholic outlook.

Upon the declaration of the war, Guy returns from Italy to London, eager to serve but initially unable to secure a military role. He stays with his sister Angela and her husband, Arthur Box-Bender, a non-Catholic Conservative MP who dismisses Guy's religious restrictions. Guy finally joins the Royal Corps of Halberdiers, where he meets eccentric fellow officer Apthorpe. The regiment is marked by comedic incidents, such as the Thunder-Box saga involving Apthorpe's treasured portable toilet, which reflects the broader inefficiencies and absurdities that plagued the British military during WWII, as, "by the end of 1941, and especially in comparison with the air force and navy, the army was widely viewed as inefficient and unprepared for the challenges it faced" (Field 123). The Thunder-Box, a symbol of a source of personal comfort in the face of military absurdity, mirrors the real struggles of soldiers dealing with inadequate supplies and bureaucratic mismanagement. The narrative blends humour with the grim realities of war, epitomised by a failed raid in Africa, and the death of Apthorpe from excessive whiskey

consumption. The novel concludes with Guy flying back to England, his future uncertain, as his peers reflect on his misadventures with a mix of humour and detachment.

As the first book in Evelyn Waugh's war trilogy, *Sword of Honour*, *Men at Arms* presents the initial idealism and eventual disillusionment of the protagonist, Guy Crouchback, an English Catholic man. Within the historical context of the interwar period and the beginning of the Second World War, Waugh confronts themes of honour, disillusionment with war, while providing a humorous satire on the inefficacy of military bureaucracy. Guy Crouchback embodies the predominant feeling of disorientation, isolation, and being lost, and as he discovers a sense of purpose with the outbreak of the Second World War, he joins the army and embarks on a journey toward unsettling disillusionment.

While humour might traditionally be associated with times of joy and leisure, history frequently reveals its emergence during periods of profound adversity, such as plagues, natural disasters, and wars. Among these adversities, wars stand apart, not only because of their devastating effects—including mass death, widespread destruction, and societal upheaval—but also due to their complex and multifaceted origins. Wars arise from an amalgamation of economic pressures, political ambitions, ideological fervours, power struggles, and territorial desires. These conflicts are fundamentally human constructs, caused by our socio-political structures, and they unleash catastrophic consequences predominantly upon the powerless and the vulnerable.

Charlotte Towle articulates the sense of powerlessness that war imposes upon ordinary individuals: "The individual becomes subject to the state, and our cherished freedom as individuals is laid aside against an uncertain tomorrow" (144). Towle's observation underlines the dehumanising effects of war, where the government's schemes overshadow individual autonomy, treating people as mere parts of a large, uncaring system. The loss of personal agency creates an atmosphere of insecurity and hopelessness, which is intricately woven into Evelyn Waugh's *Men at Arm*s, where dark

humour serves as a critical tool to expose and explore the profound disillusionment and moral ambiguity that pervade the wartime experience.

In *Men at Arms*, Waugh uses dark humour to navigate the grim realities of war, highlighting the contrast between the glorified narratives of military honour and the actual experiences of those involved. He effectively accentuates the harsh realities of war without succumbing to sentimentality through this technique. By intentionally maintaining a distance from what is considered sacred, Waugh "avoids issues, decisions, controversy, for all the world is the object of his farce. Nothing is sacred, not even the Catholic Church, which he joined in 1930, almost at the very end of his literary career" (Karl 169). This distance, combined with "his humour [which] annoys and disturbs" (Karl 166), allows Waugh's sardonic observations of World War II to be particularly revealing.

Employing what Bergson describes as the "[t]he comic spirit [which] has a logic of its own" (2), Waugh sheds light on the often-overlooked absurdities of war, portraying it as superfluous and nonsensical. Waugh does not subscribe to the constructed narratives that typically glorify armed conflict; instead, he unearths the inherent absurdity through his humour. He highlights human folly and inefficacy rather than excellence, presenting a general atmosphere of perplexity rather than coordination, and emphasising the incongruities that arise from the myriad absurdities of war. As Kathleen Emmet Darman states, "[a] comic, detached ambivalence lies at the heart of Evelyn Waugh's work" (164), which allows him to critique the absurdity of war without being overtly moralistic or didactic.

The war, marked by unprecedented global upheaval and moral ambiguity, provides a contrast to the romanticised Victorian ideals that linger in the minds of older generations. These ideals, rooted in moral certainties, patriotism, and the belief in British imperialism's civilising mission, stand in stark contrast to the harsh realities of modern conflict. David Wykes argues that "[o]ne of the variety of things that Evelyn Waugh's

novels are about is consistently the conflict of generations, the clashing of the divergent mentalities of the old and the young" (16). In *Men at Arms*, this generational conflict is vividly portrayed through the characters of Gervase and Hermione, whose unwavering confidence in their nation and religious beliefs starkly contrasts with the disillusionment of their descendant, Guy Crouchback.

Waugh's depiction of Mr. Crouchback and Hermione as representatives of Victorian values subtly exposes the limitations of the era's faith in progress and nationalistic pride. Waugh, who criticises the "facile, humanistic faith in progress" (Wykes 55) characteristic of Victorianism, humorously highlights the fragility of these ideals during Gervase and Hermione's honeymoon in Italy. This criticism is humorously depicted during Gervase and Hermione's honeymoon in Italy, where Waugh describes a "sad gap … made by modesty and tenderness and innocence" (*MA* 1) between them. Despite their outward happiness and high social standing, an unspoken emotional distance reveals a lack of intimacy beneath the appearance of purity and innocence. This incongruity between the facade of an ideal Victorian couple and its underlying dissatisfaction highlights the dissonance between Victorian ideals and reality.

Furthering this revelation, Waugh satirises the imperialist mindset of the Victorian era through the traditional game of "I claim" played by Gervase and Hermione. As they explore Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, Hermione's exclamation of "I claim" embodies the imperialist notion of "taking possession of all she sees by right of her happiness" (*MA* 2). This individualistic entitlement, rooted in imperialist ideology, is humorously depicted when two sailors precede the couple to prevent any annoyance from the natives. Waugh vividly describes the scene: "The great paved platform was broken everywhere with pine and broom. The watch-tower was full of rubble. Two cottages had been built in the hillside from the finely cut masonry of the old castle and two families of peasants ran out to greet them with bunches of mimosa. The picnic luncheon was spread in the shade" (*MA* 2). This scene epitomises the incongruity by trivialising Victorian imperial ideals into a mere game. The absurdly welcoming reception of the couple by the natives, who

serve mimosas amidst an unkempt setting, effectively reduces imperial motives to farce. The disordered scenery further symbolises the abandonment of traditional structures, symbolising the decline of sanctified institutions.

Henri Bergson's concept of incongruity provides a compelling framework to analyse Waugh's use of caricatures. By depicting Gervase and Hermione as Victorian caricatures, Waugh applies mechanical rigidity into the vibrant flow of life, which creates an intentional dissonance, resulting in the emergence of humorous amusement. In furthering this analysis, Brennan's insights into Waugh's pastime activity underline the prevalence of such caricatures. Brennan observes: "[Waugh] came to view sketching, especially cartoons, as a pleasurable relaxation. Indeed, many of the most vivid caricatures of his fictions, … owe much to his early aptitude for creating essentially cartoon-like impressions of exaggerated human behaviour" (5). These caricatures not only enrich his humour but also serve as a medium to expose underlying social and personal discrepancies. This is particularly evident in scenarios where individuals perform mundane activities with mechanical precision, only to encounter disruptions by unforeseen forces. The essence of this incongruity is captured in Bergson's illustration of a person whose habitual, almost robotic actions are subverted by an element of surprise or absurdity, creating a comic effect. Waugh's caricatures mirror this concept, as his characters often exhibit mechanical and exaggerated behaviours that, when set against the unpredictability of their environments, highlight the inherent absurdity and humour in human nature. An illustration of this incongruity is provided by Bergson, who describes a person that:

> Attends to the petty occupations of his everyday life with mathematical precision. The objects around him, however, have all been tampered with by a mischievous wag, the result being that when he dips his pen into the inkstand he draws it out all covered with mud, when he fancies he is sitting down on a solid chair he finds himself sprawling on the floor, in a word his actions are all topsy-turvy or mere beating the air, while in every case the effect is invariably one of momentum. Habit has given the impulse: what was wanted was to check the movement or deflect it. He did nothing of the sort, but continued like a machine in the same straight line. (9-10)

Waugh's caricatures encapsulate this essence of mechanicality, where characters continue their actions with unthinking regularity, only to be met with the absurd consequences of their rigid behaviours.

Apthorpe, a central figure in Evelyn Waugh's *Men at Arms*, embodies this absurdity within the wartime experience, his eccentricity manifesting most prominently through his obsessive attachment to a portable toilet, or "thunder-box." This seemingly trivial object becomes a symbol of Apthorpe's deep-seated anxieties and his attempts to impose a semblance of personal order amid the overwhelming chaos of war. Apthorpe's fixation on the thunder-box transcends mere idiosyncrasy; it functions as a symbol of his desperate grasp for control in a milieu where control is impossible.

The absurdity inherent in Apthorpe's character is vividly illustrated in his reaction to the unauthorised use of his thunder-box by Brigadier Ritchie-Hook, his superior officer. Apthorpe's outraged assertion that "as my superior officer he has no more right to use my thunder-box than to wear my boots" (*MA* 128) reveals a profound disjunction between the personal and the professional, highlighting his distorted perception of military hierarchy. The absurdity of this situation is compounded by Apthorpe's contemplation of appealing to the Army Council, a course of action that highlights his inability to navigate the boundaries between private possession and military duty. This episode encapsulates the incongruity that defines Apthorpe's worldview, wherein the trivial is elevated to the status of the critical, and the personal is inextricably intertwined with the professional.

The narrative further amplifies the absurdity of Apthorpe's predicament through the lengths to which he goes to secure exclusive access to his thunder-box. The relocation of the thunder-box to a clandestine location, undertaken with Guy Crouchback's assistance, exemplifies Apthorpe's futile attempts to impose order in an environment characterised by disorder and unpredictability. This futile endeavour reaches its apogee in the darkly humorous twist where Ritchie-Hook, having discovered the new location, sabotages the

thunder-box with explosives. This act, set against the life-and-death stakes of war, creates a stark juxtaposition that accentuates the absurdity of Apthorpe's concerns. The narrative here operates on multiple levels: While the farcical elements entertain, they also serve as a vehicle for Waugh's satirical critique of the military's often arbitrary and nonsensical priorities. The interplay between the comic and the tragic, the personal and the professional, foregrounds the existential absurdity of the human condition in the context of war.

Moreover, Apthorpe's mechanical inelasticity—his rigid adherence to routine and inability to adapt to his surroundings—further elucidates the absurdity of his character. This concept, as articulated by Bergson, who posits that "[a]bsentmindedness, indeed, is not perhaps the actual fountain-head of the comic, but surely it is contiguous to a certain stream of facts and fancies which flows straight from the fountain-head" (12), is exemplified by Apthorpe's insistence on wearing his tin-hat in situations that do not warrant it. His habitual wearing of the tin-hat, even during mundane activities such as using the thunder-box, is not merely a quirk but a manifestation of his deeper psychological need for stability and security in an alien environment. The absurdity of this behaviour is further highlighted in his dialogue with Guy, where Apthorpe rationalises his actions: "Why were you wearing your tin-hat?" Guy queries, to which Apthorpe responds, "Instinct, old man. Self-preservation" (*MA* 121). He elaborates: "'I suppose it really boils down to homesickness, old man. The helmet has rather the feel of a solar topee, if you see what I mean. It makes the thunder-box more homely'" (*MA* 121). Here, Apthorpe's attempt to create a sense of normalcy through the familiar sensation of the tin-hat, akin to a sola topee, becomes a poignant expression of his displacement and homesickness. His rigid adherence to these rituals serves as a coping mechanism, a means of preserving his identity in an environment that incessantly threatens to erode it.

Waugh's portrayal of Apthorpe, therefore, extends beyond the superficial comedy of eccentricity to probe the deeper absurdities of the human condition, particularly in the context of war. Apthorpe's character, with his fixation on the thunder-box and tin-hat, becomes a microcosm of the broader absurdity that pervades the military experience. His inability to adapt to the realities of war, his conflation of the trivial with the significant, and his mechanical inelasticity all contribute to a rich exploration of themes such as existential displacement, the absurdity of human behaviour under stress, and the satirical critique of military bureaucracy. In this way, Waugh's narrative operates on a sophisticated level, using humour not only to entertain but to offer a commentary on the contradictions and absurdities inherent in the human experience during wartime.

In contrast to Apthorpe's eccentricity which manifests itself as absent-mindedness, Brigadier Ritchie-Hook's excessive ferocity and brutality manifest in his impulsive and combative approach within the military context. Ritchie-Hook represents a different facet of the absurd—one grounded in a distorted sense of authority. When Guy encounters various commanding officers, Ritchie-Hook reveals his preferred method for maintaining discipline: "You want more than automatic obedience. You want Grip. When I commanded a company and a man came up to me on a charge I used to ask him whether he'd take my punishment or go to the C.O. He always chose mine. Then I'd bend him over and give him six of the best with a cane" (*MA* 57). This passage highlights Ritchie-Hook's authoritarian nature and outdated, brutal approach to discipline, emphasising the military institution's failure to adopt more humane methods. His fixation on obtaining and sustaining dominance parallels Apthorpe's caricature-like depiction and bizarre fixations, further contributing to the humorous element. Ritchie-Hook's behaviour is not just a critical approach towards outdated disciplinary practices but also a broader commentary on the dehumanising effects of militaristic values. His brutality, masked as discipline, reveals an underlying absurdity in the military's rigid structures, where personal power dynamics often overshadow rational judgement and humane treatment.

Ritchie-Hook's mechanical inelasticity is also evident in his actions and perception of war. For instance, he recounts practical jokes and perceives the war as "the wet sponge on the door, the hedgehog in the bed; or, rather, he saw war itself as a prodigious booby trap" (*MA* 57). His perception reveals his inability to grasp the gravity of war, treating it instead as a series of pranks. His view of war as a series of practical jokes undermines the serious and often tragic nature of military conflict, creating a darkly humorous dissonance that is both jarring and revealing. This perspective reduces the horrors of war to a farcical level, suggesting a psychological coping mechanism that trivialises genuine danger and suffering. Waugh uses Ritchie-Hook's character to explore the absurdity of war, where the disconnect between the perception of conflict and its harsh realities becomes a source of dark humour and a critique of the military's often cavalier attitude towards human life.

Another striking example of Ritchie-Hook's absurd leadership is seen in his behaviour during a training exercise. Growing impatient with the soldiers' performance, Ritchie-Hook places his hat on a stick and runs along the trench, challenging the soldiers to hit it. When they all miss, he becomes increasingly frustrated, eventually popping his head over the parapet and shouting: "Come on, you young blighters, shoot me" (*MA* 111). His insistence on continuing this reckless behaviour highlights a breakdown of discipline and highlights his mechanical inelasticity. The absurdity of a commanding officer inviting his own men to shoot at him reveals the irrationality and chaos of military life. This incident encapsulates the absurdity inherent in Ritchie-Hook's leadership style, where recklessness is mistaken for courage and effectiveness. It also serves as a metaphor for the madness of war, where traditional notions of heroism and discipline are subverted by the sheer absurdity of circumstances.

