

Carry On Joking: Freud, Laughter and the Hysterical Male in the Carry On films

John Bannister

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Abstract

The popularity of the Carry On films can be measured by the success of the series which ran for twenty years from 1958-1978. Twenty-nine films were made and at the height of their popularity in the 1960s two films a year were being produced to capitalise on the success of the series. Film after film utilised the same comedic formula often with the same actors playing the same character types telling the same jokes. The aim of this thesis is to explore a number of questions: How were audiences positioned to laugh at the same 'dirty' joke that was told over and over again? What was the relationship between the verbal joke and the visual gag? How significant were the hysterical male characters played by Kenneth Connor and Kenneth Williams in the creation of the comedy of castration, and how was a sense of humour shared between young male audiences and the producers who promoted the heterosexual ideology of a male patriarchal society? Whilst film theories of comedy have concentrated on the visual gag, and psychoanalytic film theories have concentrated on the male gaze as the source of pleasure for the voyeuristic male spectator, this thesis draws on Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* to analyse the Carry On films. Freud's comprehensive theory incorporates the verbal, the comic (visual) and the importance of sharing humour in jokes. He explains the psycho-social relationship between sexually inhibited male desire and patriarchal censorship that are necessary for the production of pleasure sought for and found in many sexual jokes. The Carry On films make a useful choice for investigating the relevance of Freud's theories of humour since the films exhibit a recurrent theoretical preoccupation with psychoanalysis. The hysterical males are a particularly useful source to investigate since the dirty jokes coalesce around them.

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Robert.Fellows@granadamedia.com
www.grnadamedia.com/international

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the jokes in the Carry On series produced from 1958 to 1978. It seeks to identify how the Carry On films positioned audiences to laugh at the same 'dirty' joke that was told over and over again in twenty-nine films. I will draw on Freud's work, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*,¹ to undertake a close reading of a selection of Carry On films and to deconstruct their textual meaning. I will argue that the rigid framework of the jokes and their special relationship with the hysterical male in the Carry On films renders them amenable to this kind of analysis.

The Carry On films make a useful choice for investigating the relevance of Freud's theory of humour since the films exhibit a recurrent theoretical preoccupation with psychoanalysis in terms popularised by public discourses about Freud and his theories. The hysterical males played by Kenneth Williams and Kenneth Connor in the Carry On films are a particularly useful source to investigate because they are visually and verbally psychopathological manifestations of the sexually repressed patients Freud describes in his psychoanalysis. Dana Dragunoiu, writing on psychoanalysis and film theory, states that the 'comic appropriation of some of the most popular theoretical models of psychoanalysis'² in films suggests that psychoanalysis is 'the instrument of comedy and vice versa'.³

¹ Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, XXIV vols, London, 1953-74, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905)*, Volume VIII.

² Dragunoiu, D. 'Psychoanalysis, Film Theory, and the Case of *Being John Malkovich*', *Film Criticism*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, Winter, 2001-02, p. 3.

³ *ibid.* p. 17.

i. Film Comedy Theories

The Carry On films were immensely popular with audiences for twenty years from 1958 to 1978. They enjoy the accolade of being the most successful series of British comedy films. They are still extraordinarily popular and the films are screened regularly on television.⁴ Peter Rogers, the creator and producer of the films, offered an explanation for their popularity. He said: "I am convinced that audiences do not like change [...] audiences like to see the laughs coming and to recognise them."⁵ This would seem to be born out by Gerald Thomas, the director of the Carry On films, who said the films were 'one joke films.'⁶ In an interview for *Saga* magazine in 2002 Peter Rogers was asked if he had any plans to update the comedy. He replied: 'You don't update comedy. Comedy is dateless, completely.'⁷ But he had been wrong before: *Carry On Columbus* in 1992 was a box office flop, nonetheless, Rogers's formula for creating comedy was generally a successful one, even if that formula could not guarantee to make audiences laugh every time.

Many writers on film comedy, like Geoff King, have pointed out that:

[t]here is no single adequate theory of comedy, despite various efforts to produce an all-embracing account. Various different theoretical approaches are available and offer differing degrees of use, depending on the precise nature of the comedy involved [...] and the different questions we might seek to answer.⁸

⁴ In August 2007, for example, *Carry On Up The Khyber*, *Carry On Henry*, *Carry On Constable* and *Carry On Follow That Camel* were broadcast on Channel 4 and BBC2.

⁵ Peter Rogers quoted in Sally and Nina Hibbin, *What a Carry On: The Official Story of the Carry On Film Series*, London, 1988, pp. 9-11.

⁶ "I've made 31 films from one joke! But I love that joke and the people who have made it funny." Gerald Thomas quoted in *The Classic Carry On Film Collection*, Magazine, Issue 11, DeAgostini Carlton, London, 2004, p. 15.

⁷ Peter Rogers quoted in interview with Tristan Davies. 'Carry On Regardless', *SAGA Magazine*, December 2004 issue. www.saga.co.uk [Accessed 15/09/2005].

⁸ King, G. *Film Comedy*, London, 2002, p. 5.

Similarly, Andrew Horton in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* states that: 'no totalising theory of comedy has proved successful',⁹ while Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink in their review of the literature on comedy theory in *The Cinema Book* conclude that 'no single theory has dominated the study of these topics in the cinema.'¹⁰

Much of the debate about the nature of film comedy, as Cook and Bernink point out, centres on the 'narrative and the non-narrative context in which [jokes and gags] occur.'¹¹ Gerald Mast in *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (1979)¹² analysed the comic structures of narrative in film comedy. Many writers on comedy theory, like Horton, find Mast's emphasis on narrative and 'comic plots'¹³ 'incomplete and restrictive in light of the [...] theoretical perspectives that have proved useful since 1979'¹⁴ and he cites Jerry Palmer's *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (1988) as an important work in this debate. 'No plot', explains Horton 'is inherently funny. Any plot is potentially comic, melodramatic, or tragic, or perhaps all three at once.'¹⁵ The main concern, suggest Cook and Bernink, has been that Mast's typology 'avoids the issue of funniness by focussing on the 'maximum'¹⁶ units of comedy (like plots) rather than 'minimum' units of comedy (like jokes and gags) which they say: 'for many commentators are fundamental to all forms of comedy.'¹⁷ This has inevitably led to serious debates about how comedy is defined. Horton occupies the middle ground. He says:

Comedies are inter-locking sequences of jokes and gags that

⁹ Horton, A. *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, Oxford, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁰ Cook, P. & Bernink, M. *The Cinema Book*, London, 2002, p. 223.