Waugh further illustrates the absurdity of Ritchie-Hook's leadership style when Mrs. Leonard comments on his disregard for Sundays. Ritchie-Hook's response, "There are no Sundays in the firing-line, . . . [t]he week-end habit could lose us the war" (*MA* 56), shows his relentless and almost sadistic approach to military duty. This contrasts sharply with the monotonous and excessively formal routines depicted prior in the novel, where

officers' strict adherence to dress codes and saluting protocols reveals a prioritisation of appearance over effectiveness:

> They had doubled to their quarters, thrown their rifles and equipment on their beds, and changed into service-dress. Complete with canes and gloves (which had to be buttoned before emerging. A junior officer seen buttoning his gloves on the steps would be sent back to dress) they had marched in pairs to the Officers' House. This was the daily routine. Every ten yards they saluted or were saluted. (*MA* 36)

In this light, Ritchie-Hook's insistence that there are no Sundays in the firing-line and his disdain for the week-end habit take on a deeper significance. They reflect a worldview where the normal rhythms of life have been obliterated by the relentless demands of war. In Ritchie-Hook's mind, any concession to normalcy or humanity—such as observing a day of rest—could spell disaster. This attitude, while absurd, is also tragically fitting in the context of a war that has rendered traditional values meaningless.

Waugh's depiction of Ritchie-Hook ultimately serves to question the very nature of heroism and leadership in the context of war. Ritchie-Hook is both a parody and a tragic figure, embodying the contradictions and absurdities of a military system that has lost its way. His reckless bravery, which might be celebrated in another context, becomes in Waugh's hands a symbol of the madness and futility of war. Through Ritchie-Hook, Waugh invites the reader to reflect on the thin line between courage and absurdity, and to question whether the traditional narratives of heroism can hold any meaning in a world as chaotic and irrational as the one he portrays in *Men at Arms*.

Waugh's depiction of these characters and incidents illustrates the absurdity and inefficacy of military bureaucracy, using dark humour to critique the rigid structures and institutional failures. By focusing on the incongruity between the characters' actions and the serious context of war, Waugh exposes the absurdities inherent in military life, emphasising the need for more humane and effective approaches to leadership and soldier welfare. Through these characters, Waugh masterfully uses dark humour to critique the absurdities and misplaced priorities within the military establishment. The stark contrast

between Apthorpe's comical eccentricities and Ritchie-Hook's brutal absurdities provides a multifaceted exploration of the various ways in which individuals and institutions cope with the chaos and unpredictability of war.

In *Men at Arms*, the scene where a Halberdier soldier naively asks Guy, "Uncle, what sort of fellow is this Winston Churchill?" (*MA* 154), takes place within a broader context of military life that reflects a distinct detachment from political affairs. Apthorpe's promotion generated more excitement among the men than the change in prime ministers, highlighting how distant they felt from the larger political context of the war. Guy, already critical of Churchill's broadcasts, views the political figure with scepticism, associating him with Zionism and press lords. The soldiers' lack of awareness about significant figures like Churchill not only demonstrates individual ignorance but also reflects a broader criticism of the military institution's failure to adequately educate its members about the events and leaders shaping the war they are fighting. Guy's response, "Like Hore-Belisha except that for some reason his hats are thought to be funny" (*MA* 154), reflects a deep sense of futility. By reducing Churchill—a man who would later be celebrated as one of the greatest wartime leaders—to a trivial comparison with Hore-Belisha, Guy highlights not only the soldier's naivety but also the absurdity and detachment prevalent in the military's approach to politics. The interaction exposes the failure of the military to connect its soldiers with the realities of the war beyond the battlefield. The Halberdiers, absorbed in their regimental traditions, consider "politics [to be] an unsoldierly topic" (*MA* 153), thus creating a gap between the soldiers and the world-changing events occurring around them.

This detachment is a recurring theme in *Men at Arms*, where the focus on regimental life often overshadows the broader, more critical issues at stake in the war. Guy's response also serves as a criticism of the institution's focus on form over substance. The simplicity and irony in his response underlines a sense of disillusionment with the leadership and the superficial ways in which significant figures are perceived within the regiment.

This scene also resonates with the superiority theory of humour, where laughter often stems from a sense of triumph over others' imperfections or inadequacies. Here, both Guy and the reader experience a subtle sense of superiority over the soldier's political naivety. Guy's ironic comparison diminishes Churchill in the eyes of the uninformed soldier, while simultaneously exposing the soldier's—and by extension, the military's—lack of awareness. This sense of superiority is not just individual but institutional, as it critiques the military's failure to educate its members adequately, leaving them ill-equipped to understand the very war they are fighting.

Within the novel, the inadequacies and obliviousness of the soldiers permeate military processes, resulting in absurdly humorous situations that exemplify dark humour. An exemplifying account is when the Brigadier, known for his ferocity and impulsive nature, decides to "hid[e] in the hold and crash the party in the dark, . . . his face blacked" (*MA* 199). This reckless and foolhardy decision leads to an injury, highlighting his inability to choose a safe and sensible method for joining the operation. The reader, recognizing the absurdity and danger of his actions, experiences a sense of superiority over the Brigadier's incompetence. The Brigadier's incompetence and his subsequent injury provide the reader with a sense of sudden glory as they recognize his foolishness and the resultant consequences. This sense of superiority is a key element of dark humour, as it highlights the broader theme of institutional failure within the military. The humour derived from the Brigadier's serves to critique the systemic inefficacies of the military institution that allows such recklessness to prevail.

In *Men at Arms*, Waugh masterfully intertwines dark humour with the tragic demise of Apthorpe. His death, which is caused by a combination of factors including an infection caused by his excessive consumption of whisky, serves as a focal point for Waugh's exploration of humour as a coping mechanism. This is illustrated in the scenes leading up to Apthorpe's death, where levity emerges as both a psychological defence and a means

of asserting control over an uncontrollable situation. Waugh's portrayal of Apthorpe's final moments reflects Freud's relief theory since Apthorpe's obsession with trivialities—such as his thunder-box and his request for a corkscrew while on his deathbed—serves as a means of trivialising the impending threat of death. Apthorpe engages in a dialogue with Guy: "When Guy looked up he saw tears on Apthorpe's colourless cheeks. 'I say, would you like me to go?' 'No, no. I'll feel better in a minute. Did you bring a corkscrew? Good man'" (*MA* 206). This moment exemplifies how levity can momentarily lift the burden of reality. It offers both Apthorpe and Guy a brief respite from the emotional strain of his deteriorating condition.Freud's concept of humour as "the triumph of narcissism" (Freud 162) is particularly relevant here, as Apthorpe's humour allows him to maintain a semblance of dignity and control, even as his body succumbs to illness.

The absurdity of the situation is further highlighted in the dialogue between Apthorpe and Guy: "'Do you remember years ago, when we first joined, I mentioned my aunt?' 'You mentioned two.' 'Exactly. That's what I wanted to tell you. There's only one'" (*MA* 207). This seemingly irrelevant detail serves to diffuse the tension surrounding Apthorpe's condition, providing a momentary escape from the gravity of the situation. Here, Waugh aligns with Freud's theory by illustrating how humour can serve as a safe outlet for repressed emotions, offering psychological relief through the trivialization of serious matters.

Furthermore, the cause of Apthorpe's death itself is a prime example of Waugh's dark humour. Apthorpe's demise is caused by the addiction he clings to in an attempt to experience normalcy, that is, his excessive consumption of whisky. Guy's involuntary role in this, bringing Apthorpe a bottle of whisky in his delirium, underlines the tragicomic nature of the event.

In his modal for entropic humour, O'Neill draws a parallel between satire and dark humour, noting that "satire serves as the soil for dark humor to flourish" (157). Waugh's

use of this style in *Men at Arms* fits into this framework, as he maintains a distant stance that allows him to present his comedic observations without a corrective intention. This non-corrective satiric mode can be observed in several instances throughout *Men at Arms,* where Waugh's dark humour serves not to reform but to expose the underlying absurdities and failures of the military institution. Waugh employs the satiric mode as he humorously undermines the military and its hierarchical structure by exposing the reality behind appearances. This implication is evident in an instance where Waugh depicts de Souza, who is an officer within the Halberdiers, displaying a cynical attitude towards military life, mockingly paying respect to Apthorpe: "Then two paces away, de Souza would suddenly relax, switch negligently at a weed, or on one occasion, drop suddenly on one knee and, still fixing the captain with his worshipping stare, fiddle with a bootlace" (*MA* 156). Apthorpe's unearned promotion, not fully comprehended by his fellow officers, becomes a subject of mockery by de Souza, whose method is described as "the cruellest technique" (*MA* 156). Waugh's satirical gaze captures the dissonance within the military, which is ostensibly a perfectly functioning system. By excluding a didactic and corrective tone, Waugh reduces the hierarchy to mere decorum, turning it into a subject of dark humour.

Another instance where Waugh employs the satiric mode is in his depiction of the mismanagement and instability of financial resources within the military. The narrative illustrates this through the officers' financial struggles: "The first flood-tide of ready cash ebbed fast. Young officers began counting the days until the end of the month and speculating whether, now that their existence had once been recognized by the pay-office, they could depend on regular funds... One by one all Guy's former clients returned to him; one or two others diffidently joined" (*MA* 93). Waugh exposes the inefficacy of the military bureaucracy by showing how the mismanagement of monetary resources leads to insecurity among the young officers. This recurring financial instability forces the officers to turn to Guy, depicting him as an "awfully generous good-natured fellow" (*MA* 93) despite being an outcast otherwise. Waugh also emphasises that "Guy's prestige rose also with the renewed incidence of poverty" (*MA* 93). This highlights the absurdity of

military inefficiencies and mismanagement, enhancing the dark humour in Waugh's satirical examination of bureaucratic failures.

Waugh turns his satirical gaze upon the notion of the dignification of the military tradition by juxtaposing the inadequacy of training within the Halbediers with the effort to maintain an appearance of a dignified heritage. This is humorously illustrated through the Physical Training instructor's irrelevant correlation between physical training and waltzing:

> Make it smooth and graceful, gentlemen, as though you were waltzing with your best girl. That's the way, Mr. Trimmer. That's very rhythmic. In the old days a soldier's training consisted of standing stiff at attention for long periods and stamping the feet. Modern science has shown that stamping the feet can seriously jar the spinal column. That's why nowadays every day's work ends with half an hour's limbering up. (*MA* 41)

By highlighting the absurdity of comparing military drills to a dance, Waugh exposes the disparity beneath the premise of a dignified and strict military tradition of the Halbediers, employing dark humour to critique the disconnect between the glorification of military history and the actual practices. Dance, in this context, becomes a metaphor for the absurdity Waugh sees in the military's attempt to preserve dignity and tradition amidst the disorienting realities of war. The notion of waltzing through military drills symbolises a larger failure to grasp the seriousness of the situation, a theme that permeates Waugh's depiction of the Halberdiers. This absurd imagery underlines the dissonance between the glorified image of military life and the often ridiculous and chaotic reality experienced by those within it.

Evelyn Waugh's *Men at Arms* engages with irony not merely as a rhetorical device but as a means of dissecting the underlying dysfunctions of military bureaucracy and the broader societal systems it represents. Waugh employs irony to illuminate the incongruities between the anticipated efficacy of hierarchical structures and the erratic, often farcical reality experienced by his characters. Guy Crouchback's attempts to secure a military posting exemplify this interplay between expectation and reality. Guy, adhering

to the conventional belief that persistence and connections within the upper echelons of power will yield results, spends "weeks badgering generals and Cabinet Ministers" (*MA* 31). This effort, grounded in the assumption that the military operates as a meritocratic and efficient institution, is met with consistent failure. The irony Waugh presents is sharp: It is not the structured avenues of influence that facilitate Crouchback's advancement but rather a chance encounter with Major Tickeridge, an ostensibly minor figure within the military hierarchy.

This incident exposes the inefficacy of the military establishment, where the anticipated order and logic of hierarchical operations are subverted by the capriciousness of reality. The humour that emerges from this situation is dark because it is rooted in the realisation that the very systems designed to ensure order are inherently flawed and unreliable. Waugh's irony here is not just a commentary on military inefficiency; it reflects a deeper scepticism about the reliability of institutional structures in managing human affairs, particularly in times of crisis.

The figure of Ritchie-Hook qualifies as another source for Waugh's exploration of irony, particularly in the context of military discipline. Ritchie-Hook's pride in his unorthodox disciplinary methods, which is depicted as follows:

> You want Grip. When I commanded a company and a man came up to me on a charge I used to ask him whether he'd take my punishment or go to the C.O. He always chose mine. Then I'd bend him over and give him six of the best with a cane. Court-martial offense, of course, but there was never a complaint and I had less crime than any Company in the Corps. That's what I call "Grip." (*MA* 60-61)

illustrates a stark contrast between the ideal of military discipline, which is supposed to be governed by law and ethical standards, and the brutal reality that Ritchie-Hook embodies. On the one hand, Ritchie-Hook's methods are effective in maintaining order within his company, yet on the other, they are blatantly illegal and morally questionable. Waugh's portrayal of Ritchie-Hook complicates the reader's understanding of authority within the military. The character's Grip, a euphemism for his violent and authoritarian

approach, becomes a symbol of the distorted values that can prevail in hierarchical systems where power is unchecked. The expected ideal of just and fair leadership is replaced by a regime of fear and violence, highlighting the disjunction between the ostensible purpose of military discipline and its actual implementation.

Another instance where Waugh employs the ironic mode to implement his dark humour by emphasising the gap between the ideal military conduct and actual disorganisation that prevails the Halbediers can be observed as follows: "It's a very serious matter for someone in his position—and ours. A time may come when he holds our lives in his hands" (*MA* 134) Apthorpe's statement, which occurs during a conversation with Guy Crouchback about the dangerous behaviour of their superiors, specifically the Brigadier Ritchie-Hook's violent impulses, highlights the absurdity of military hierarchy. Given that Apthorpe's statement follows the incident of him being attacked by the Brigadier with a flower-pot while wearing his tin-hat, and also the fact that the whole incident is caused by Apthorpe's obsession with his thunder-box, strengthens the humorous element. The irony lies in the juxtaposition of the triviality of the thunder-box and the absurdity of being attacked with a flower-pot with the possibility of very serious implications of the impulsive and violent leadership of the Brigadier, highlighting the dangerous undertone of their circumstances. This particular irony is employed in order to emphasise the disarray between the soldiers' expectations of proper military leadership and the reality of their absurd experiences, which qualifies as an exemplary account for the ironic mode since it further underlines the irreconcilability of the gap between the ideal.

Regarding the grotesque mode, which "always emphasises the unresolved clash of incompatibilities" (O'Neill 159), Waugh strategically employs this technique to reveal the underlying contradictions embedded within the ostensibly sacred military system. Through deliberate exaggeration and distortion, he constructs a skewed version of reality, thereby uncovering the dissonances that lie beneath the veneer of order and authority. Through a combination of grotesque elements and ironic understatement, Waugh generates a distinctive context in which he employs dark humour to present his ideas. An example for one of these instances is as follows:

> A piano began playing behind the curtain. The curtain rose. Before the stage was fully revealed, the Captain-Commandant sank into deep but not silent sleep. Under the Corps crest in the proscenium there was disclosed a little concert party comprising three elderly women, over-made-up, a cadaverous old man, under-made-up, and a neuter beast of indeterminable age at the piano. All wore the costume of pierrots and pierrettes. There was a storm of loyal applause. A jaunty chorus opened the show. One by one the heads in the first two rows sank into their collars. Guy slept too. (*MA* 44)

In this setting of a concert held within the Halberdiers' barracks, Waugh depicts overtly grotesque elements such as a cadaverous old man, overly made up elder women, a neuter beast, all of which point towards a grotesque exaggeration, generating a sense of abnormality and bizarreness. Waugh employs the juxtaposition of the performers' revolting imagery and their costumes as pierrots and pierrettes, which are stock characters of pantomime and commedia dell'arte, in order to create a contrast between the anticipated joviality of the performance and the reality of how it actually unfolds. The grotesque element is further accentuated as the "cadaverous man whose frail northern body seemed momentarily possessed by the ghost of some enormous tenor from the south" (*MA* 44), which strengthens the sense of bizarreness. Surpassing the primary incongruity that is inherent within the grotesque as it juxtaposes the conventional and abnormal elements, Waugh adds a touch of understatement as the audience "sank into their collars" (*MA* 44), and incorporates the humorous element as the cadaverous man starts singing a patriotic song, "There'll Always Be an England." (*MA* 45) This particular instance shows how Waugh employs the grotesque mode through exaggeration and understatement, and how he employs his dark humour through presenting a cadaverous man singing a patriotic song, creating a stark contrast between patriotism and decay.

Waugh depicts another exemplary account of the grotesque mode as follows: "In the ante-room there was an impromptu concert. Major Tickeridge gave an innocently obscene performance called "The One-Armed Flautist," an old favourite in the Corps, new to Guy, a vast success with all. The silver goblets, which normally held beer, began to circulate brimming with champagne" (*MA* 65). The depiction of Major Tickeridge's "innocently obscene" performance exemplifies the juxtaposition of contrasting elements since it

presents an obscene physical performance of the Major within a military setting. Waugh distorts a conventional musical performance of an officer into an obscene and comical variation in the context of an excessive setting, embellished with silver goblets and champagne. In this particular instance, Waugh employs grotesque mode which transgresses conventional decorum that is expected within the military context.

In *Men at Arms*, Waugh encapsulates the absurd mode of dark humour through the character of Guy Crouchback, particularly in his relentless yet ultimately futile search for meaning and order in a world that persistently resists such attempts. This absurdity is intrinsically tied to the existential tension central to the narrative, where an individual's quest for purpose is consistently undermined by the chaotic and indifferent nature of the world. Guy's spiritual isolation is evident in Waugh's depiction as follows: "He never went to communion on Sundays, slipping into the church, instead, very early on weekdays when few others were about... Lately he had fallen into a habit of dry and negative chastity which even the priests felt to be unedifying" (*MA* 8). His behaviour is a manifestation of his profound detachment from both society and the communal aspects of his faith. His dry and negative chastity highlights the absurdity of his situation, because despite his rigorous adherence to religious devotion, he is perceived as spiritually inadequate by the very authorities he seeks to appease. Waugh uses this spiritual detachment to highlight the broader theme of isolation that permeates Guy's life, where his attempts to connect meaningfully with his religious community are met with alienation. Waugh further describes this sense of isolation: "Even in his religion he felt no brotherhood. Often he wished that he lived in penal times when Broome had been a solitary outpost of the Faith, surrounded by aliens. Sometimes he imagined himself serving the last mass for the last Pope in a catacomb at the end of the world" (*MA* 8). The absurdity is intensified through Guy's dramatic and theatrical romanticization of suffering and martyrdom, which is an indication of Guy's desperate need to find purpose in a world that no longer provides the moral and spiritual guidance he seeks. The absurdity lies in the stark contrast between Guy's intense yearning for meaning and the reality of his existence—his grandiose fantasies are utterly disconnected from his real life and the indifferent world around him. This is poignantly captured when Waugh writes:

> For eight years Guy, already set apart from his fellows by his own deep wound, had been deprived of the loyalties which should have sustained him... But now, splendidly, everything had become clear. The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle. (*MA* 4)

With the onset of World War II, Guy experiences a rebirth of purpose, which encapsulates the inherent absurdity in Guy's newfound clarity. The war, for Guy, offers a sense of direction, yet this direction is a simplistic and ultimately flawed perception of the conflict as a straightforward battle between good and evil. Waugh uses this instance to set the stage for the inevitable disillusionment that follows, as the complexities and chaos of war, and life itself, unravel the idealised notions that Guy clings to.

As the trilogy progresses, Waugh constructs Guy's journey of disillusionment, which parallels the broader inadequacies of the political and military structures within which he operates. His journey shows the core of the absurd mode: the relentless pursuit of meaning in a world that reveals itself to be devoid of it. The disillusionment Guy experiences is not merely personal but emblematic of the larger existential crises of the time. The absurdity lies in the fact that, despite the sincerity of Guy's intentions and his deep-seated desire to carve out a place and identity through the war, he is continually thwarted by the chaotic and meaningless nature of the world he inhabits. The pervasive sense of absurdity is tied to the historical background on which Waugh sets his narrative.

In order to reveal the shaky foundations on which the Second World War emerged, Waugh uses the Abyssinian crisis, which refers to "Italy's 1935 invasion and subsequent annexation of Ethiopia" (O'Mahoney 74). Although it is a minor event in *Men at Arms,* the use of the Abyssinian crisis foreshadows the themes of inefficacy of the existing establishments and disillusionment with the war, which strengthens as the events build up throughout the trilogy. Andrew Holt explains how the League of Nations failed its purpose as the crisis unfolded, proving itself ineffective as follows: "The League imposed sanctions on Italy, but the exclusion of restrictions on oil rendered them largely ineffectual. The British Cabinet, meanwhile, vacillated" (1384). Thus, Waugh's use of

the historical context of the Abyssinian crisis points to the crumbling of existing structures throughout the interwar period leading to the Second World War, which eventually leads to a major disillusionment on a global level.

The theme of inefficacy of the world politics agents in terms of peace-making is not only evident in the Abyssinian crisis, but also in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Similarly, Waugh uses the Spanish Civil War as a historical context to strengthen his point underlines the "fear of communism in Spain and a general aversion to the Republic, especially after February 1936, which led to the British government . . . pursuing a 'benevolent neutrality' towards the rebels'" (Ramsay 45). The "benevolent neutrality" of the British government is observable in Guy's conversation with Box-Bender, when Guy asks "Then what are we fighting for?", to which Box Bender responds: "It was quite a job in keeping neutral over Spain. You missed all that excitement living abroad. It was quite ticklish, I assure you. If we sat tight now there'd be chaos. What we have to do now is to limit and localise the war, not extend it" (*MA* 17). The political scene of the world during the interwar period was fraught with conflicts, and attempts to remain neutral often resulted in bureaucratic absurdities. The notion of "limiting and localising the war" proved futile as political conflicts inevitably escalated into the Second World War, affecting the world on a grand scale. This broader historical context sets the stage for the transformation of Guy Crouchback in *Men at Arms*. Initially, Guy embodies hope and optimism, as evidenced by his prayer, "'Sir Roger, pray for me,' he said, 'and for our endangered kingdom'" (*MA* 5). Here, Waugh presents Guy as a morally and religiously motivated soldier as he prays to Sir Roger of Waybroke, an English knight who embarked on the Second Crusade but was shipwrecked on the coast near the town of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, but as the narrative unfolds, the protagonist's disillusionment becomes increasingly apparent.

The parodic mode is another tool Waugh employs to mock military norms, behaviours, and ideologies. By imitating and exaggerating the original subject matter, Waugh exposes

the absurdity of the military system. An exemplary instance of this parodic mode is depicted during a training session where officers are tasked with finding an old latrine:

> A.T.M. 24, as no doubt you all know, recommends the use of games for training in observation and field-craft. This morning, gentlemen, you will play such a game. Somewhere about these grounds has been concealed an antiquated field latrine, no doubt left here as valueless by the former occupants of the camp. It looks like a plain square box. Work singly. The first officer to find it will report to me. Fall out. (*MA* 135)

The directive for the officers to participate in a game to locate a field latrine exemplifies the parodic mode of dark humour. The military instruction, framed as a playful activity, trivialises the seriousness of military training and preparation. By reducing observation and field training to a playful treasure hunt, Waugh parodies the military's inefficacy and lack of seriousness. The instruction to find a "plain square box" that serves no real strategic purpose mocks the bureaucratic absurdities within the military hierarchy. Incorporating these examples, Waugh's use of dark humour critiques the inefficacy of military bureaucracy and institutional failures as he exposes the dissonance between the glorified image of military tradition and its absurd reality, offering a profound commentary on the futility and absurdity inherent in the military's attempts to maintain decorum amidst chaos.

In *Men at Arms,* Evelyn Waugh masterfully employs dark humour to expose the inefficacies and contradictions of military bureaucracy during World War II, setting the stage for Guy Crouchback's profound journey of disillusionment. Through a blend of satirical exaggeration, ironic detachment, grotesque distortions, and absurdity, Waugh dismantles the veneer of military tradition, revealing a system riddled with incompetence and absurdity. Characters like Apthorpe and Ritchie-Hook are not merely comic figures but embodiments of the deeper absurdities that pervade the British military, where personal eccentricities and institutional failures collide in a chaotic landscape. As Trout suggests, *Sword of Honour* often reflects a ". . . recurring-and perversely compelling-- cycle of raised expectation and disappointment" (126). These inefficiencies and the resulting disillusionment with the ideals he once held dear propel Guy on a journey marked by growing scepticism and alienation. Waugh's dark humour transcends mere

critique; it becomes a lens through which the futility of seeking order and meaning in a disintegrating world is starkly illuminated. As Guy confronts the absurd realities of military life, his initial idealism erodes, reflecting the broader collapse of societal and moral structures during the interwar and wartime periods.

CHAPTER 2
DİSİNTEGRATİON AND DİSİLLUSİONMENT İN
OFFİCERS AND GENTLEMEN

Officers and Gentlemen, the second novel in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, continues the story of Guy Crouchback as he deals with the complexities of army life and the absurdities of civilian existence during World War II. The novel begins with Guy's return to London amid the Blitz, where he witnesses the surreal and chaotic impact of the air raids. Guy is on a mission to fulfil the last wish of his friend Apthorpe, which involves delivering Apthorpe's military equipment to Chatty Corner. This task takes him through various military installations and introduces him to a cast of characters, including Ian Kilbannock, Tommy Blackhouse, and his ex-wife Virginia. During this period, Guy also deals with the struggles of his father, who is being unjustly evicted from his hotel by the profiteering Cuthberts.

Guy's military career takes a significant turn when he is assigned to X Commando, led by his rival Tommy Blackhouse. He travels to the fictional Isle of Mugg in Scotland, where he meets eccentric characters, such as Ivor Claire and Trimmer (who claims that his name is McTavish). As part of the commando, Guy undergoes rigorous training, including a bizarre experiment to survive on local forage. Meanwhile, Trimmer embarks on a farcical mission in France that fails but results in him being mistakenly hailed as a hero back in England, leading to his rapid rise in public and military esteem. Guy's journey continues with deployment to Crete, where he witnesses Major Hound's breakdown under pressure and the chaotic defence against German forces. During the evacuation, Guy encounters Corporal-Major Ludovic, who helps him survive and escape the island.

After the evacuation of Crete, Guy recovers in a hospital in Alexandria, reconnects with socialite Mrs. Julia Stitch, and learns about the actions of Ivor Claire, who abandoned his men during the evacuation. Despite the scandal, Claire is discreetly sent to India by

influential contacts. Guy is then suddenly ordered back to England, much to his dismay, as he wishes to continue serving in the Middle East. The novel concludes with Guy's return to London and his old regiment, the Halberdiers, where he finds himself again grappling with his sense of purpose and the shifting moral landscape of the war. The narrative highlights the futility and chaos of war, leaving Guy in a state of disillusionment and uncertainty about his future.

In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Waugh masterfully employs incongruity humour in order to highlight the discrepancies between expectation and reality, which leads to disillusionment within the context of military bureaucracy. This technique accentuates the absurdity of war by juxtaposing the grim realities of conflict with the laughable inefficiencies and mismanagement endemic to military operations. A notable instance of this incongruity humour is found in the following exchange: "'Who!' 'No one I know. He was under the table and I trod on his hand.' 'Extraordinary thing. Passed out?' 'He said: 'Damn.' 'I don't believe it. Parsons, is there anyone under the billiard-table?' 'Yes, sir, a new member. 'What's he doing there?' 'Obeying orders, he says, sir'" (*OG* 219). This scene, involving a man under the billiard table, epitomises the absurdity and dark humour that permeates the narrative. It occurs in a setting where characters are grappling with the disruptions of war. When Arthur Box-Bender and his associate Elderberry discover someone under the billiard table, it transpires that the new member is simply following orders to take cover during an air raid. The dialogue, marked by a casual inquiry about the man's presence and his ludicrously literal obedience to protocol, highlights the inherent absurdity of military bureaucracy and the surreal experiences of wartime.

In Schopenhauer's theory, humour arises from the sudden juxtaposition of a concept with a reality that fails to conform to it. The expectation of military discipline, with its logical assumption that orders would be reasonable and conducive to military objectives, is contrasted with a reality where a soldier hides under a billiard table merely following orders. This incongruity not only elicits humour but also points towards the broader disintegration of the ideals and structures once held dear by the characters. The military,

traditionally associated with order, discipline, and honour, devolves into a farcical bureaucracy where nonsensical orders are obeyed without question. This breakdown of military decorum mirrors the disillusionment experienced by characters like Guy Crouchback, who enlists with a sense of duty and idealism only to encounter the chaotic and meaningless nature of the war effort.

The humour in this scene is rooted in the absurdity of the soldier's literal obedience to orders, juxtaposed with the incongruous location under a billiard table. This violation of logical expectations aligns with Schopenhauer's view that the comic effect is produced when the intellect is confronted with a perception that does not match the concept it has in mind. In this context, the concept of military orders suggests a scenario of strategic importance or battlefield relevance. Instead, the reality is trivial and absurd, leading to a humorous recognition of the discrepancy. According to Schopenhauer, the pleasure derived from humour comes from recognizing this incongruity, as it temporarily liberates the mind from the constraints of rational thought. The humour emerges as both the characters and the reader recognize the absurdity of the situation. The soldier's presence under the table, a place associated with leisure and recreation rather than military activity, creates a mental shift that highlights the absurdity of blindly following orders without understanding their purpose or context.

Waugh's use of incongruity humour provides a profound critique of the absurdities and disillusionments of wartime experience. In *Officers and Gentlemen*, one notable example of this incongruous imagery is that "On the pavement opposite Turtle's a group of experimental novelists in firemen's uniform were squirting a little jet of water into the morning-room" (*OG* 216). Here, Waugh juxtaposes the seriousness traditionally associated with firefighting with the absurdity of inadequately equipped novelists attempting to extinguish a fire. The image of these novelists, described as squirting a little jet of water, disrupts the normal order and emphasises the inefficacy and triviality of their actions. This scene highlights the pervasive sense of futility and absurdity that characterises the wartime experience, further reflecting Schopenhauer's idea that humour

arises from the discrepancy between expectation and reality. Through these vivid illustrations of incongruity, Waugh criticises the chaotic nature of war, revealing the disillusionment and absurdity faced by those who once believed in the nobility and purpose of their military endeavours.

Another significant example of Waugh's use of incongruity humour is found in a scene set on the island of Crete during World War II. Here, the characters are stationed at their headquarters, lacking in basic supplies and reflecting the dire circumstances of their situation: "No tea, sir. No water except what's in our bottles. I was advised not to light a fire, sir, on account of the hostile aircraft" (*OG* 377). Major Hound's response is depicted as such: "Major Hound's second thought was of his personal appearance. He opened his haversack, propped a looking-glass against a boulder, smeared his face with sticky matter from a tube and began to shave" (*OG* 377). In this instance, Waugh employs incongruous humour by contrasting the expected reaction to a potential attack—prioritising survival and safety—with the Major's trivial concern for his appearance. This disintegration of priorities reflects Major Hound's own disillusionment with his role and the broader conflict, creating a humorous effect amidst the grim reality of war.