¹¹ *ibid.* p.223.

¹² Mast, G. *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*, New York, 1979.

¹³ Mast, quoted in Horton, *op.cit.* p. 4.

¹⁴ Horton, *op.cit.* p. 1.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹⁶ The terms 'maximum' and 'minimum' units of comedy that Cook & Bernink use is Jerry Palmer's from *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy*, London, 1988, p. 28.

¹⁷ Cook & Bernink, *op.cit.* p. 223.

place narrative in the foreground, in which case the comedy leans in varying degrees toward some dimension of the noncomic, or that use narrative as only a loose excuse for holding together moments of comic business.¹⁸

This, like Mast's typology though, is too broad a definition of comedy because Horton does no more than acknowledge that jokes are fundamental to any definition of comedy. And while it is possible to agree that the narrative in the Carry On films is used simply as a device to insert the jokes, it might also be possible to suggest that the comedy leans in varying degrees towards some dimension of the noncomic (towards tragedy) in the sense that the hysterical males' psychopathological traumas are not very funny.

Similarly, the theory of comedy that Palmer expounds must be approached with caution. While writers like Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, in *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (1995)¹⁹, emphasise that Palmer's theory is crucial to any understanding of film comedy (because it shows up the shortcomings of Mast's typology), Cook and Bernink have pointed out that: 'Palmer himself is concerned to argue not only that gags, jokes and funny moments are fundamental to comedy, but also that they exhibit similar structural and logical features.'²⁰ Palmer's observation that jokes exhibit similar logical features is as close as any writer on film comedy comes to Freud's observation that jokes employ techniques, but he is primarily concerned with the gag²¹ as a visual form,

¹⁸ Horton, op. cit. p. 7.

¹⁹ Neale, S., & Krutnik, F. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, London, 1995.

²⁰ Cook & Bernink, op.cit. p. 223.

²¹ There is some confusion about what a 'gag' is. The writers on film comedy quoted above contradict the original meaning of the term. Neale & Krutnik says that a gag is a 'non-linguistic action', a piece of 'visual physical action' (p. 51). Evan Esar in *The Humor of Humor*, (London, 1954) states that, the gag is 'at bottom a spoken medium, and that minstrel shows, vaudeville and the radio were the chief factors in its evolution' in America and that 'visual elements so important in 'talkies' [cinema] have not influenced the gag at all' (p. 27). The definitions are confusing: Neale & Krutnik argue that it bears a relation to what Freud called the 'comic' - something that 'is witnessed (observed)' which is contrary to the joke that 'exists only in utterance' (p. 72). Crucially Evan states 'a joke is a story, but unlike the gag it applies to situation comedy' (p. 28). So, it would seem to undermine the argument that insists jokes 'are structurally unsuited to narration' (Neale & Krutnik op. cit. p. 47) and that 'gags, whether digressive or not, share

and not the verbal joke. Nevertheless his 'theory of the absurd - his global term for the ludicrous and the ridiculous'²² suggest Neale and Krutnik, is useful because it re-affirms why certain comic characters in film comedy (the 'inferior'²³ types that Aristotle said comedy imitates) remain popular. The characters played by Williams in the Carry On films are ridiculous because they are impatient and because of their exaggerated sense of their own importance, and the characters played by Connor are ludicrous because of the 'degree of unwitting ignorance'²⁴ they display in situations that they find uncomfortable and threatening. Put simply, Connor's characters cannot help themselves. Williams's can, but they refuse to acknowledge that they need to. A closer examination of the hysterical males played by Williams and Connor in Chapters Three and Four will show how these characters are not just defined as ludicrous or ridiculous by the way they look and the behave, but by the kind of jokes that 'characterise'²⁵ them.

Neale and Krutnik's concern, like Palmer's, is with the 'comic' character, as something that is drawn, something to be looked and laughed at. This preoccupation with the visual "gag", as Horton points out, is evident because Palmer 'establishes four types of comic character'.²⁶ Nevertheless his descriptions are useful. There is the 'joke teller who has no "character"; the stand-up comic with a consistent public persona; the stereotypical character "positioned according to the needs of the punch-line; and the

with true narratives all the properties of narration, all the devices necessary for the sequential presentation of events and their components in time and space [cinema].' (p. 54). The jokes in the Carry On films might be said to serve both these functions, as a kind of 'verbal slapstick.' They simultaneously drive forward and disrupt the narrative.

²² Neale & Krutnik, op.cit. p. 68.

²³ 'Comedy is an imitation of inferior people' states Aristotle in *Poetics*, London, 1996, (p. 9): 'The laughable a species of what is disgraceful', (p. xii.).

²⁴ Neale & Krutnik, op.cit. p. 67. These writers acknowledge Elder Olsen's *Theory of Comedy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1968 who points out that: 'People are ludicrous or ridiculous in appearance as well as in speech or action' (p. 21), but they do not explore the verbal joke as a crucial element of speech in the ludicrous or ridiculous character.

²⁵ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 55.

²⁶ Horton, op.cit. p. 10.

'fully drawn comic character.'²⁷ Freud's description in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* is worth comparing. He defines the 'comic' as something that is 'found in people - in their movements, forms, actions and traits of character, [and] in their physical characteristics',²⁸ in other words it is something we look and laugh at.

While these preoccupations with the visual gag and the comic character undermine the importance of the verbal joke, they do stress the importance of the visual aspect of humour of film comedies like the Carry Ons where a character's appearance and actions determine the way that audiences are invited to respond to them. The relationship between the visual and verbal humour contributes to the characters' identity. Each character serves a social function. This is worth comparing with psychoanalytic film theories that stress the importance of the sadistic gaze. An act of punishment (the "kick up the arse" gag) in silent comedy is often the source of audience pleasure. Equally, punishment can come from a verbal "kick up the arse" in the form of a joke. The 'comic' character is no less important; he provides the young adolescent target audience with a comparison to himself. As Freud states:

A person appears comic to us [if] in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; and it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him.²⁹

The other important contribution Palmer makes is to apply a system of logic to deconstruct the visual elements of the gag to discover how the moment of laughter is

²⁷ Palmer, op. cit. p. 167-168 quoted in Horton, *ibid.* p. 10.

²⁸ Freud, op. cit. p. 189. In this sense the characters played by Kenneth Williams and Kenneth Connor are caricatures. Freud says 'Fischer illustrates the relation of jokes to the comic with the help of caricature: 'If it [what is ugly] is concealed, it must be uncovered in the light of the comic way of looking at things; [...] In this way caricature comes about.' (Fischer, K. *Über den Witz*, Heidelberg, 1889, p. 45), quoted in Freud, *ibid.* p. 10.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 195.

created. In this respect Palmer's 'logic of the absurd' is comparable to Freud's who uses a methodology he calls 'reduction' to deconstruct the words that make up the joke (the actual minimum units) to discover the moment that laughter occurs. He explains:

In order to discover the technique of jokes, we must apply to it a process of reduction which gets rid of the joke by changing the mode of expression and instead introducing the original complete meaning [that] can be inferred with certainty from a good joke.³⁰

It is obvious at this point that the *mode of expression* used to tell jokes is different than that used to show a gag. It might be argued that Palmer's methodology is as restricted by its mode of expression as Freud's is. But Palmer's use of semantics and logic to deconstruct the silent gags in silent cinema³¹ seems more restricted than Freud's is by any visual element (the cinema) that was missing from his analysis. Interestingly, as Cook and Bernink point out, Freud saw 'cinema as a cultural form antithetical to psychoanalysis'³² but Barbara Creed states:

Not only did Freud draw on cinematic terms to describe his theories, as in 'screen memories', but a number of his key ideas were developed in visual terms.³³

Clearly, Freud's theories have influenced psychoanalytic film theory and film comedy theory. To a large extent they are interwoven and influence both these discourses. I suggest that a systematic analysis of 'the minimum units' of comedy – jokes - has never been fully explored in theories of film comedy and that the visual element of comedy has received most attention. This neglect has resulted in theories of comedy that are incomplete, and unnecessarily flawed. A theory of film comedy cannot exist without an

³⁰ Freud, *Jokes*, op.cit. p. 22.

³¹ Neale & Krutnik use Palmer's example of the film *Liberty* (1929) starring Laurel and Hardy, that was, as they point out, Palmer's 'primary model' for his comedy theory (p. 68).

³² Cook & Bernink quote Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916), The Penguin Freud Library, Vol.1, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 41.

³³ Creed, B. 'Film and psychoanalysis', in Hill, John., & Church Gibson, Pamela. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford, 1998, p. 77.

exploration into the discourse of jokes and their close relationship with clowning. The hysterical males in the Carry On films are probably the most visibly funny and vocally hilarious of all the characters in the films. They are the *caput Nili* of laughter because they exaggerate the comic and the joke by continual re-telling it. But how does the complex relationship between the verbal joke and the visual grotesqueness of the character coalesce into something funny in these films? And can theories of film comedy explain the psychology behind ‘dirty’ jokes without taking into consideration contemporary audiences’ responses to the sexually incompetent characters in the Carry On films? It is worth looking briefly at some psychoanalytic film theories to explain the hysterical male character in relation to their sexuality.

ii. Psychoanalytic Film Theories

The hysterical males in the Carry On films are the comic representations of the psychopathologically castrated males Freud describes in *Studies on Hysteria (1893-1895)* and *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893-1899)*.³⁴ These hysterical types are defined as either perpetually pre-Oedipal, as is the case with Williams’s characters, or they are at the point of which, they must ‘confront and resolve their Oedipal conflicts’,³⁵ as is the case with Connor’s characters. Both actors play child-like adults arrested at a point in their infantile sexual development who do not enjoy the pleasures of acting like children. The characters are traumatised by what Freud calls ‘the memory of earlier experiences’.³⁶ In *Carry On Sergeant (1958)* Private Strong (Connor) is psychoanalysed by the army doctor. His overbearing mother is revealed to be the cause

³⁴ Freud, S. *Studies on Hysteria (1893-1895): The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. II. London, 1975. *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893-1899): The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. III. London, 1975.

³⁵ Horton, op.cit. p. 10. See also King, G. ‘A space outside childishness, play and the ‘pre-Oedipal’’, *Film Comedy*, London, 2002, pp. 77-92.

³⁶ Freud (*Early Psycho-Analytical Publications*, op.cit. p. 197) quoted in Storr, A. *Freud*, Oxford, 2001, p. 23.

of his fear of women and consequently, his impotency. Freud concluded that these earlier experiences were sexual, he states: 'at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood.'³⁷ From his early studies on hysteria, as Anthony Storr points out:

Freud made sexual emotions the key emotions, which, if repressed, were the cause of neurotic symptoms [...] Sex was the linchpin around which psychoanalytic theory could circle and coalesce.³⁸

Throughout the 1970s psychoanalysis was at the centre of intellectual and political debate amongst film theorists. Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz's apparatus theory both draw from Freud. As Creed has pointed out, these early 'writers applied the Oedipal trajectory to the narrative structures of classic cinema film texts'³⁹ where the male protagonist has to overcome a 'lack' (successfully negotiate the Oedipus complex),⁴⁰ identify himself with the father (patriarchy), and phallicize the mother-object. In *Carry On Cleo* (1964) the Oedipal trajectory of the narrative is closely linked to the Oedipal phase that Hengist (Connor) must negotiate. He cannot make love to his domineering wife Senna (Sheila Hancock) because she reminds him of her/his mother. He is captured and taken to Rome (the journey is analogous with the Oedipal trajectory of the narrative) where he successfully negotiates the Oedipus complex by killing Sosages (Tom Clegg) and becoming a real man like his friend Horsa (Jim Dale). When he returns to Briton he is able to make love with his wife because he can dominate her,

³⁷ Freud quoted in Storr, *ibid.* p. 24.

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 24.

³⁹ Creed, *op. cit.*, p. 78. It is important to note here that many of the Carry On films do not follow the classic narrative structure, they are (as a rule) plot driven and episodic. It is the Oedipal trajectory of the hysterical males and their importance to narrative resolution of the films that this thesis is concerned with.

⁴⁰ Charles Rycroft explains that 'resolution of the Oedipus complex is achieved typically by identification with the parent of the same sex and (partial) temporary renunciation of the parent of the opposite sex, who is 'rediscovered' in his adult sexual object. Persons who are fixated at the Oedipal level are mother-fixated or father-fixated. Oedipal rivalry is a cause of castration anxiety [...] but since the [1930s] psychoanalysis has become increasingly mother-orientated, and concerned with the pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother', *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Middlesex, 1972, p. 105.

just like all the other men who are dragging their wives around Coccium-in-Cornovii by their hair.