The historical context of the Battle of Crete highlights the grim reality and ultimate failure of the campaign. Despite the Royal Navy's resilience, the evacuation from Crete was marred by significant losses: "Two of the destroyers were lost and two cruisers badly damaged. The squadron limped into Alexandria harbour piled with dead" (Beevor 144). Furthermore, the evacuation efforts were fraught with chaos and disorder: "At Sphakia there was chaos and disorder caused mainly by the mass of leaderless base troops who had swarmed ahead. The New Zealanders, Australians and Royal Marines who had retreated in good order set up a cordon to prevent the boats being rushed. The last ships left in the early hours of 1 June as the German mountain troops closed in" (Beevor 144). Ultimately, the battle "represented the greatest blow which the Wehrmacht had suffered since the start of the war," but it resulted in a "needless and poignant defeat" (Beevor 144) for the Allies. This backdrop of disarray and defeat heightens the incongruity of

Major Hound's concern for his appearance, accentuating Waugh's dark humour amidst the tragedy of war.

The character of Major Hound provides further layers of incongruous humour through his mechanical behaviour, aligning with Henri Bergson's theory. Major Hound's mechanical adherence to trivial tasks during strategic discussions is illustrated in the following exchange: "'Besides,' he said, 'this brigade hasn't the equipment for defensive action.' 'Then why are we defending Alexandria?' 'That would be an emergency'," to which Major Hound's response is "[w]hy doesn't that orderly empty the ash-trays?" (*OG* 362). Major Hound's focus on ash-trays during critical military deliberations exemplifies his insistence on prioritising the trivial, reflecting his disillusionment and highlighting the absurdity of his role.

Waugh's *Officers and Gentlemen* is rich with instances where humour arises from the recognition of defects, deformities, and inadequacies in characters, aligning closely with the superiority theory of humour. This theory, famously articulated by Thomas Hobbes, suggests that laughter derives from the sudden realisation of one's superiority over others, often manifesting as a feeling of sudden glory. Waugh masterfully employs this approach to highlight the incompetence and inadequacy of his characters, creating a comic relief amidst the grim realities of wartime.

One exemplary instance of Waugh's use of dark humour is his depiction of Trimmer, whose overinflated self-esteem becomes a source of covert mockery. This is evident in the following passage: "'Here comes our Scottie,' said Kerstie and, nosy and knowing, Trimmer sauntered across the room towards them. He was aware that his approach always created tension and barely suppressed risibility and took this as a tribute to his charm" (*OG* 338). In this scene, Waugh juxtaposes Trimmer's inflated sense of self with the barely suppressed laughter of others, highlighting the disconnect between his self-perception and reality. Trimmer's false sense of charm is portrayed as an attempt to

fabricate a sense of self-worth in a world where traditional values and roles have deteriorated. This juxtaposition evokes a sense of superiority in the reader, who recognizes the absurdity of Trimmer's self-delusion. As Frederick John Stopp suggests, "[Trimmer] is the new and ugly reality which supplants the old illusion which was Apthorpe, he is the denial of all form, tradition, honour" (170). This observation underlines Trimmer's embodiment of the degradation of the formerly respected military values, further emphasising the contrast between his self-perception and the reality of his incompetence and lack of substance. In this way, Waugh's humour not only ridicules Trimmer's delusions but also critiques the broader disintegration of traditional values within the military, illustrating the absurdity of self-delusion in a collapsing world.

In the novel, the absurdity of Trimmer's rise to fame as a war hero is presented as a humorous satire on wartime propaganda and the fabrication of heroism, further highlighting disintegration. Ian Kilbannock, aware of Trimmer's lack of genuine military achievement, manipulates the narrative, coaching Trimmer on the story that will soon be broadcast to the public. Kilbannock remarks, "In a day or two's time... you and Captain McTavish and your men are going to wake up and find yourselves heroes. Can you do with some whisky?" (*OG* 353). Ian Kilbannock, a media officer fully aware of the power of propaganda, orchestrates Trimmer's transformation. His casual offer of whisky, made in the same breath, further highlights the artificiality of the entire situation. This example reflects a deeper societal decay, where appearances are valued over substance, and where the truth is shapeable in the hands of those who control the narrative. This aligns with Waugh's broader theme of the disintegration of meaning and honour in a world increasingly dominated by superficial appearances. Trimmer's story is a hollow construction, a facade that highlights the emptiness at the heart of the wartime propaganda machine.

Another notable instance of Waugh generating humorous amusement through Trimmer involves the dialogue between Major and Trimmer: "'What the devil are you dressed like that?' he asked. Trimmer thought quickly. 'I was promoted the other day, sir. I'm not

with the regiment anymore. I'm on special service'" (*OG* 287). In this scene, Trimmer's immediate fabrication of a promotion and special assignment highlights the disintegration of clear military roles and identities since in an ideal military structure, changes in rank would be documented and known by other officers. Trimmer's lie, instantly recognizable to the audience, contrasts sharply with the obliviousness of the Major, thereby creating a sense of superiority in the reader.

This particular instance aligns with Hobbes's idea that humour arises from the recognition of one's own superiority over the misfortunes or failings of others. The audience's awareness of Trimmer's deception and the Major's ignorance creates a disparity that fosters a sense of superiority. The reader's recognition of the absurdity of Trimmer's situation, coupled with the knowledge that the Major is being deceived, highlights the ineptitude and self-delusion that characterise Trimmer's wartime experience. Moreover, this instance serves as a microcosm of the larger disillusionment that permeates the novel. The ease with which Trimmer concocts his story, and the Major's unquestioning acceptance of it, reflect a broader collapse of order and meaning within the military and, by extension, society during the war. The humour carries a darker undertone, exposing the erosion of clear military roles and identities. It highlights the futility and absurdity of the wartime experience, where the boundaries between truth and fabrication blur, and where individuals like Trimmer navigate their roles with a mix of self-delusion and opportunism.

Through his use of humorous amusement stemming from a sense of superiority, Evelyn Waugh not only entertains but also unveils the underlying inadequacies and disillusionments within the military establishment. This is particularly evident in his depiction of the reasons behind Major Hound's career choice:

> He had chosen a military career because he was not clever enough to pass into the civil service. At Sandhurst in 1925 the universal assumption was that the British army would never again be obliged to fight a European war. . . Later in the drift of war he was found in the pool of unattached staff officers

in Cairo when Hookforce arrived leaderless at Suez. To them he came and he
did not disguise his distaste for their anomalies. (OG 323)

By revealing that Major Hound's entry into the military was due to his inability to qualify
for the civil service, Waugh generates a sense of superiority in the reader. The knowledge
that Major Hound's military career is a result of his intellectual shortcomings rather than
ambition evokes a sense of superiority, Waugh criticises the perceived ineptitude within
the military hierarchy. This criticism is reinforced through Major Hound's attitude
towards his role and the unit he eventually leads. His "distaste for the anomalies" of
Hookforce and his placement in "the pool of unattached staff officers" suggest a lack of
personal fulfilment and ambition, contributing to the theme of disillusionment pervasive
throughout the novel. Waugh's portrayal of Major Hound contributes to the novel's
exploration of the disintegration of traditional values and roles during wartime. The
characterization of Major Hound as someone who enters the military by default, rather
than through a genuine sense of duty or vocation, reflects the broader societal changes
and uncertainties of the wartime period. This disintegration of traditional values is further
emphasised by Major Hound's lack of fulfilment and his dismissive attitude towards his
role, illustrating the erosion of meaningful ambition and the rise of disillusionment.

Evelyn Waugh's *Officers and Gentlemen* masterfully incorporates various modes of dark
humour to criticise military leadership and reveal the disintegration and disillusionment
experienced by individuals during World War II. Employing O'Neill's framework, which
suggests that the satiric mode involves generating entropic humour without relying on its
corrective function, Waugh presents a critical gaze upon military leadership and societal
values. One notable example of Waugh's satiric mode is his depiction of a general
abandoning his duties: "the General's off in a flying-boat tonight... No staying with the
sinking ship" (*OG* 420). Here, Waugh employs satire to critique the expected honour and
duty of military leadership. By portraying the general as a self-interested man fleeing a
sinking ship Waugh unearths the reality beneath the heroic narratives traditionally
associated with military service. This humorous criticism reflects a broader
disillusionment with the ideals of honour and duty, revealing them as hollow and
hypocritical. The imagery of a high-ranking officer, whose role ideally symbolises

steadfastness and leadership, opting for personal safety over duty, serves as a biting commentary on the moral decay within the military hierarchy. This disillusionment is strengthened by the contrast between the noble expectations of military service and the self-serving actions of its leaders, highlighting the erosion of traditional values in the face of war's harsh realities.

Waugh further explores the satiric mode through the character of the laird, whose outdated opinions on the military are conveyed as follows: "I always told my men that the nearer you are to the point of an explosion, the safer you are" (*OG* 272). This trivialization downplays the life-threatening quality of explosives and, by extension, the seriousness and fatality of war. Waugh's satirical gaze exposes the incongruous and illogical perspectives of inadequate military leadership, emphasising the irrational attitudes towards danger. This instance reveals a breakdown in logical thinking and a profound disillusionment caused by the realisation that survival in war is often a matter of chance rather than strategy. The laird's statement, framed within the context of outdated military wisdom, highlights the absurdity and detachment from reality that characterises much of the military leadership in Waugh's portrayal. By highlighting the disparity between the laird's cavalier advice and the deadly seriousness of modern warfare, Waugh critiques the dangerous incompetence and outdated thinking that can pervade military command structures, contributing to a broader sense of disillusionment among the ranks.

In addition to his satirical critique of military leadership, Waugh humorously highlights military inefficacies through the satiric mode. The following quote shows this critique: "Exactly, sir, either the Commandos become a corps d'élite, in which case they seriously weaken the other arms of the service, or they become a sort of Foreign Legion of throw-outs. . ." (*OG* 321). This statement underlines the disintegration of the military, presenting the impossibility of making beneficial decisions within a flawed system. The critique lies in the paradox that establishing special postings either weakens the overall service by drawing capable soldiers away or becomes a dumping ground for the less capable. Waugh

highlights the deep-seated incompetence within military administration, revealing a disillusionment with the military's ability to integrate specialised units effectively. This observation points to a systemic failure in which any attempt at reform or specialisation is inherently compromised by the institution's existing flaws. The portrayal of the Commandos as either an elite force that depletes other units or a collection of rejects further emphasises the lack of coherent strategic planning and the pervading inefficacy of military leadership, reflecting a deep-seated disillusionment with the organisational structures of the military.

In depicting the London Blitz, Waugh depicts an imagery that combines the sublime with the chaotic and the grim, creating a landscape where beauty and destruction coexist in unsettling harmony. The sky, described as "glorious, ocher and madder, as though a dozen tropic suns were simultaneously setting round the horizon" (*OG* 216), invites the reader into a scene of beauty. However, this aesthetic scenery is disrupted by the grim reality of the Blitz, where "everywhere the searchlights clustered and hovered, then swept apart; here and there pitchy clouds drifted and billowed; now and then a huge flash momentarily froze the serene fireside glow" (*OG* 216). Waugh's dark humour emerges through this ironic tension, where the language of beauty is used to describe an event marked by horror and devastation. The incongruity between the serene imagery and the violent context creates a form of humour that is as unsettling as it is sharp, which is not humour in the conventional sense; rather, it is a complex interplay of irony and absurdity that reveals the futility and madness of war. The characters, and by extension, the reader, are forced to reconcile the poetic description with the underlying horror, leading to a form of disillusionment that is central to Waugh's dark humour. The aestheticization of the Blitz is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate strategy to expose the contradictions at the heart of human experience during war. Waugh uses this ironic aesthetic to critique the romanticised notions of heroism and leadership that pervade wartime narratives, revealing them as hollow and inadequate in the face of true chaos. In this way, Waugh's dark humour operates on multiple levels: it critiques the absurdity of war, exposes the inadequacies of traditional narratives, and forces the reader to confront the unsettling reality that beauty and horror can exist side by side. The irony in this passage is a vehicle

for this humour, transforming what could be a straightforward depiction of war into a complex and disturbing reflection on the human condition.

To further explore Waugh's use of irony and dark humour, the narrative shifts to a dialogue between Guy Crouchback and Ian Kilbannock that highlights the unsettling contrast between the aestheticization of war and its brutal reality. This dialogue, occurring immediately after the vivid description of the Blitz, deepens the ironic tension by juxtaposing the chaos of the bombing with a detached discussion on art. Guy enthusiastically remarks on the scene as "Pure Turner," while Kilbannock counters with "John Martin, surely?" (OG 216). Guy's firm rejection of Kilbannock's suggestion, based on his own artistic judgments, exemplifies the ironic gap that Waugh meticulously constructs. In this instance, Waugh is not merely highlighting a difference in artistic opinion; he is exposing the absurdity of engaging in such a conversation amid the horrors of war. The reference to William Turner and John Martin—artists known for their dramatic, apocalyptic landscapes—ironically aligns the real devastation of London with sublime artistic representations. This comparison blurs the lines between reality and art, making the horrors of war seem almost like a staged scene to be critiqued rather than a lived experience. The characters' discussion trivialises the actual destruction, reducing it to an intellectual exercise, which is where Waugh's dark humour takes root.

Guy's dismissive remark, "Anyway, it's too noisy to discuss it here," adds another layer to this irony (*OG* 216). His nonchalance in the face of chaos not only highlights his personal detachment but also serves as a broader commentary on the disconnection between those who intellectualise war and the brutal realities faced by those who endure it, which deepens the sense of disillusionment by illustrating how cultural and intellectual pursuits can seem absurdly out of place when confronted with the immediacy of destruction. Waugh's choice to frame the bombing within an art critique is a deliberate strategy to emphasise the incongruity between the characters' cultivated detachment and the chaos surrounding them. The dark humour in this scene arises from the absurdity of maintaining such cultural pretensions amidst widespread devastation. It reflects Waugh's

critique of the wartime mindset, where traditional notions of heroism, leadership, and cultural superiority are revealed as hollow when faced with the true horrors of conflict. This ironic mode, therefore, not only critiques the characters' attitudes but also serves as a broader indictment of the military and societal establishments that perpetuate such disconnections.

Another example in which Waugh employs the ironic mode to illustrate Kilbannock's reflections on the heroic narratives surrounding the military is as follows: "Heroes are in strong demand. Heroes are urgently required to boost civilian morale. You'll see pages about the Commandos in the papers soon. But not about your racket, Guy. They just won't do, you know. Delightful fellows, heroes too, I daresay, but the Wrong Period. Last-war stuff, Guy. Went out with Rupert Brooke" (*OG* 309). In this quote, Waugh creates an ironic gap with the image of idealistic patriotism, illustrated by the reference to Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), who is known for his patriotic war poetry. This adds a layer of irony as it contrasts the grim realities of World War II with the more romanticised view of war from the previous generation. As Waugh presents the media as creating heroic narratives to fulfil the needs of the civilians, he exposes the ironic gap between the appearances fabricated by the media and the mediocre reality of the military, revealing the disillusionment with the notion of heroism. This instance shows that rather than genuine heroic acts, a hero is constructed through media coverage. By juxtaposing the constructed heroism of the present with the authentic, albeit idealised, heroism of the past, Waugh critiques the superficiality and manipulation inherent in contemporary wartime propaganda. This ironic commentary highlights the disillusionment with both the media and the military's role in perpetuating false narratives of heroism to maintain morale.

In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Evelyn Waugh presents a powerful scene set against the backdrop of post-Blitz London, where the city lies in ruins and the characters confront the devastating realities of war. Amidst this destruction, a seemingly trivial remark is made: "'Pretty bloody, isn't it? Everything has been stored away underground since the blitz.' Then from the bleakest spot in the universal desolation: 'I've lost a pip, too'" (*OG*

225). This statement, made by an ARP warden, underlines an incongruity—the focus on the loss of a military rank insignia in the midst of overwhelming devastation. The grotesque nature of this moment is rooted in the stark contrast between the monumental scale of destruction and the warden's fixation on a minor personal loss. This dissonance highlights the distortion of reality that war inevitably brings, where the boundaries between significant and insignificant concerns become blurred. The grotesque mode here operates by unsettling the reader, confronting them with the absurdity of war—a world where the trivial and the catastrophic coexist in an unsettling, surreal manner.