Psychoanalytic film theory based on the theories of Freud, which emphasise the importance of the Oedipal/Castration complex, was challenged in the 1970s by feminists like Laura Mulvey⁴¹ because, as Jill Nelmes says: ‘they were based on patriarchal assumptions that the woman is inferior to man.’⁴² Women in the Carry On films are often portrayed in this way. They are either busty young girls that are hunted down by Sid James’s characters, or they are harridans, (usually played by the overweight Hattie Jacques), that are not. But whenever the women are portrayed as superior to man (and it is usually the hysterical male they are superior to) they threaten castration. While Mulvey’s article, states Creed, argued that the fetishized woman in classic narrative film texts destroyed the pleasure of the male gaze because it ‘invoked man’s unconscious anxieties about sexual difference and castration’,⁴³ in a second paper ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”’, Creed points out, Mulvey drew on Freud’s theory of the bisexual nature of the libido. ‘There is only one libido which performs both the masculine and feminine functions’⁴⁴ she says, so ‘the female spectator either identifies with woman as object of the narrative and (male) gaze or may adopt a ‘masculine’ position.’⁴⁵ A re-reading of Laura Mulvey’s work in this thesis places the emphasis on the ‘hysterical male’ as the comic object of the male gaze, not as an object of desire but of disgust. The female spectator was not being addressed in the Carry On films. It was the adolescent males in the audience. ‘Their biggest audience

⁴¹ Mulvey, L. ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, (1975) in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, 1989.

⁴² Nelmes, J. (ed) ‘Women and film’, *An Introduction to Film Studies*, London, 1996, p. 230.

⁴³ Creed, op.cit. p. 83.

⁴⁴ Mulvey, L. ‘Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema”’, inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1981), *Framework*, p.13, quoted in Creed, op.cit. p. 84.

⁴⁵ Creed, op.cit. p. 84.

was group was 8-17 year olds'⁴⁶ states Robert Ross. This young and impressionable audience⁴⁷ was positioned by the patriarchal and phallogentric agenda of these films to adopt a 'masculine' position towards the hysterical [fe]male; as Margaret Anderson points out: '[t]he Carry On films have a male, heterosexual prefeminist [agenda] which leaves the dominant ideology intact.'⁴⁸

If, as Cook and Bernink state: 'Mulvey was able to extrapolate a theory of film spectatorship based on Freud's account of the development of the male child, and particularly on the threat posed to his development by the fact of sexual difference',⁴⁹ the hysterical males in the Carry On films demonstrate this because of their 'passive role of the to-be-looked-at object.'⁵⁰ Emanuela Guano says: 'According to Mulvey, in the phallic system, woman is constructed as sexual difference' and the male spectator's pleasure is gained 'either through sadistic voyeurism or through scopophilic fetishism'.⁵¹ I would argue that the 'hysterical male' is *constructed as sexual difference* in the Carry On films. Kenneth Williams's character Desmond Fancey tries to explain that difference to "Big" Dick Turpin (Sid James) in *Carry On Dick* (1974): "Do you know the difference between a man and a woman?" he asks. The implied question here is: whether the target audience could see how the difference between this man ("Big"

⁴⁶ Ross, R. *The Carry On Companion*, London, 2003, p. 127.

⁴⁷ This is reflected in an anecdotal comment made by the historian Dave Russell after a presentation I gave on the Carry On films on the 9th May, 2007 at the University of Central Lancashire. Dave Russell, who would have been one of the target audience for the films, said: 'I don't remember watching them at all until the mid-1960s. I would have been between about 11 and 15 over that period. The films were definitely a bit of rite of passage in terms of imbibing 'adult' humour.' Dave Russell, e-mail correspondence, 25 May 2007.

⁴⁸ Anderson, M. "'Stop messing about!' The gay fool of the Carry On films', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, March, 1998, Vol. 1, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Cook & Bernink, op.cit. p. 349.

⁵⁰ Guano, E. 'She looks at Him with the Eyes of a Camera: Female Visual Pleasures and the Polemic with Fetishism in Sally Potter's *Tango Lesson*', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 5, 2004, p.462.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 462.

Dick) and this 'other' kind of man (Desmond Fancy) made one an object of ridicule who must be punished and the other an object worthy of adulation.

The hysterical male can be seen in the same way Guano describes: 'she [he] is either punished for her [his] lack of a penis', or 'by turning the female [hysterical male] into a [man with a] fetish, he overcomes the male fear of castration'.⁵² He is an object of ridicule and redemption because he is seen as an object to fear (because he represents the castrated male) and a means of disavowing that fear (of avoiding castration). His 'male-less-ness' reflects the 'monster in the mirror'; something that the young man gazing at the cinema screen might turn into unless he is man enough to laugh at him.

Mulvey's claim that 'film-going implied a 'subject-positioning' at once pruriently male'⁵³ is justified in the Carry On films. The films reinforce that position, not just by making women the risible objects of ridicule because they threaten castration but by laughing at men who are the castrated 'other'. If the castrated male in the Carry On films threatens to destroy the pleasure of the male gaze, it is distracted by the comedy of castration that always coalesces around the clowns played by Connor and Williams.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 462.

⁵³ Mulvey, L. 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema"', inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1981), *Visual And Other Pleasures*, London, 1989, pp. 29-37 in Cooke & Bernink, *op.cit.* p.350.

Selecting the films for analysis

There are so many films in the Carry On series that a choice regarding which films best illustrate how the jokes function had to be determined by the hysterical male characters played by Williams and Connor because much of the humour coalesces around them. As Andy Medhurst said, 'Kenneth Williams guaranteed Carry On greatness [...] because [he] is so reliably hysterical.'⁵⁴ As many films as possible are referred to simply to illustrate how common the special relationship between the jokes and the character types is throughout the entire series.⁵⁵ However, specific films have been chosen for analysis. Chapter Two explores the relationship between the 'innocent' pun and Hengist, the character played by Connor, in *Carry On Cleo* (1964), and compares it with a scene from *Carry On Maitron* (1972) to explore the relationship between puns that are double entendres and Sir Bernard Cutting, the character played by Williams. Chapters Three and Four show how Freud's theory of jokes and the characters played by Williams and Connor can be brought together to provide a complete analysis of the hysterical male in the Carry On films. The purpose of these chapters is to offer a comparison of the psychopathology of these hysterical male types. In Chapter Three the maligned hysterical male characters played by Williams are represented by Caesar in *Carry On Cleo*, and the hysterical males played by Connor who threaten the institution of marriage (a theme which preoccupies the Carry On films) is re-explored in Chapter Four in films like *Carry On Sergeant*, *Carry On Cleo* and *Carry On Up the Jungle* (1970). First of all however, it is worth illustrating how the films 'reflect a pre-occupying psychopathology'⁵⁵ with Freud.

⁵⁴ Medhurst, A. 'Carry On Camp', *Sight & Sound*, August 1992, Vol. 2, Issue 4, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Bannister, J. 'Carry On za granica', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Warszawa, 2006, p. 107.

CHAPTER ONE

Freud and his Relation to the Carry On films

Although Freud never applied his theories to the analysis of film, largely because they pre-date it, once his theories entered into the public consciousness, psychoanalysis, along with the psychopathological types he identified, became very popular themes in cinema, especially in the genres of melodrama, horror and comedy.⁵⁶

The theme of psychoanalysis was a popular one in the Carry On films. It was a theme that was continually returned to, especially when a film had not done well at the box office. Norman Hudis re-used the psychoanalyst-patient theme in *Carry On Cruising* (1962) after *Carry On Regardless* (1961), as did Talbot Rothwell in *Carry On Matron* after *Carry On At Your Convenience* (1971) had proved unpopular with audiences at the cinema. This says a great deal about the production of comedy; not just that the scriptwriters knew they could plunder psychoanalysis for a few jokes, but about the audiences who found the films funny. *Carry On Cruising* did not do well (in fact Hudis was replaced by Rothwell for the next film) but one of the funniest moments in the film is when Dr Binn, played by Kenneth Connor, confesses his shyness about women to camera. What part is the spectator-audience playing in the joke when they are addressed by the character? Are they laughing with him because they are laughing at themselves? Are they playing the part of psychoanalyst and empathising with the character who confides in them, or are they psychoanalysing themselves?

⁵⁶ Psychoanalysis began to filter down into American culture in the 1940s and 1950s where it became a popular theme in melodrama, film noir, and horror films. In Britain its influence was seen in melodramas like: *Seventh Veil* (1945), and comedies such as *Blithe Spirit*, (1945), but its real influence came much later, for example, in perhaps the most Freudian of British horror films, *The Innocents* (1961). Interestingly, the popular myth of psychoanalysis could be seen most often in the Carry On films from 1958 onwards.

It would be useful here to point out how frequently psychoanalysis features in the Carry On films. Of the six films scripted by Norman Hudis, three - *Carry On Sergeant*, *Carry On Teacher* (1959), and *Carry On Cruising* - include psychoanalyst-patient scenarios. In *Carry On Cruising*, Kenneth Williams's character Marjoribanks, is referred to, rather disparagingly, as "Freud of the frozen north"⁵⁷ by Captain Crowther/Sid James but later Crowther says: "This bloke Freud knew what he was talking about. Inside you must be a writhing mass of complexes, egos, ids, and all that gear. I'm gonna psychoanalyse you." In *Carry On Teacher* Leslie Phillips, who plays a child psychologist called Alistair Grigg, remembers his "dear old Viennese professor" with great affection. In *Carry On Matron*, Doctor F A Goode (Charles Hawtrey), is the resident psychiatrist at Finisham Maternity Hospital who hypnotises himself with his own watch, and in *Carry On Spying* (1964) the evil Doctor Crow (Judith Furse) uses hypnosis to create the ultimate "being with the characteristics of both sexes" - by manipulating their minds.⁵⁸ In *Carry On Emmanuelle* (1978) Emile, played by Kenneth Williams, goes to the doctor because he cannot make love to his wife: "Can you help me?" he asks. "I'm quite sure your condition is psychological not pathological" the doctor replies.

Many of the Carry On films include direct references to psychoanalysis. In *Carry On Sergeant*, Horace Strong (Connor), is a hypochondriac who believes his sufferings make him an authority on the subject of psychiatry amongst his fellow recruits. When he

⁵⁷ The hysterical male characters that Williams is best remembered for is not developed in the early films scripted by Hudis. This did not happen until his character Caesar met Hengist in *Carry On Cleo* scripted by Rothwell. But there are tantalising references here, not least in the name of Marjoribanks which can be broken into two elements; "Marjory" which corresponds with the woman's name, "Marjorie" and "Banks" or a 'bank', as a safe place to hide his effeminate sexuality in. This is confirmed by his nickname; "Freud of the frozen north" which suggests that his sexuality is 'frozen' (fixated) at a particular stage of his infantile development just as the hysterical male characters played by Williams would be frozen (stereotyped) from then on.

⁵⁸ Freud first used hypnosis to treat hysterics. See, Freud, S., and Breuer, J. *Studies on Hysteria (1893-1895) : The Standard Edition Of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. II, London, 1975, p. 6,7.

diagnoses Charlie (Bob Monkhouse) as “a ucs-soro-maniac⁵⁹ – a man obsessed with the idea of marriage” - Private Heywood (Terence Longdon) offers a more obvious explanation: “How would you feel if you had been called up on your wedding night?” he rails. “Belt up! You don’t know anything about psychiatry!” replies a piqued Horace.

Similarly, many of the films make indirect references to psychoanalysis. In *Carry On Constable* (1960) Kenneth Connor’s character Charlie Constable believes in the “hereditary thought waves that rule our lives” (a possible allusion in popular form to Freud’s map of the mind) and in *Carry On Cleo* (1964) certain characters (Seneca/Hawtrey, and a Soothsayer/Jon Pertwee) are able to look into the future and predict Caesar’s death. These “visions and omens” are easily equated with Freud’s work on dreams.⁶⁰ The visions are a manifestation of Caesar’s cephalic fear which forces him to face up to his castration-complex.⁶¹ If he makes love to Cleopatra he will be murdered. Making love will actually kill him. And that is exactly what “a poor Briton” like Hengist realises might happen to him if Caesar forces him to taking his place in the bed chamber: “You don’t want to worry. You saw how I did it” Caesar says to Hengist. “Yes – and I saw what happened to you when you did it” replies Hengist.

⁵⁹ *ucs* means ‘unconscious’.

⁶⁰ Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Part I) (1900): *The Standard Edition Of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. IV, London, 1975. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Part II) and *On Dreams* (1900-1901), Vol. V, London, 1975. The visions may reveal Caesar’s death but they never predict his death correctly, just as the manifest content of dreams never seems to directly reveal the latent content of repressed thoughts of the patient except through an analyst (or someone who says “sooth” in the Carry On films).

⁶¹ The hysterical males in the Carry On films suffer from what Freud called the ‘castration complex’. This is not only in the sense of a ‘demoralization in respect of their masculine role[s]’ but in the very real sense ‘of castration in its anatomical, surgical sense (removal of the testes)’ (Rycroft op. cit. p. 15). In *Carry On Doctor*, Dr. Tinkle/Williams is strapped to an operating table by his male patients who threaten to castrate him: Sword-wielding men threaten Caesar and Hengist in *Carry On Cleo* and sword-wielding women (Madame Desirée/Joan Sims) threaten to castrate men like (Desmond Fancey/Williams) in *Carry On Dick*.