Waugh's use of grotesque humour serves a darker, more profound purpose. The trivialization of the lost pip amid such extensive devastation not only emphasises the absurdity of the situation but also reflects the fragmented values and distorted priorities that characterise wartime life. The humour in this scene arises from the incongruity between the vast destruction and the trivial concern, creating a darkly comic effect that is both jarring and thought-provoking, which is not just for comic relief; it is a vehicle for Waugh's critique of the absurdity and futility of war. The ARP warden's preoccupation with his lost pip amidst the ruins of London exemplifies the breakdown of values, where the abnormal becomes normalised, and trivial concerns overshadow the catastrophic reality. This grotesque humour also functions as a coping mechanism, allowing characters—and readers—to navigate the overwhelming horrors of the Blitz by clinging to remnants of normalcy, however trivial they may be.

Ultimately, Waugh's portrayal of this moment emphasises the tragic irony of a society struggling to maintain its grasp on reality in the chaos of war. The grotesque dissonance between individual concerns and collective catastrophe reflects a larger theme of disillusionment and the erosion of meaning in a world shattered by conflict. By highlighting the absurdity of the warden's focus on his lost pip, Waugh reinforces the sense of despair and the futility of clinging to trivialities in the face of unimaginable loss, deepening the impact of his dark humour on the reader.

In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Evelyn Waugh intricately weaves dark humour into the fabric of his narrative, particularly in the scene where Trimmer arrives in Glasgow and checks into a station hotel amid the fog and crowds. The vivid description of the hotel's bustling ground floor, teeming with transient soldiers and sailors all vying for limited accommodations, sets the stage for a critical exploration of societal decay and disillusionment. Trimmer, undeterred by the chaos and driven by his desire for feminine company, attempts to charm the receptionist, only to be cast aside by more desperate and destitute men. As Trimmer saunters through the crowded floor, Waugh describes him moving "with all the panache of a mongrel among the dustbins, tail waving, ears cocked, nose a-quiver" (*OG* 281), which operates on two significant layers. Firstly, Trimmer's transformation into a scavenging mongrel symbolises the broader decay and disillusionment that pervade the wartime society depicted in the novel. This grotesque image not only reflects the physical and moral decline of individuals like Trimmer but also highlights the degradation of social structures that once provided stability and meaning. Waugh's portrayal of Trimmer as a mongrel emphasises the erosion of human dignity in a world ravaged by war, where individuals are left to navigate a landscape marked by chaos and disintegration. Secondly, the depiction of Trimmer as a mongrel highlights the profound emotional detachment that characterises the society around him. His attempts to insinuate himself into various groups, mockingly depicted as unsuccessful, reflect the cold indifference of those around him. The grotesque portrayal of Trimmer's desperation serves not only to ridicule his social and emotional shortcomings but also to subtly critique the emotional barrenness of a world where personal connections have become superficial and transient. This detachment is emblematic of the broader theme of alienation in Waugh's work, where the war serves as a backdrop for the disintegration of meaningful human relationships.

The absurdity of Trimmer's situation is amplified when he encounters Virginia, further cementing his role as a figure of ridicule. The narrative describes Trimmer as suddenly disheartened and out of touch with himself upon seeing Virginia: "He fell suddenly silent, out of it, not up to it, on this evening of all evenings... So far as such a conception was

feasible to Trimmer, she was a hallowed memory. He wished now Virginia were alone. He wished he were wearing his kilt. This was not the lovers' meeting he had sometimes adumbrated at his journey's end" (*OG* 339). This encounter between Trimmer and Virginia further complicates Guy Crouchback's experience of the war and intensifies his growing sense of disillusionment. For Guy, Trimmer's encounter with Virginia, a woman to whom he had once been married and who now seems entangled with a figure as absurd and undignified as Trimmer, serves as a painful reminder of the erosion of the values and relationships he once held dear. The absurdity of their situation, particularly with the eventual birth of their child, starkly contrasts with Guy's increasingly bleak outlook on the world around him. Waugh displays this development in Virginia's contempt for Trimmer: "Virginia hates him more than anyone. She wouldn't marry him, if he came to her in his kilt escorted by bagpipes" (OG 521), which emphasises the farcical nature of their relationship and further deepens Guy's sense of alienation and despair.

Waugh further explores the psychological damage suffered by soldiers through the grotesque mode: "The man lay under a blanket. His wound was fresh and he was not yet in much pain. He smiled up quite cheerfully. 'Shanks,' said Guy. 'What have you been doing to yourself?' 'Must have been a mortar bomb, sir. Took us all by surprise, bursting right in the trench. I am lucky, considering. Chap next to me caught a packet" (*OG* 408). The juxtaposition of Shanks's cheerful demeanour with his severe physical trauma creates a grotesque contrast. This instance reveals how physical and psychological trauma become normalised, highlighting the disintegration of soldiers' mental states and the absurdity of their wartime experiences. Shanks's casual acceptance of his injury and the matter-of-fact way he discusses the death of a comrade illustrate the numbing effect of constant exposure to violence and danger. This grotesque normalisation of trauma highlights the profound disillusionment with the notion of heroism and the emotional resilience expected of soldiers, revealing the deep psychological scars left by the war.

In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Waugh employs the absurd mode to depict "the conflict between the quest for meaning and the upset at finding none, creates an emerging tone in

which distress and joke, horror and farce collide" (Safer 105). This mode emphasises the disjunction between the search for purpose and meaning and the indifferent reality faced by soldiers. The absurd mode operates within the framework of dark humour to highlight the futility and meaninglessness of wartime experiences, creating a distinctive tone where the grotesque and the farcical coexist.

An instance where Waugh employs the absurd mode is as follows: Guy approached and addressed (the priest) in French. He seemed not to hear. A bearded, skirted figure scudded past in the darkness. Guy pursued and said awkwardly: 'Excusez-moi, mon père. Y a-t-il un prêtre qui parle anglais ou italien?' The priest did not pause. 'Français,' he said" (*OG* 326). Waugh's depiction of Guy Crouchback's struggle to communicate with the priest in a foreign language reflects the disintegration of effective communication and the disappointment that stems from attempting to find purpose. This scene presents the absurd condition of questing for spiritual consolation in an environment annihilated by war. Additionally, this particular example illustrates how Waugh subverts the expected norm of genuine, heart-to-heart spiritual exchanges with religious figures. By emphasising the priest's immediate dismissal of Guy's request, Waugh reveals a disillusionment with the religious institution, which is expected to provide consolation during hard times. This absurd encounter highlights the futility of seeking traditional sources of comfort and guidance in a world turned upside down by war, further amplifying the sense of disillusionment and existential confusion faced by the characters.

Another example where Waugh employs the absurd mode is when the soldiers are stranded at sea after their escape from Crete, as Waugh reflects on this particular moment as follows:

> There had been an afternoon in the boat, in the early days of anxiety and calculation, when they had all sung 'God save the King'. That was in thanksgiving. An aeroplane with R.A.F. markings had come out of the sky, had changed course, circled and hurtled over their heads, twice. They had all

waved and the machine had soared away to the south towards Africa. Deliverance seemed certain then. The sapper ordered watches; all next day they kept a look-out for the boat which must be on its way, which never came. That night hope died and soon the pain of privation gave place to inertia. (*OG* 429)

The characters' singing of "God Save the King" is a moment of unity, but the expression "the early days of anxiety and calculation" implies that this unity is temporary and naive in retrospect. This instance functions as the absurd mode since, in a different context, the patriotic song would be a display of pride. However, this context transmutes the patriotic song into a symbol of misplaced cheerfulness that emerges in the grim reality of the war. Waugh reveals the futility of their attempt to rediscover the purpose behind their circumstances and the disintegration of their initial idealism, which underlines the employment of the absurd, thus, strengthening the element of dark humour. The absurdity of their situation—singing a patriotic song in the face of impending doom—highlights the stark contrast between their desperate hope and the cruel indifference of their reality, further emphasising the themes of disillusionment and existential despair.

One of the main themes of the absurd is the theme of confusion, which Waugh employs efficiently to create scenes in which he presents his distinctive humour. The theme of confusion can be observed in the following example where Trimmer and the fellow officers are on a military mission, and Trimmer expresses his confusion as follows: "For Christ's sake,' said Trimmer. 'What's that? It sounds like a dog.' 'A fox perhaps.' 'Do foxes bark like that?' 'I don't think so.' 'It can't be a dog.' 'A wolf?" (*OG* 350). The absurd mode operates in the irrationality of the estimations for the source of the sound they hear, which reveals an incongruity as it creates an irreconcilable gap between the expectation from the military officers to be alert and precise and the reality of their inadequacy toward identifying an animal noise. Waugh's presentation of the confused soldiers exposes their inadequacy and exemplifies the absurd mode by revealing the ridiculous element of their situation. This instance reveals a fragmented state of mind and the disintegration of collective confidence, emphasising the underlying anxiety and disillusionment that disrupts their emotional resilience. The absurdity of experienced military personnel being unable to identify a common animal noise highlights their

disorientation and the breakdown of rational thinking under the pressures of war, further amplifying the sense of absurdity and futility.

Through his use of the parodic mode of dark humour, Waugh reveals the absurd aspects of the military system and, on a grander scale, of the war itself. As the parodic mode generates a distinctive tension that reveals the paradoxical and absurd nature of the subject matter, O'Neill characterises it by "the sense of values parodied and the transvaluation of 'modes of ululation' into the parodic and paradoxical celebration of entropy" (161). Therefore, the parodic mode explores the subject matter from a more active stance, which Waugh employs to blend his distinctive humour into his narration. In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Waugh employs the ironic and critical distance toward the narrative that surrounds the war and the military and transmutes it into a distorted version of itself through the parodic mode. One of the examples of Waugh's use of the parodic mode is as follows:

> The odd numbers of the front rank will seize the rifles of the even numbers of the rear rank with the left hand crossing the muzzles, magazines turned outward, at the same time raising the piling swivels with the forefinger and thumb of both hands…. In the present instance, ... number two being a blank file, there are no even numbers in the rear rank. Number three will therefore for the purpose of this exercise regard himself as even. (*OG* 449)

The aforementioned example shows how Waugh employs the parodic mode through exaggeration to emphasise the illogical nature of bureaucracy within the military. This instance parodies military drills by presenting depictions of absurd instructions, namely, the reassigning of even numbers, which exposes the irrationality and absurdity of military practices and certain army routines. The arbitrary nature of the instructions emphasises how military bureaucracy is presented as detached from the realities of warfare, leading to disillusionment among the ranks. By highlighting the nonsensical and convoluted nature of military procedures, Waugh critiques the inefficiency and absurdity inherent in the bureaucratic systems, further amplifying the themes of disillusionment and frustration experienced by the soldiers.

Following the same vein with the aforementioned example, Waugh parodies the military practices to reveal their irrational and futile nature as follows: "Guy spun on his heel and saluted. 'Sir.' He spun back. 'Squad will retire. About turn. Quick march. Halt. About turn. As you were. About turn" (*OG* 325). In this example, Waugh depicts Guy completing a series of repetitive and illogical sequences of commands that lack clear purpose or direction, which mimics and distorts the military commands. Because of the intentional employment of exaggeration and distortion, the depiction of the illogicality of the commands functions as the parodic mode, and reveals the futility and irrationality that soldiers experience within the military structure. This absurdity emphasises how military ineffectiveness contributes to a disillusionment with the military institution. By presenting these exaggerated and purposeless drills, Waugh highlights the disconnect between the formalities of military training and the chaotic realities of combat, further illustrating the disillusionment and frustration faced by soldiers subjected to such meaningless routines.

The analysis of dark humour in *Officers and Gentlemen* reveals how Waugh strategically employs satiric, ironic, grotesque, absurd, and parodic modes to chart the deepening disillusionment of Guy Crouchback. Throughout the novel, key moments—such as witnessing the ineffectual and farcical military bureaucracy, the hollow rise of Trimmer as a war hero, and the absurdity of leadership exemplified by Major Hound's trivial concerns during a critical moment in Crete—contribute to Guy's growing realisation that the ideals of heroism, duty, and honour are being eroded by the chaotic and meaningless nature of war. These instances not only dismantle the structures and values Guy once held dear but also serve as pivotal points in his journey toward profound disillusionment. Waugh's use of dark humour in these scenes acts as a vehicle to expose the absurdity of war and the futility of attempting to find meaning within it. As Guy navigates these disheartening experiences, his increasing disillusionment becomes emblematic of the broader collapse of purpose and certainty in a world dominated by disorder and absurdity. This analysis deepens our understanding of how Waugh's humour reflects and amplifies Guy's internal disillusionment, making it a central theme in the novel.

CHAPTER 3
COLLECTIVE SURRENDER TO CHAOS IN
UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Evelyn Waugh's *Unconditional Surrender* continues the story of Guy Crouchback, delving deeply into his experiences and evolving perspective during the central years of World War II. The novel opens with a prologue recounting Guy's lack of direction following his return from Crete in 1941. He reconnects with his father at a seaside hotel and becomes involved in training new officers for the Royal Corps of Halberdiers. However, by August 1943, Guy was deemed too old to accompany the troops abroad due to an incident involving a bottle of whiskey that led to the death of his colleague, Apthorpe. This period of reflection and inactivity leaves Guy feeling directionless until his friend Jumbo Trotter encourages him to move to London and seek a new role. At Bellamy's club in London, Guy encounters Tommy Blackhouse, who suggests he might find a post in Hazardous Offensive Operations Headquarters (HOO HQ).

As Guy settles into his new role at HOO HQ, he finds himself in a bureaucratic maze, working in a cramped office in the Royal Victorian Institute. The absurdities of military bureaucracy are highlighted by his interactions with an Electronic Personnel Selector, which ironically identifies Guy himself for a job in Italy. Meanwhile, the narrative introduces the Sword of Stalingrad, symbolising the contrast between the noble ideals of the past and the modern values. The story also reintroduces Ludovic, a mysterious figure from Guy's past, now overseeing a parachute training centre. Guy undergoes parachute training but injures his knee, leading to his hospitalisation and subsequent recovery in London. During this time, his ex-wife Virginia faces financial ruin and personal crises, including an unwanted pregnancy by Trimmer. Guy, moved by a sense of duty and compassion, agrees to remarry Virginia and raise the child as his own, embodying his desire to perform one selfless, noble act.

Virginia's eventual death in a V-1 rocket attack marks a poignant and tragic turn in the story, further deepening Guy's sense of loss and disillusionment. As the war progresses, Guy is dispatched to Yugoslavia as a Military Liaison Officer, where he witnesses the complexities and brutalities of partisan warfare. He becomes involved in efforts to assist Jewish refugees, highlighting the moral ambiguities and harsh realities of the conflict. Guy's attempts to secure safe passage for the Jews are met with bureaucratic obstacles and partisan politics, reflecting the disintegration of his idealistic views. Joseph Hynes suggests that "Guy's war ends with his having done nothing to defeat Germany and with his helping Russia get a grip on Eastern Europe" (75), highlighting the futility of his efforts.The novel culminates in a series of tragic and ironic events, including the staged attack on a guardhouse and the farcical death of Brigadier Ritchie-Hook. Guy's encounters with various characters, including the manipulative communist functionary Gilpin, highlight the pervasive sense of betrayal and the collapse of noble ideals. Through these experiences, Waugh explores themes of honour, duty, and disillusionment, ultimately presenting a complex portrait of a man seeking meaning and redemption amid the chaos of war.