For Hengist the vision of Caesar's death is a manifestation of his own repressed fears about castration.⁶²

Carry On Screaming (1966) is a perfect parody of Freud's dream-work in reverse, in the sense that the repressed becomes the "real." Williams's character Doctor Watt is one of the un-dead. He sleeps throughout the day, happily content not to exist in the world of daymares - the real world. When he is "regenerated" (brought back to life with an electric charge) – he is literally shocked back into his repressed dreams. He is woken up to relive the nightmare of facing the libidinous beast (Oddbod) whom he has created to take his place as a phallus to disavow the threat of castration. When he realises he has to face the police with the truth that Oddbod is responsible for the disappearance of young women and that his own sexual impotency will be revealed, he dies happily with his monster-ego drowning in a vat of vitrifying liquid (semen).⁶³ His death has a psycho-social function; it is a warning (albeit disguised as a joke) to young adolescents not to develop unnatural sexual impulses, and as Robin Wood explains, 'the happy ending typically signif[ies] the restoration of repression'⁶⁴ of the dominant male heterosexual ideology.

⁶² Hengist becomes Caesar's bodyguard after he is found sword (phallus) in hand surrounded by the slain bodies of Caesar's enemies (it is Horsa who has actually done the killing). And in the scene where he kills Soseges (Cleopatra's bodyguard, the symbol of penis envy/castration) he turns to Caesar and Horsa and says: "I actually did it!" It's a turning point for Hengist who has become a man by killing/castrating a man/phallus. He goes back to Briton and fathers six children. This is worth comparing to the last scene in *Carry On Emmannuelle* when Emile/Williams celebrates the birth of (presumably eleven baby boys) with his wife Emmanuelle. Joining in the celebrations are the footballers who the audience know are the real fathers of Emmannuelle's amour de sport.

⁶³ Fluids flow freely in the stream of *Carry On* comedy. That they can be interpreted through Freudian symbolism is made explicit in the context that 'solutions' are used as a means of releasing sexual tensions in many of the films. In the last scene in *Carry On Loving* a celebration of the institution of marriage turns into a custard pie throwing fight. Marriage always signifies a damming-up of sexual desire for men and women. Soaking a partner with aggression was the visual equivalent of making them the object of a 'smutty' joke. The sexual-instinct of desire (love) becomes the aggressive-instinct that desires death (hate). See Freud, S. 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915) Storr, op. cit. p. 64.

⁶⁴ Robin Wood draws on Freud for a psycho-social explanation of the death of the monster in horror films to suggest how patriarchal ideology represses 'unnatural' sexuality. Quoted in Cook & Bernink op. cit. p. 197.

The “scared-to-death” males played by Williams and Connor are the most memorable manifestations of the hysterical male. Hudis and Rothwell saw the comic potential of developing tragic-comic stereotype characters that had entered popular culture from psychoanalysis. They deliberately conceived caricatures to create pathetic stereotypes.⁶⁵ Roger Lewis calls this the ‘comedy of incompetence.’⁶⁶ But the hysterical male stereotypes of Hudis were very different from those created by Rothwell. Whilst Hudis’s hysterical males⁶⁷ (Horace Strong/Conner in *Carry On Sergeant*) kick and scream against their institutional mothers (Captain Clark/Hattie Jacques) they are always re-made into *real* men by the patriarchal father (Sergeant Grimshawe/William Hartnell).⁶⁸ The passing-out parade at the end of *Carry on Sergeant* is therefore important for its Oedipal and narrative resolution. It is only once Horace has negotiated the Oedipal complex that the newly weds, Charlie and Mary, can finally consummate their marriage. Similarly, the rest of the men of Able platoon are only “able” to pass-out of the army once Horace has identified himself as being like them and not disabled by a ‘lack’. The overall message to the young men in the original cinema-going audience of 1958 would have been exactly the same. While Sergeant Grimshawe is forced to *mother* his boys and treat them like “delicate blooms”, the army specialists who represent absolute patriarchal authority assure Horace Strong that his physical illnesses are associated with his infantile attachment to his mother:

⁶⁵ It is important to distinguish the apparent antinomy between the psychoanalytic definition of *archetype* as an inherent mental image (as the content of the unconscious), and the consciously constructed *stereotype*. See Jordan, Marion. ‘Carry On Follow that Stereotype’, in Curran, J., & Porter, V. (eds) *British Cinema History*, 1983, and Dyer, Richard ‘The role of stereotypes’, in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, London, 1993.

⁶⁶ Lewis, R. *Charles Hawtrey 1914-1988: The Man who was Private Widdle*, London, 2001, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Hudis’s humour is less cruel than Rothwell’s who delights in deliberately evoking the moral badness in his characters by making ‘the laughable a species of what is disgraceful’, (Aristotle, op.cit. p.lxii).

⁶⁸ The autonomous surrogate father-figure (Sergeant Grimshawe) signifies a crucial point about the peripheral role of fathers in the socialisation of their sons which explains their psychological attachment to their mothers. Sergeant Grimshawe represents father/patriarch/ *Laius*.

Psychiatrist	What's the first thing you remember?
Horace	M,m, my mother.
Psychiatrist	Now Association Test. Say whatever comes into your mind after what I say. Mother.
Horace	Cold.

All of Horace's psychosomatic⁶⁹ symptoms are a manifestation of the repressed memories of the "cold" relationship he had with his mother. The consequence of this is that he thinks all women will treat him in the same way, yet he craves a mother's love so he remains psychologically immature, impotent and ill. It is not until he associates the word "water" (amniotic fluid) with "washing up" (in the NAAFI canteen) that he is able to substitute his mother's love for Nora's (the girl who washes up in the NAAFI canteen) and grow up (negotiate the Oedipus complex).

At this turning point in the narrative, Horace goes straight to the NAAFI and says to Nora "Hey, wanna be my doll?" Horace has realised that if he behaves like a baby he will be treated like a baby "doll" by women and never grow up to be a man. Nora will love him if he is strong and dominant and takes her in his arms - like a "doll". So, before Nora has time to answer him he leaps over the counter in the canteen, takes her in his arms and pulls her into the kitchen. When he goes back to the billet he is a different man. Psychiatry has saved him "Psychiatry!" he says looking up as though he seen a revelation. "Psychiatry" has performed a miracle; it has cured him of his hysteria and the heresy of "impotency". His hysteria is no longer a threat to the country.

⁶⁹ Coleridge who coined the term 'psychosomatic' was 'interested in the complex links between subjective and physiological processes' states Sally Box in her review of Jennifer Ford, 'Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination', (p. 81). Horace's symptoms of hypochondria, his continual pleas of "I'm ill I tell yer. I'm ill" to Captain Clarke/Jacques (his substitute-mother-object) is interesting because he is cured through psychoanalysis (he resolves the Oedipus complex by identification with the 'male' psychoanalyst through a process called 'Free Association'). By uncovering the complex links between what Coleridge called the 'somatic/physical expression...transformed into psychic pain' (p. 81) Horace is able to disentangle his own self as subject-object and make Nora (the NAAFI girl) the object-choice of his love. 'Object-relations(hip) is the relation of the subject to his object, *not* the relation between the subject and the object which is an *interpersonal* relationship' explains Rycroft (op. cit. p. 101).

Conscription has cured his castration-anxiety. Now he is ready to copulate for the nation.

This threat to the nation's manhood from the hysterical male was no less felt by Rothwell. While Hudis's scripts follow the classical narrative discourse, Rothwell's are a chaotic series of character-based sketches. This reflects his concerns more for spectacle and a shift away from the narrative that allowed him to place more emphasis on the individual joke. The characters' hysterias become conspicuous because they are displayed like circus-side show freaks. They are, as Christian Metz puts it, observed as though they were 'living in a kind of aquarium.'⁷⁰

Rothwell's interest in psychoanalysis as a plunderable source of humour was very different to that of Hudis's though. He realised that the comic potential of the patient-analyst scenario had been fully exploited, so he turned his attention to ridicule and to fully exploiting the tragic-comic potential of the psychopathological traits of the neurotic. He quickly gave his hysterical male characters these traits and created a grotesque stereotype that was exclusively played by Kenneth Williams. He rejected pathos for predatory parody and compassion for caricature. Freud says:

the discovery that one has it in one's power to make someone else comic opens up the way to a yield of comic pleasures and is the origin of a highly developed technique. The method[s] that serves to make people comic include: caricature and parody.⁷¹

⁷⁰Metz, C. 'Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)' in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, London, 1985, p. 96. It is important to remember that the visual slapstick humour that is very much a part of the films scripted by Rothwell is derived from the farcical situations that the hysterical male characters find themselves drowning in (to use Metzian metaphors) for the amusement of the spectator-shark audience.

⁷¹ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 189.

Rothwell's scriptwriting and his penchant for parody⁷² would certainly seem to conform to Freud's observation. So too, does the way in which he seems to have created the contemptible characters played exclusively by Kenneth Williams. 'One can make a person comic in order to make him contemptible, to deprive him of his claim to dignity and authority'⁷³ states Freud. Certainly, many if not all, of the hysterical male characters played by Williams are ridiculous figures of authority. In the historical comedies he plays cowardly characters like Caesar in *Carry On Cleo*, and Rhandi Lal, the Khasi of Kalabar in *Carry On Up The Khyber* (1968). In the institutional comedies he plays very arrogant characters like Dr. Tinkle in *Carry On Doctor* (1968), Dr. Frederick Carver in *Carry On Again Doctor* (1969), and Sir Bernard Cutting in *Carry On Matron*.

Both caricature and parody, states Freud, 'brings about degradation of something exalted'.⁷⁴ In the case of caricature, says Freud, this is brought about by 'emphasizing the general impression given by the exalted object of a single trait.'⁷⁵ Williams's character's haughtiness and hysterical outbursts are often accompanied by a display of nasal gymnastics. Paradoxically, as the jokes became less innocent over the years his characters became more like cartoons, with their nostrils flaring at the more sexually explicit sexual puns and double entendres as if the characters found them too crude for their superior tastes. Significantly too, his characters became more comic as the jokes became less funny, and arguably more cartoon-like in the films that had a contemporary

⁷² Rothwell's first historical comedy spoof was *Carry On Jack* a parody of *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1951). *Carry On Follow That Camel* was a spoof of French Foreign Legion films like *Beau Brummel* (1954), *Carry On Cleopatra* was a parody of *Cleopatra* (1963), *Carry On Don't Lose Your Head* parodied French Revolution films like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) and *Carry On Henry* parodied *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933).

⁷³ Freud, *Jokes*, op.cit. p. 189.

⁷⁴ Freud in *Jokes*, p. 201, quotes Bain, who writes: 'The occasion of the Ludicrous is the Degradation of some person [...] possessing dignity', Bain, A. *The Emotions and the Will*, London, 1865, p. 248).

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. 201.

setting than they were in the parodies. Subsequent analysis will explain why this is the case.

Parodies are distinguished from caricature because they ‘achieve the degradation of something exalted in another way’⁷⁶ says Freud. This is illuminating because it helps to explain why Williams’s characters became less funny the more cartoon-like they became: hence ‘by destroying the unity that exists between people’s characters as we know them and their speeches and actions, by replacing either the exalted figure or their utterances by inferior ones’,⁷⁷ Williams’s characters become defined by a single trait of their personality. In *Carry On Cleo*, for example, hysteria is all that defines Williams’s cowardly Caesar from the ‘real’ historical Caesar recalled in popular culture. When “the mighty Caesar” faints because an assassination attempt has been made on his life he repeats Caesar’s speech from Shakespeare. Raising himself one last time from his death-bed he proclaims: “Veni, vidi, vici.” “Julie”, it seems, has at last become Julius Caesar the man. But he shatters the illusion immediately by interpreting for them: “I came, I saw, I conked out”. He has destroyed what the audience is presumed to ‘know’ about Caesar, the eloquent political speaker and conqueror who said: “I came, I saw, I conquered” and replaced him with an impotent and hysterical coward: “Huh! What do you know about conquering?” says his wife Calpurnia/Joan Sims ridiculing him. The same thing happens each time Caesar tries to impress on the citizens of Rome that he is just an ordinary man like them. But they know he is not. His “countrymen” never allow him to finish his public declaration. They interrupt and finish his speech for him because they know this “upstart” Caesar will never finish (reach orgasm) like they can: “Friends, Romans ...” / (“Countrymen” is whispered in his ear) / “I know” he

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 201.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 201.

complains with the kind of piqued expression that cinema audiences would have understood; this camp Caesar was very different to the Caesar who seduced Cleopatra. But it is his character's lapses into the idiom of modern speech and expression whenever they feel threatened that betrays their hysteria. If the emphasis of the delivery is modern because the character is seen to confess his hysteria in a kind of public soliloquy, so too, is the manic behaviour of hysterical males, like "Julie" Caesar, who are imitations of the neurotic female that had entered the public consciousness. It is plainly not the effeminate "Julie" that the target audience were supposed to aspire to; it was the exalted figure of the mythical Caesar (encapsulated in the virile figure of Mark Antony that a contemporary audience would have associated with the modern persona of Sid James⁷⁸), "someone who is strong and handsome and vital", says Seneca (Hawtrey), who could take Caesar's place in Cleopatra's bed-chamber.