The historical backdrop of *Unconditional Surrender* is essential to understanding the depth of Guy Crouchback's journey and the thematic explorations of honour, duty, and disillusionment in the novel. As the story begins in 1941, Waugh situates Guy's return from Crete, which had concluded with a German victory, marked a significant turning point in the war, particularly for British forces who had suffered a major defeat. This defeat not only influenced military strategy but also deeply impacted the morale of the British Army and those, like Guy, who were involved in the campaign. Guy's sense of directionlessness upon his return can be seen as emblematic of the broader disorientation and reevaluation that many soldiers experienced as the war entered its grimmest phases, and it ultimately "ends the illusion of the hero Guy Crouchback that the war is being fought by men of principle, officers and gentlemen" (Davie 496).

The introduction of the Sword of Stalingrad within the narrative serves as a symbolic link between the historic Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943) and the novel's thematic concerns. The Battle of Stalingrad was a decisive Soviet victory that marked a turning point on the Eastern Front and is often remembered for the extraordinary resilience and sacrifice of the Soviet forces. As noted by Weinberg, "the defeat at Stalingrad had a major impact on how people in Germany and the rest of the world saw the course of the war" (125), emphasising the significance of this battle in shifting global perceptions. The Sword of Stalingrad, which was a "gift of His Majesty King George VI to the citizens of Stalingrad in token of the homage of the British people, was handed over to Marshal Stalin by Mr Winston Churchill" (Australian War Memorial), represents the ideals of courage and honour that once defined warfare. However, in the context of the novel, this symbol contrasts sharply with the disillusionment and moral ambiguity that characterise Guy's experiences, highlighting the erosion of those very ideals in the face of modern warfare's brutal realities.

As Guy is dispatched to Yugoslavia, the novel delves into the complex dynamics of partisan warfare that were unfolding in the Balkans during the later years of the war. As Shepherd states, "[f]rom 1942 onward, both (guerrilla movements in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) grew more cognizant of their limited means, and pursued more modest aims: guerrillas sought to build their strength and disrupt occupation, while the Axis increasingly sought to contain guerrilla movements rather than to suppress them altogether" (698). The brutal and often chaotic nature of this conflict, characterised by shifting alliances and internal betrayals, mirrors Guy's internal struggle with the collapse of his own ideals. Waugh's depiction of the partisans, along with the bureaucratic obstacles Guy faces in his efforts to assist Jewish refugees, reflects the broader geopolitical tensions of the time, as the Allies increasingly had to navigate the complexities of working with resistance movements that did not always share their political goals.

Virginia's death in a V-1 attack—a part of the "new weapons systems that were designed to level London and other English cities"—occurs during the final, desperate phase of the war. "These weapons, including the V-1 pilotless aeroplane, the V-2 ballistic missile, the V-3 ultra-long-range cannon, and the V-4 multi-stage rocket, absorbed vast resources for development and production, and in the case of the V-1 and V-3, launching sites" (Weinberg 128). The rocket attack situates the novel within this grim period when Germany began launching V-weapons against British cities in a last-ditch effort to turn the tide of the conflict. The V-1 flying bombs, which caused widespread destruction and civilian casualties, symbolised the indiscriminate and senseless nature of modern warfare, where the boundaries between military and civilian targets had blurred. Virginia's death serves as a poignant reminder of the war's devastating impact on all aspects of life, further deepening Guy's sense of loss and disillusionment.

Waugh's dark humour, particularly through the lens of incongruity, serves as a potent vehicle for exploring themes of disillusionment and chaos, central to the narrative of *Unconditional Surrender*. A pivotal instance occurs during Guy Crouchback's retreat to a medical facility after sustaining injuries in a parachute training exercise, an episode marked by an unexpected and disorienting encounter, which is depicted as follows: "Guy was not at all comfortable. There were no fellow patients in the ward. Its sole attendant was a youth who, sitting on Guy's bed, announced, as soon as the stretcher-party had left: 'I'm a CO.' 'Commanding Officer?' Guy asked without surprise. 'Conscientious Objector'"(*US* 546). The scene unfolds with a sharp ironic twist as Guy, who is understandably distressed and vulnerable, is attended by a young man who ambiguously introduces himself as a "C.O." Initially, Guy interprets this as "Commanding Officer," a logical assumption given the military context. However, the subsequent revelation that the youth is, in fact, a "Conscientious Objector" radically alters the dynamic, injecting a darkly humorous element into an otherwise grim situation.

This moment is rich with incongruity, not merely in the verbal misunderstanding but in the broader juxtaposition of military expectation and absurd reality. The young

attendant's declaration that his objections are connected to the occult significance of the Great Pyramid introduces a surreal, almost absurd dimension to the scene, highlighting the disintegration of meaning and order within the military setting. The ward itself, isolated and permeated with the discordant sounds of jazz, further amplifies the sense of disarray, symbolising the breakdown of conventional structures and the encroaching chaos of war.

The importance of the conscientious objector in this context is profound, as it encapsulates a fundamental aspect of the novel's exploration of disillusionment. Conscientious objectors, who refuse military service on moral or religious grounds, stand in stark opposition to the expected norms of duty and patriotism during wartime. Their presence within the military setting highlights the disintegration of the moral and social hierarchies. The dark humour in this encounter not only subverts expectations but also serves as a critique of the absurdities of military bureaucracy, where the very institution meant to embody order and discipline becomes a theatre for the surreal and the contradictory.

Waugh's deliberate subversion of the expected roles and meanings in this interaction emphasises the absurdity of military bureaucracy, where roles and titles that once held clear significance are rendered meaningless in the face of the war's irrationality. The conscientious objector's presence, in particular, symbolises a rejection of the war's legitimacy and reflects the broader societal disillusionment with the values that the war seeks to uphold. This scene, therefore, serves not only as a critique of the absurdities inherent in the wartime experience but also as a commentary on the broader disillusionment that permeates the novel. The encounter between Guy and the "C.O." becomes emblematic of the larger thematic exploration of a world where conventional order has unravelled, leaving in its wake a landscape defined by confusion, irony, and dark humour. This reflects Waugh's broader narrative strategy, wherein dark humour is not merely a stylistic choice but a means of grappling with the existential disorientation that war precipitates.

Another instance where Waugh employs incongruity to generate humour is evident in the character of Major Ludovic, a peculiar and unsettling figure who is not well-liked among his fellow officers. Ludovic, with his aloofness and lack of camaraderie, becomes a figure of intrigue for his bizarre and unpredictable behaviour. His social awkwardness is amplified during a dinner scene, where the officers are already on edge due to his cold demeanour and strange presence. In this context, Ludovic addresses the group in a superior tone and abruptly brings up his Military Medal, a moment that starkly contrasts with the uncomfortable atmosphere. He says, "'You are wondering,' Ludovic said sternly and suddenly, 'how I acquired the Military Medal.' 'No, I wasn't,' said Gilpin. 'I was just wondering what it was.' 'It's the award for valour given to "Other Ranks.' I won it in flight, not in such a flight as you have enjoyed today. I won it by running away from the enemy'" (*US* 536). Ludovic's sudden declaration is an assertion of his own importance, which is an attempt to command respect. However, the indifferent response from Gilpin deflates Ludovic's grandiosity, replacing any potential admiration with a sense of the triviality of such honours in the context of their shared disillusionment. The humour deepens as Ludovic explains the origin of his medal, revealing the profound incongruity that lies at the heart. "I won it in flight" which is suggestive of a daring aerial fight, is quickly undercut by Ludovic's confession that his flight was, in fact, a retreat. This revelation not only subverts the traditional narrative of military heroism but also exposes the grotesque irony of war, where acts of cowardice can be perversely celebrated as bravery.

Waugh's use of dark humour serves as a revelation of the moral disintegration that war engenders. The Military Medal, a symbol of courage, is stripped of its meaning when awarded for an act of cowardice, reflecting the broader collapse of values in a world turned upside down by conflict. Ludovic's boastful yet hollow claim to heroism, coupled with Gilpin's apathetic response, underlines the futility of seeking honour in an environment where the very concept of valour has become absurd.

Mr. Oates, introduced in Evelyn Waugh's *Unconditional Surrender* as a civilian efficiency expert at HOO HQ, embodies the absurdities of bureaucratic rigidity in a chaotic wartime environment. His character, though initially unremarkable in appearance, stands out to Guy Crouchback due to his unwavering confidence amidst the chaos that surrounds them as depicted below:

> Mr. Oates, despite his unobtrusive appearance (or by reason of it), seemed bizarre to Guy. He was a plump, taciturn little man and he alone among all his heterogeneous colleagues proclaimed confidence. Of the others, some toiled mindlessly, passing files from tray to tray, some took their ease, some were plotting, some hiding, some grousing; all quite baffled. But Mr. Oates believed he was in his own way helping to win the war. He was a profoundly peaceful man and his way seemed clear before him. (*US* 465)

This juxtaposition, where Mr. Oates remains calm and methodical while everyone else is bewildered, is crucial to understanding how Waugh uses his character to explore the dark humour inherent in the absurdity of war and bureaucracy.

Guy's interactions with Mr. Oates vividly illustrate the bureaucratic chaos that Waugh reveals in *Unconditional Surrender*. When Guy inquires about the return of his typist, Mr. Oates's response, "Negative" (*US* 465) is devoid of any practical consideration, reflecting a rigid adherence to bureaucratic procedure rather than the needs of the officers involved. This response is echoed when Mr. Oates demonstrates the "Electronic Personnel Selector" (*US* 466) a sophisticated piece of technology imported from America and requiring 560 man-hours to install. Despite its impressive credentials, the machine ultimately proves useless, producing a blank card in response to Guy's request, with Mr. Oates again offering the explanation: "Negative" (*US* 466).

The parallel between Mr. Oates's earlier response and the machine's output is significant. It suggests that Mr. Oates himself has become as mechanical and inefficient as the machine he operates, embodying the very bureaucratic futility that Waugh seeks to expose. The response from both Mr. Oates and the machine emphasises the chaotic absurdity of the entire process, as Guy's dry response "I think I could have guessed that"

(US 466) emphasises the futility of relying on such systems, especially in a time of war. Through this interaction, Waugh critiques the misplaced faith in technology and order, revealing how such systems, represented by both Mr. Oates and the machine, are ultimately incapable of addressing real human needs, thus rendering them ineffective and absurd.

In *Unconditional Surrender*, Evelyn Waugh's portrayal of Virginia Crouchback and Uncle Peregrine Crouchback is intricately woven with themes of dark humour and social satire, reflecting the broader absurdity and futility of the world they inhabit. Both characters serve as poignant symbols of the decaying values and moral disengagement that Waugh exposes throughout the *Sword of Honour* trilogy.

Virginia Crouchback, a woman who has lived a life of privilege marked by multiple marriages and affairs, embodies the moral and emotional detachment that Waugh often associates with the disintegration of the pre-war aristocracy. Her life, once filled with the superficial charms of high society, has descended into a hollow existence marked by a growing awareness of her own irrelevance. This is starkly contrasted with her former husband, Guy Crouchback, who clings to a fading sense of honor and morality in a world that no longer values such ideals.

Uncle Peregrine, on the other hand, represents the eccentric and somewhat tragic remnants of the old order. His life, filled with peculiar interests and minor failures, reflects a certain detachment from the realities of the changing world. Peregrine's interactions with Virginia, particularly during their restaurant visit, are laden with irony and dark humour. When Peregrine smugly recounts his limited sexual experiences, Virginia's laughter is depicted as follows: "Virginia's spontaneous laughter had seldom been heard in recent years; it had once been one of her chief charms. She sat back in her chair and gave full, free tongue; clear, unrestrained, entirely joyous, with a shadow of ridicule, her mirth rang through the quiet little restaurant" (*US* 566). Virginia's laughter

is not merely a response to a humorous situation; it is a manifestation of what Thomas Hobbes described as "sudden glory", where one finds pleasure in the perceived inferiority of others. In this moment, Virginia's scornful amusement highlights the absurdity of Peregrine's innocent self-satisfaction and, by extension, the hollowness of her own life. The dark humour in this scene arises from the recognition that Virginia's sense of triumph is ultimately empty, and her laughter is as much a reflection of her own disillusionment as it is a judgement on Peregrine's naivety. Virginia, with her once-glamorous life now reduced to moments of scorn and superiority, embodies the tragic futility of a life spent chasing hollow victories. Her interactions with Peregrine and Guy further illustrate the collapse of the values that once defined their world.

The culmination of Virginia's arc in the novel is her tragic and abrupt death by "one of the new doodle bombs landed on Carlisle Place" (*US* 621). This event serves as a stark reminder of the impersonal and arbitrary nature of war, reducing her life, once filled with superficial charm, to an anonymous and unremarked end. Buried alongside Uncle Peregrine and a servant, Virginia's death is both a physical and symbolic conclusion to her existence, representing the collapse of the aristocratic world she once inhabited. Waugh uses Virginia's death to show the ultimate futility of her life and the broader decay of the social order. Despite her attempts to assert control and maintain her superiority, Virginia's end, caused by a random doodle-bomb attack, serves as a reminder of how even the most privileged are powerless against the disintegration and disorder that war brings.

In *Unconditional Surrender,* Evelyn Waugh illustrates how the repressed frustrations and absurdities of war can lead to moments of dark humour that serve as a release valve for pent-up emotions. This is evident in the interaction between Captain Fremantle, Guy, and De Souza, which is marked by a sense of bureaucratic absurdity and the detachment of military protocol from the human experiences of the soldiers. Waugh sets the scene with Guy's injury from a parachute jump, a moment that should naturally invoke concern and immediate action. Instead, the response from Captain Fremantle, an officer with extensive

military experience, is startlingly indifferent. His reply, "Not my pigeon. The SMO will have to discharge you" (*US* 548) encapsulates the cold and procedural nature of the military, where personal well-being is subordinated to bureaucratic necessity. The insistence that Guy's discharge must be signed by the Senior Medical Officer (SMO), who is notably absent, further heightens the sense of absurdity and inefficiency. This moment reflects the frustration inherent in the military system, where rigid adherence to protocol often creates unnecessary obstacles rather than solutions, exacerbating the stress and helplessness of the individuals involved.

The repressed energy in this situation—the unexpressed frustration and the absurdity of the military's inefficiency—finds a humorous outlet in De Souza's comment to Guy: "So you are safe and well, uncle" (*US* 548) This line, delivered with apparent nonchalance, serves as a release of the accumulated tension. It is a moment where the pent-up mental energy, generated by the clash between the soldiers' expectations of care and the stark reality of military indifference, is momentarily discharged through humour. The dark humour becomes a coping mechanism for the characters, allowing them to momentarily escape the grim realities of their situation.

Waugh employs release humour in alignment with Freud's suggestion that "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge" (Freud 147). An illustrative instance correlates with Freud's explanation of the dynamics behind humorous amusement: "'Thank you, Fremantle,' he said. 'You can take the confidential reports, seal them and give them to the dispatch rider to take back. What did you think of our last batch?' 'Not up to much.' 'A rabble of coistrel curates.' 'Sir?' 'Never mind'" (*US* 518).In this instance, Fremantle is expected to handle confidential reports about the performance of the "clients," referring to the training officers. When asked about the condition of the latest group of training officers, Fremantle expresses that they are "not up to much." Ludovic refers to them as a "rabble of coistrel curates," a term for lower-class clergy, exemplifying Freud's release theory as Waugh humorously juxtaposes the

informal expression "a rabble of coistrel curates" with the seriousness of confidential reports, creating humorous incongruity. This incongruity generates a buildup of mental tension due to the serious context and Captain Fremantle's perplexity. The randomness of the expression "a rabble of coistrel curates," combined with Ludovic's dismissal with "Never mind," generates a humorous release. Additionally, this instance humorously reflects a surrender to the chaotic nature of wartime bureaucracy, where actions are performed without belief in their importance.

Waugh employs the satiric mode of dark humour to highlight the futility of military efforts by placing a satirical gaze upon institutions and their malfunctions, presenting total disorder:

> The Ministry of Information gave it protection, exempted its staff from other duties, granted it a generous allowance of paper, and exported it in bulk to whatever countries were still open to British shipping. Copies were even scattered from aeroplanes in regions under German domination and patiently construed by partisans with the aid of dictionaries. (*US* 474)

In this instance, Waugh presents the actions of the Ministry of Information to display his satirical gaze by highlighting the inefficacy of bureaucratic efforts. The Ministry's act of generously funding the distribution of a magazine devoted "to the Survival of Values" and scattering copies from aeroplanes into German-dominated territories exposes the illogicality of the decision. Waugh undermines military bureaucracy and its efforts, deeming them ineffective in the war context by creating a contrast between the Ministry's plans and the absurd reality of their implementation. This reveals the ineffective nature of institutional reflexes, illustrating a breakdown of orderly communication methods and a surrender to desperate strategies to reach an audience.

Another instance of Waugh's use of the satirical mode is evident in the character of Gilpin, who expresses:

> And the packing is left to a lot of girls. You'd only need one fascist agent on the assembly line and she could kill hundreds of men—thousands probably. There would be no way of catching her and her 'Roman Candles.' Why are

they called 'Roman Candles,' anyway, if it isn't a fascist trick? I'm as ready as the next man to take a reasonable risk. I don't like the idea of trusting my life to some girl in a packing station—so-called refugees perhaps—Polish and Ukrainian agents as likely as not. (*US* 531)

In the passage where Gilpin expresses his paranoid fears about parachute packing by women he suspects to be fascist agents, Waugh employs satirical dark humour to critique the irrationality that war can breed. Gilpin's absurd belief that so-called refugees, whom he imagines to be Polish and Ukrainian agents, might sabotage parachutes, causing them to malfunction as "Roman Candles," reveals his baseless and xenophobic paranoia. The humour in this scene arises from the exaggerated nature of his fears, which are entirely disconnected from reality. His suspicion that the very naming of "Roman Candles" — which happens "when the parachute doesn't open and you fall plump straight" (*US* 530) — might be a fascist trick further amplifies the absurdity of his thoughts, showcasing a descent into irrationality that is both comical and disturbing.

This moment is crucial for understanding the total surrender to chaos in *Unconditional Surrender*. Gilpin's paranoia symbolises the psychological disintegration that individuals experience amidst the disorder of war. Waugh uses Gilpin's character to satirise the irrational and dysfunctional responses that emerge in such environments, mocking how fear and suspicion can easily override reason. The dark humour here lies in the tragic vulnerability of innocent groups, like refugees, who become irrationally blamed and suspected during times of crisis. Gilpin's exaggerated fears not only provide a lens into his own psychological unravelling but also reflect the broader disintegration of societal norms and rationality in the chaos of war.

In order to present his satirical gaze, Waugh introduces a dialogue between Mme Kanyi, a Jewish refugee and friend of Guy Crouchback, representing the displaced communities affected by the war. The exchange between Mme Kanyi and Guy encapsulates the multifaceted motivations behind various factions' desires for war, driven by revenge, nationalism, and political ambition:

> Is there any place that is free from evil? It is too simple to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These communists wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power. Many of my people wanted it, to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of the national state. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy. (*US* 655-656)

This dialogue reveals the hypocrisy of placing the blame solely on the Nazis for the outbreak of the war. Mme Kanyi's reflection highlights that not only the Nazis but also the Communists, and even her own people, desired war for various reasons such as revenge and the establishment of a national state. Waugh's use of dark humour here is evident in the absurdity of even good men seeking to redeem their honour and prove their manhood through war. The notion of a collective will to war or death wish mocks the romanticization of war as a noble endeavour, highlighting the absurdity and futility of such motivations. This critique aligns with the broader theme of the futility and absurdity of war, illustrating how deeply ingrained the desire for conflict is across different societal and political groups. The dark humour in this dialogue emerges as the grim realisation that individuals, regardless of their moral standing, are willing to embrace chaos and destruction in a misguided pursuit of honour and redemption, emphasising a collective surrender to chaos.

While Waugh employs the satiric mode to reveal institutional discrepancies, he also uses the ironic mode. This is evident in the following exchange between Guy and Mme Kanyi:

> When the King fled, the Ustachi began massacring Jews. The Italians rounded them up and took them to the Adriatic. When Italy surrendered, the partisans for a few weeks held the coast. They brought the Jews to the mainland, conscripted all who seemed capable of useful work, and imprisoned the rest. Her husband had been attached to the army headquarters as an electrician. Then the Germans moved in; the partisans fled, taking the Jews with them. And here they were, a hundred and eight of them, half starving in Begoy. Guy said: 'Well, I congratulate you.' Mme. Kanyi looked up quickly to see if he were mocking her, found that he was not, and continued to regard him now with sad, blank wonder. (*US* 603)

In this instance, Mme Kanyi reflects on the journey that brought a group of Jewish refugees to their current state of near-starvation, emphasising the brutality inflicted by various occupying groups. As she recounts the tragic experiences of the Jews—massacred by the Ustachi, relocated by the Italians, exploited by the partisans, and starved under German dominance—Waugh highlights the grim reality of chaotic power dynamics. Guy's well-intentioned yet incongruous congratulatory remark highlights the stark irony between the profound impact of war on vulnerable groups and his oblivious, irrelevant response. The dark humour here stems from the grotesque disparity between the horrific reality and Guy's naive attempt at comfort. This highlights the widening gap between any idealised perception and the harsh reality, illustrating how deeply war distorts human interactions and understanding. This irony further amplifies the sense of collective surrender to chaos, as even well-meaning individuals like Guy are rendered ineffectual and disconnected from the grim realities they seek to address.

The portrayal of Everard Spruce's magazine, *The Survival of Values*, serves as a powerful example of Waugh's ironic critique of wartime propaganda and cultural disconnection. Introduced when Guy Crouchback is searching for purpose, the magazine is founded by Everard Spruce, a once obscure socialist writer, who is suddenly elevated by the war. Initially conceived as a noble effort to preserve cultural and moral values amidst the chaos, *The Survival of Values* becomes a satirical emblem of pessimism and irrelevance. The very title, "The Survival of Values," suggests a dignified mission to safeguard ideals threatened by the conflict. However, the content of the magazine, which is described as pessimistic and irrelevant to the war effort, reveals a stark contrast between its stated purpose and its actual output. This disparity is where Waugh's irony is most sharply felt— what is meant to be a bastion of values instead becomes an emblem of their erosion. Waugh illustrates this irony through the depiction of the magazine's conception:

> Spruce by contrast had stood out for himself and in that disorderly period when Guy had sat in Bellamy's writing so many fruitless appeals for military employment, had announced the birth of a magazine devoted 'to the Survival of Values.' The Ministry of Information gave it protection … A member who complained in the House of Commons that so far as its contents were intelligible to him, they were pessimistic in tone and unconnected in subject

> with the war effort, was told at some length by the Minister that free expression in the arts was an essential of democracy. (*US* 474)

Waugh uses this irony to comment on the broader absurdity of wartime propaganda and cultural efforts. The Ministry of Information's protection of the magazine, despite its lack of relevance and its negative tone, further amplifies the disconnect between government rhetoric and reality. The Minister's defence of the magazine, referring to the importance of free expression in a democracy, is superficial in a context where such expression seems to serve no real purpose other than to maintain a facade of cultural excellency. In this light, the magazine becomes a symbol of the futility inherent in attempts to uphold noble ideals during a time when those ideals are increasingly out of step with the world's brutal realities. The magazine's failure to align its content with its lofty goals mirrors the broader disintegration of values in a world overwhelmed by violence and chaos. Through this portrayal, Waugh invites readers to question the viability of preserving cultural and moral values in such a context.

Waugh continues to explore the disparities within wartime experiences through the ironic description of the scene in Westminster Abbey, where "the Sword of Stalingrad stood unattended. The doors were locked, the lights all extinguished. Next day the queue would form again in the street and the act of homage would be renewed" (US 487). The Sword of Stalingrad, which was "made at the King's command as a gift to 'the steel-hearted people of Stalingrad'" (US 487), becomes a symbol whose solemnity has eroded. This scene takes place in a broader context where the war effort, particularly in its later stages, is marked by a sense of disillusionment and the erosion of the solemnity associated with such symbols. The Sword of Stalingrad, which should evoke awe and respect, instead becomes part of a routine, a hollow ritual where people queue mechanically the next day to pay their respects. The act of homage, repeated and devoid of genuine emotion, reflects the superficiality that has infiltrated wartime gestures. What was meant to be a powerful symbol of solidarity and resilience is reduced to a mere spectacle, its significance drained by the performative nature of the homage.

The sword stands as a silent witness to the disintegration of meaning in these rituals. By highlighting the incongruity between the symbol (the sword) and its treatment, Waugh exposes the absurdity of human efforts to maintain meaning in a world that is increasingly disintegrating. This reflects a broader theme in Waugh's work—the collective surrender to chaos and the erosion of genuine values under the pressures of modern warfare.

Throughout *Unconditional Surrender,* Waugh's use of irony underlines the futility of wartime efforts. However, in some instances, Waugh switches to the grotesque mode to "emphasise the unresolved clash of incompatibilities" (O'Neill 159). One instance where Waugh employs the grotesque mode is as follows:

> He overtopped the largest man in the room by some inches. There was at that time a well-marked contrast in appearance between the happy soldiers destined for the battlefield and those who endangered their digestions and sanity at office telephones. Standing before and above those lean and flushed young men, Ludovic's soft bulk and pallor suggested not so much the desk as the tomb. Complete silence fell. "Present me," Ludovic said, "to these gentlemen". (*US* 535)

In this example, Waugh contrasts Ludovic's physical appearance with that of the young soldiers. By emphasising Ludovic's soft bulk and pallor, Waugh presents him as a corpse-like figure, a strong grotesque element. Ludovic is depicted as a figure associated with death, highlighting the psychological decay caused by the chaos of war. The image of Ludovic, an authority figure within the military hierarchy, as a walking reminder of the possibility of sudden demise for the soldiers, strengthens the dark humour. This grotesque representation highlights the surreal and unsettling aspects of wartime existence, reflecting a collective surrender to chaos where life and death coexist in a disorienting manner.

Another instance where Waugh juxtaposes the exaggeration of the grotesque and the understatement of irony which causes our simultaneous horror and exhilaration to generate dark humour is as follows:

> She stepped into a room whose conventional furniture was augmented with a number of hand-drums, a bright statue of the Sacred Heart, a cock, decapitated but unplucked, secured with nails to the table top, its wings spread open like a butterfly's, a variety of human bones including a skull, a brass cobra of Benares were, bowls of ashes, flasks from a chemical laboratory stoppered and holding murky liquids. A magnified photograph of Mr. Winston Churchill glowered down upon the profusion of Dr. Akonanga's war-stores, but Virginia did not observe them in detail. (*US* 515)

This passage reflects when Virginia Troy visits Dr. Akomanga, a black nature-therapist and psychologist, in an attempt to have an illegal abortion as she is pregnant by Trimmer, a man she has little respect for. Dr. Akonanga, once operating in more humble circumstances, has now taken up a government role to use his skills for the war effort, including psychologically disturbing the enemy, as he mentions giving Herr von Ribbentrop "the most terrible dreams" (*US* 516). The room she steps into, filled with a grotesque collection of objects—human bones, the decapitated cock, the statue of the Sacred Heart, and Winston Churchill's photograph—becomes a microcosm of the breakdown of normalcy.

After Dr. Akonanga refuses her, Virginia continues to explore other options, but her attempts are met with failure. She encounters a series of refusals from doctors, and the places she visits either no longer exist or are too risky to proceed with. On one hand, she is trying to eliminate a life she sees as a mistake in a world where life is being destroyed on a massive scale by the war. On the other hand, every avenue she explores to rid herself of this burden is closed off, almost as if fate itself is conspiring against her.Virginia's story is not just about a failed abortion; it is about the collapse of personal agency in the face of overwhelming social and moral chaos. Waugh's dark humour and grotesque imagery serve to highlight the absurdity of this collapse, offering a bleak yet poignant reflection on the human condition during wartime.

Throughout his novel, *Unconditional Surrender,* Waugh depicts instances where "the tension emerges from the individual's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either" (Childs and Fowler 1) to emphasise

the absurdity of the human condition within the context of war. The depiction of Guy's prayer exemplifies the absurd mode as follows:

> One day he would get the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created. Even he must have his function in the divine plan. He did not expect a heroic destiny. Quantitative judgments did not apply. All that mattered was to recognize the chance when it offered. Perhaps his father was at that moment clearing the way for him. "Show me what to do and help me to do it," he prayed. (*US* 500)

Guy Crouchback's prayer for purpose shows his ongoing struggle to reconcile his internal sense of duty with the external chaos of war. By this point in the novel, Guy has been through a series of disillusioning experiences that have shattered his initial perceptions of the war as a clear moral crusade. Instead, he finds himself in a world that appears indifferent to his values and ideals, leading to a profound sense of existential uncertainty. Guy's prayer reflects a desperate hope that, despite the randomness and chaos around him, there is still a place for him within a divinely ordained plan. He clings to the belief that even he "must have his function in the divine plan," a notion that is increasingly difficult to sustain as the war drags on and the absurdities of his situation multiply.

The absurdity of this scene is heightened by the context of Guy's circumstances. He is not seeking grand heroism or a significant destiny, but rather a small, meaningful act that only he can perform. This modesty in his expectations contrasts sharply with the grand chaos of the war, making his hope seem both poignant and tragically futile. The idea that his deceased father might be "clearing the way for him" adds a layer of tragic irony, as it suggests a comforting narrative of divine intervention that the chaotic and indifferent reality of war continually undermines.In this context, Guy's prayer can be seen as a microcosm of the larger existential dilemmas faced by individuals during the war. His struggle to find meaning and purpose in a seemingly purposeless world encapsulates the tension between the human need for meaning and the often absurd reality of existence. Waugh's depiction of this struggle, through the lens of dark humour, emphasises the ultimate futility of seeking purpose in a world that is, by its very nature, absurd .

In *Unconditional Surrender*, Evelyn Waugh masterfully employs the character of Ludovic to encapsulate the pervasive absurdity and total surrender to chaos that defines the wartime experience in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. Ludovic's evolution from an eccentric, detached soldier to a figure shrouded in grotesque speculation reflects the profound disintegration of order and reason under the pressures of war. The scene where Captain Fremantle and de Souza discuss the possibility of Ludovic being a zombie is a striking illustration of this theme. De Souza's half-serious remark, calling Ludovic "Major Dracula" (*US* 537) and entertaining the notion that he might be undead, is not merely a darkly humorous aside. When de Souza elaborates, "I thought he was dead … In Haiti they call them 'Zombies.' Men who are dug up and put to work and then buried again. I thought perhaps he had been killed in Crete or wherever it was. But clearly I was wrong" (*US* 539), he reflects the soldiers' desperate attempts to make sense of the senseless. In a world where the boundaries between life and death have been obliterated by the relentless chaos of war, such absurd speculations become disturbingly plausible.

This scene is emblematic of the larger collapse of logic and meaning that permeates the novel. Ludovic's unsettling behaviour, from his meticulous and almost eerie eating habits to his inexplicable adoption of a dog, amplifies the sense of the surreal and the grotesque. His character becomes a symbol of the war's erosion of all certainties. The suggestion that he might be a zombie—a creature caught between life and death—highlights the disorienting environment in which the soldiers operate, where the absurd becomes the norm and the irrational is treated with a disconcerting seriousness. Jerome Meckier discusses Waugh's exploration of the "ultimate symbol for twentieth-century disorder: the Second World War" where "nothing occupies its proper place or performs its intended function" (168). Ludovics presence and the bizarre speculation surrounding him serve as a microcosm of the total surrender to chaos that Waugh explores throughout the trilogy. The war, as depicted by Waugh, is not merely a physical conflict but a profound assault on the very foundations of order, logic, and sanity. The soldiers, grappling with the overwhelming irrationality of their circumstances, find themselves unable to distinguish between the real and the surreal, the living and the dead. Ludovic, in his enigmatic and unsettling existence, becomes a focal point for this breakdown of reality, embodying the

disintegration of the world around him. The dark humour that emerges from this example is deeply intertwined with the tragedy of the characters' situation. The absurdity of Ludovic possibly being a zombie is not simply a joke but a reflection of the soldiers' psychological state as they navigate a world where nothing makes sense anymore. This absurdity is a coping mechanism, a way for the characters to confront the unfathomable chaos that surrounds them. Yet, it also highlights the ultimate futility of trying to impose order on a world that has surrendered to chaos.

Waugh explores the problem of attempting to find purpose in the midst of a tumultuous and senseless environment through Ludovic's obsession with the English language:

> In his lonely condition he found more than solace, positive excitement, in the art of writing. The further he removed from human society and the less he attended to human speech, the more did words, printed and written, occupy his mind. The books he read were books about words. As he lay unshriven, his sleep was never troubled by the monstrous memories which might have been supposed to lie in wait for him in the dark. He dreamed of words and woke repeating them as though memorising a foreign vocabulary. Ludovic had become an addict of that potent intoxicant, the English language. (*US* 473)

Ludovic's obsession with the English language in *Unconditional Surrender* serves as a complex exploration of communication, or rather, the breakdown of communication, within the context of war and personal disintegration. This contrast between the communicative function of language and Ludovic's isolation creates a darkly humorous depiction of his obsession. At its core, communication is about connection—between individuals, societies, and even within oneself. Language, the primary medium of communication, is supposed to bridge the gaps between people, to convey thoughts, emotions, and experiences. However, Ludovic's retreat into the intricacies of the English language is marked by a paradox: the deeper he delves into words, the more disconnected he becomes from those around him. This paradox highlights the central irony in Waugh's depiction of communication: that the tool designed to facilitate understanding becomes a barrier when isolated from its social and emotional contexts.

In Ludovic's case, language is stripped of its communicative function and becomes an end in itself, an object of obsession that isolates rather than connects. Waugh's description of Ludovic finding "positive excitement" in writing, coupled with his detachment from "human speech," highlights the idea that language, when divorced from its communicative purpose, can become alienating. Ludovic's fixation on words reflects a broader disconnection from the human experience; he becomes so absorbed in the mechanics of language that he loses sight of its purpose as a medium for human interaction.

Moreover, Ludovic's fixation on the structure and rules of language can be seen as an attempt to impose order on the chaos of his external and internal worlds. In a war-torn environment where traditional forms of communication and social order have collapsed, Ludovic's retreat into language is a way of clinging to something structured and predictable. However, this retreat only deepens his alienation, as the rules of language, when detached from the social and emotional contexts in which they operate, become meaningless. Waugh thus critiques the notion that language alone can provide solace or clarity in a world that defies understanding.

In illustrating the discrepancies within military life, Evelyn Waugh employs the parodic mode, which takes an active role in a "parodic and paradoxical celebration of entropy". (O'Neill 161) Through ridicule, irony, and exaggeration, Waugh criticises the inefficacy of military bureaucracy and reveals the human condition within the context of war. An exemplary account is as follows: "I am told you dig your own grave—those are the very words of the junior instructor—if the parachute doesn't open—burrow into the earth five feet deep and all they have to do is shovel the sides down on one. I keep reminding Gilpin of that possibility. In that rich earth a richer dust concealed" (*US* 549). In this instance, Waugh exaggerates the military's indifferent and absurd approach to life-threatening situations, transforming what should be a moment of grave concern into a grotesque and almost farcical scenario, which mimics the formality and detachment of military procedures while exaggerating them to the point of absurdity. De Souza's offhand remark

about digging one's own grave if the parachute fails—a macabre twist on what should be a serious matter—serves as a parody of the military's bureaucratic detachment from the human consequences of its procedures. The exaggeration in De Souza's remark serves to ridicule the military's cold and impersonal approach, turning a potentially tragic situation into a moment of absurdity. This transformation of a deadly scenario into something darkly comedic emphasises the inhumane aspects of war, where human lives are often reduced to logistical concerns. Through this parodic mode, Waugh effectively uses dark humour to critique the military establishment, exposing the underlying entropy and disintegration of values that characterise the wartime experience. The result is a powerful and sophisticated commentary on the absurdity of war, where the grotesque and the comedic are intertwined to reveal the tragic realities faced by individuals caught in the machinery of conflict.

Another instance where Waugh employs the parodic mode to present his dark humour is as follows:

> There's nothing wrong with the commandant. He's being held prisoner. … Or do you think the whole place has been taken over by the Gestapo? … They have to keep him to sign the bumf. Meanwhile they get particulars of all our agents. There's that instructor who's always fooling about with a camera. Says he's making 'action studies' to correct faulty positions in jumping. Of course what he's really doing is making records of us all. They'll be microfilmed and sent out via Portugal. Then the Gestapo will have a complete portrait gallery and they can pick us up as soon as we show our faces. We ought to organize a rescue party. (*US* 529)

In this example, by mimicking the exaggerated scenarios typical of espionage narratives, Waugh presents De Souza's paranoid fantasy about the Gestapo's elaborate infiltration and the creation of a complete portrait gallery of agents through microfilmed records, andexposes how easily rational thought can be overtaken by absurdity when order collapses. Waugh's parody functions through deliberate exaggeration, where the seriousness with which De Souza constructs his outlandish scenario contrasts sharply with its inherent absurdity. This contrast highlights the ridiculousness of such overblown fears and reflects the broader theme of the novel: the surrender to chaos that war engenders. In a world where structures and norms have been destabilised by conflict, even

the most irrational ideas can gain validation, as fear and uncertainty drive people to construct and believe in fantastical scenarios.

The immediate suggestion to organise a rescue party, based on De Souza's improbable premise, underlies how the chaos of war erodes reason and leads to illogical responses. His reaction illustrates overwhelming disorder, where the boundaries between reality and fiction blur, and exaggerated narratives like De Souza's take on a life of their own. Waugh uses this parody not just to mock the specific situation but to critique the broader human tendency to succumb to irrational fears and lose touch with reality when confronted with the chaotic and unpredictable nature of war.

In *Unconditional Surrender*, Guy Crouchback's journey through the chaos and absurdity of war reaches its zenith of disillusionment, as Waugh masterfully entwines dark humour to illuminate the collapse of traditional values and the human psyche. This final instalment of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy serves as the culmination of Guy's internal struggle, where his initial ideals of honour and duty are repeatedly destroyed by tragic realities of wartime existence. Waugh's portrayal of the absurdity within military bureaucracy, the grotesque disintegration of social and moral order, and the satirical exposure of institutional futility, all converge to show Guy's ultimate realisation that the noble ideals he once clung to are irreparably compromised, which marks the final stage of Guy's journey—an acknowledgment that in the face of overwhelming entropy, the only certainty is the collapse of the very ideals that once provided a sense of direction and purpose.

CONCLUSION

Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy masterfully exposes the absurdities and moral ambiguities of wartime experiences. This study examines Waugh's use of dark humour, revealing it as a potent tool for criticising military structures and challenging conventional narratives of heroism and morality. Through a detailed analysis of *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen*, and *Unconditional Surrender*, this thesis illuminates how each novel offers a distinct perspective—united by the thematic use of dark humour but diverging in focus and treatment of war's impact..

In *Men at Arms*, Evelyn Waugh meticulously foregrounds the inefficacies and absurdities inherent in military bureaucracy, using satire to expose the dissonance between the romanticised perception of war and its stark, often ludicrous reality. Through characters like Apthorpe—whose obsessive quirks and fixation on trivial matters exemplify the petty concerns that preoccupy soldiers—Waugh illustrates the significant gap between the idealistic notions of military service and the mundane experiences of those enlisted. This first novel in the trilogy is dominated by incongruity; the exaggerated importance placed on military rituals starkly contrasts with the trivialization of the broader war efforts, making these contradictions central to the novel's humour and critical examination. Furthermore, Waugh's narrative navigates through a series of absurd situations that continually highlight the disconnect between the grandiosity associated with war and the trivial, often nonsensical, lives of its participants. The absurdity of military rituals— notably the meticulous attention to uniform details and procedural formalities—serves to ridicule the inefficiencies within the military establishment. Characters become so entangled in these minor preoccupations that the larger purpose of the war effort is rendered almost inconsequential, emphasising the pettiness that can overshadow critical endeavours. Ultimately, *Men at Arms* functions as a critical examination of the romanticised ideals of war, revealing through satire and absurdity how the reality of military life is fraught with trivialities and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Waugh's emphasis on the incongruities between expectation and reality not only undermines traditional war narratives but also prompts readers to question the inherent absurdity of war itself. By

exposing the trivial lives of its participants against the backdrop of a supposedly grand conflict, the novel highlights the disconnection between the glorified image of war and its mundane, often ridiculous, human realities.

In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Evelyn Waugh delves deeper into the disintegration of societal norms and the growing disillusionment of his characters, employing dark humour as a key tool to build upon the themes introduced in the first novel of his war trilogy. This becomes more prominent in this work, serving not just as a satirical device but as a profound commentary on the absurdity of war itself. Waugh's use of dark humour highlights this absurdity, as the breakdown of social structures and personal identities highlights the fragility of constructs that once provided meaning and order in peacetime. Characters like Trimmer epitomise the contradictions of military life during wartime, serving as vehicles for Waugh's dark humour; Trimmer, an inept officer who rises through the ranks due to superficial qualities rather than merit, is a darkly comic figure who embodies the inversion of traditional military virtues. Through darkly humorous episodes, his undeserved success satirises the arbitrary nature of recognition in a disordered world, where incompetence can masquerade as heroism.Through such characters, Waugh illustrates the moral decay and existential confusion that arise when established norms are rendered meaningless. Waugh's dark humour in this novel takes on a more unsettling tone, as the exaggerated portrayals of character and situation show the futility of attempting to impose order and honour in a world increasingly defined by disorder and moral ambiguity. The absurdity of bureaucratic incompetence, misguided heroism, and the collapse of ethical standards is amplified through his darkly comedic narrative, which not only satirises military and societal institutions but also delves into a deeper critique of the human condition under the strain of war. In this second instalment, the personal and collective disillusionment deepens significantly, and the dark humour reflects not only the absurdity of military life but also the more profound existential absurdities of human existence in a world at war. Ultimately, Waugh suggests that the harsh realities of war expose the fundamental illusions of order and honour, emphasising a pervasive sense of futility and disillusionment. The characters' struggles are not merely individual crises but emblematic of a broader human predicament—where the quest for

meaning and morality becomes increasingly untenable in the face of overwhelming chaos. By accentuating these themes through dark humour, Waugh underlines the inherent instability of societal values and the existential void that war reveals.

In *Unconditional Surrender,* Evelyn Waugh brings Guy Crouchback's journey of disillusionment to its culmination, as the chaotic absurdity of war finally crushes the last remnants of his idealistic notions of honour and duty. Throughout the narrative, Waugh uses dark humour to reflect both the personal and collective surrender to chaos that defines the wartime experience. Guy's increasing disconnection from traditional values is encapsulated in his futile efforts to maintain a sense of purpose amidst an environment that constantly undermines those ideals. For example, Waugh presents Ludovic, a grotesque and absurd figure, as a symbol of this disintegration. Ludovic's evolution from a strange and detached soldier to a man surrounded by eerie rumours reflects the profound erosion of moral order under the pressures of war. The dark humour in Ludovic's interactions, particularly when he is referred to as Major Dracula and speculated to be a zombie, highlights the absurdity of a world where even the boundaries between life and death blur into a grotesque continuum. Moreover, Guy's personal relationships, particularly his remarriage to Virginia and her subsequent tragic death, further intensify his surrender to disillusionment. Virginia's death by a V-1 rocket symbolises the ultimate collapse of both their personal lives and the social order they once represented. Throughout *Unconditional Surrender*, Waugh continually intertwines dark humour with tragic events, creating a narrative where characters, including Guy, are often powerless against the encroaching chaos of war. Thus, the conclusion of Guy's journey reflects the overarching theme of the novel: the surrender to chaos is not only physical but existential, as all attempts to uphold noble ideals are inevitably eroded by the absurdity and brutality of war. This surrender to chaos is both personal and collective, marking the culmination of the trilogy's critique of traditional wartime narratives. The futility of seeking meaning is highlighted through absurd situations that mock the very notion of valour and heroism, highlighting the novel's critical examination of disillusionment and the chaotic nature of war.

Evelyn Waugh's use of dark humour across the *Sword of Honour* trilogy functions as a critical lens through which he dissects and exposes the absurdities, inefficiencies, and moral ambiguities of wartime experience. By progressively intensifying the dark humour from *Men at Arms* through *Officers and Gentlemen* to *Unconditional Surrender*, Waugh not only satirises the trivialities and bureaucratic incompetence inherent in military structures but also delves deeply into the existential crises that beset individuals in the face of societal disintegration. Characters such as Apthorpe, Trimmer, and Ludovic become embodiments of the contradictions and moral decay within the military establishment, their exaggerated quirks and absurd ascents reflecting the inversion of traditional values and the arbitrary nature of recognition and success in a disordered world. The dark humour serves a multifaceted role: it highlights the dissonance between romanticised perceptions of war and its stark, often ludicrous reality; it highlights the fragility and collapse of social norms and personal identities under the strain of war; and it amplifies the futility and existential absurdity of seeking honour and meaning amid pervasive chaos. Through this intricate weaving of dark humour, Waugh not only undermines traditional war narratives but also prompts a profound re-evaluation of the constructs of heroism, honour, and morality. Ultimately, the trilogy presents a compelling critique of the human condition in wartime, where the surrender to chaos becomes both a personal and collective inevitability, and where dark humour becomes a necessary vehicle for confronting the unsettling truths about war and its impact on society and the individual.

This thesis contributes to the academic field by providing a comprehensive analysis of Waugh's use of dark humour within the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. It extends the understanding of how humour can be employed as a critical tool to examine and reflect on the complexities of human experience during times of conflict. By integrating detailed textual analysis with theoretical insights, this study provides a perspective on Waugh's literary techniques and thematic concerns, highlighting the enduring relevance and power of this narrative device in literature. The detailed examination of Waugh's narrative strategies and thematic preoccupations enriches the discourse on the role of humour in literature, particularly in its capacity to engage with serious and often troubling subjects.

In conclusion, this study has established that Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy employs dark humour as a critical tool to interrogate the wartime experience, systematically challenging conventional notions of heroism, honour, and morality. By offering a penetrating commentary on the absurdities, inefficiencies, and moral ambiguities inherent in war, Waugh deconstructs idealised concepts of military glory and illuminates the often overlooked banalities and contradictions of military life. This analysis not only enhances our understanding of Waugh's literary techniques but also underlines the broader significance of humour as a lens for critiquing the human condition amid conflict. Through a detailed examination of Guy's journey of disillusionment, the research elucidates how dark humour dismantles heroic wartime narratives, revealing the complex realities of human experience and the futility of traditional wartime ideals.

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