It is clear that the hysterical males played by Williams are very different to those played by Connor, and if it is the male gaze that defines their sexual difference from each other, it also defines their difference from the adolescent males in the audience. As Freud says:

A person appears comic to us if, in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him.⁷⁹

Williams's characters act and look ridiculous. This is one of the reasons why audiences laugh at them. But curiously, it seems to be because they are more tragic than comic, more like caricatures than 'real' characters. They function like 'danger' signs. They

⁷⁸ Mark Antony makes this speech at Caesar's funeral in Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar*. And like Antony in the Carry Ons he 'come[s] to bury Caesar, not to praise him', Shakespeare, *W. Julius Caesar: The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, Dorch, T. S. (ed), London, 1961, III: 2: 73.

⁷⁹ Freud, *op. cit.* p. 195.

provoke hostility and aggression from other characters and therefore, by association, also from the audience. They are characters who are tortured. They are the cinematic equivalent of the characters in the *theatre of cruelty*.⁸⁰ Connor's characters, by comparison, behave in a ludicrous and pathetic way, so they provoke sympathy. They could be seen to be characters from a theatre of compassion.

Williams's characters' jokes are always cruel and hostile and they never speak or tell an 'exposing' joke without "revealing themselves". Jokes minimise the spoken word, so in a sense, they help to castrate Williams's characters because they define his characters as one dimensional. This makes his characters unsympathetic. Similarly, the jokes that his characters make underline their own visual repugnance because they are always aimed at wounding others. Connor's characters by comparison use a lot of language to "reveal themselves". They confide in other characters by talking about their sexual anxieties. What Connor's characters say about themselves is funny because it reflects the sexual anxieties of the young man in the audience thinking about himself. A national survey conducted by the "laugh"Lab team at the University of Hertfordshire in 2001 which sought to answer questions about the psychology of humour, concluded: 'Humour provides a kind of relief – a way of coping with the problems in our lives, or issues that we are embarrassed or reluctant to confront.'⁸¹ Young men in the audience watching characters like Horace Strong, Charlie Constable and Dr Binn trying (and often failing miserably) to "chat up" young women, would have related to them. They would have empathised with these characters who felt compelled to confide in someone. Whenever

⁸⁰ The theatre of cruelty was a type of theatre advocated by Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) in *Le Théâtre et son double*. 'He used the term to define a new theatre that minimized the spoken word and relied instead on a combination of physical movement and gesture. Their senses thus disoriented, spectators would be forced to confront the inner, primal self.' *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*, 2002, [Accessed 15/08/2007].

⁸¹ British Association for the Advancement of Science, "laugh"Lab: *The Scientific Quest for the World's Funniest Joke*, London, 2002, p. 112.

the characters looked into the eyes of someone (and it is always male), they reflected the spectator-audiences' gaze at their own 'screen memory'. Similarly, audiences are invited to empathise with characters like Dr Binn because they look directly at the camera to confide in *them*. They would have responded in a completely different way when they saw Caesar threatening to step out of the mirror (screen) pleading with them to help him.

The difference between the characters played by Williams and Connor then is not just determined by the 'comic', it is defined in another way; by the type of joke that is associated with them. In the next chapter the most common type of jokes employed in the Carry On films are identified, and by using Freud's observations of psychopathological patient traits, the relationship between the joke and the character is established.

CHAPTER TWO

Jokes and their Relation to the Carry On films

The most common type of jokes used in the Carry On films are puns. Freud also found them to be: 'the most numerous group of jokes'.⁸² How puns can be employed to define one type of hysterical male from another is interesting. Some jokes, Freud says, are 'characterizing'⁸³ jokes; they reflect or reveal certain traits. Freud's description of those traits is revealing because they neatly describe both types of the hysterical male that Williams and Connor play: the narcissistic type and the anaclitic type. In his paper, 'On Narcissism (1914)',⁸⁴ Freud describes the narcissistic type as a person who is concerned only with: '(a) what he himself is (i.e. himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be, (d) someone who was once a part of himself'.⁸⁵ This definition sums up the characters played by Williams's characters succinctly. The description Freud makes of the, 'anaclitic'⁸⁶ (attachment type) who is concerned: (a) with the woman that feeds him, (b) the man who protects him and the succession of others who take their place⁸⁷ fits the hysterical character types played by Connor.

Freud also found that: 'a special aptitude for the production of jokes [...] is fulfilled in neurotic people.'⁸⁸ It would appear, then, that a particular personality trait of a person makes them more likely to tell jokes, and it is worth noting that Connor's characters do not tell jokes whereas Williams's do. This is a factor that helps to define the difference

⁸² Freud, op. cit. p. 45.

⁸³ *ibid.* p. 55.

⁸⁴ Freud, S. 'On Narcissism: an introduction (1914)' in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV, London, 1975.

⁸⁵ Freud, 'On Narcissism', op. cit. p. 90.

⁸⁶ 'anaclitic: from Greek *anaklitos* for leaning upon.' *Collins English Dictionary*, London, 1979. Rycroft states: 'anaclitic object-choice occurs when the choice is based on the pattern of childhood dependence on someone unlike himself. Homosexuality is narcissistic, while heterosexuality is anaclitic.' (op.cit. p.6). The two kinds of object-choice would seem to describe the narcissistic male (Williams) and the anaclitic (Connor).

⁸⁷ Freud, 'On Narcissism', op. cit. p. 90. Also quoted in Storr, op. cit. p. 72.

⁸⁸ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 178.

between the hysterical males played by Williams and those played by Connor because it influences how the audience respond to them. Curiously, it is not Williams's characters' jokes that invite empathy from audiences because they do not share their sense of humour. Instead they are horrified and hostile towards them. Freud states:

Hostile impulses against our fellow men have always been subject to the same restrictions, the same progressive repression, as our sexual urges. We have not got so far as to be able to love our enemies.⁸⁹

Clearly, the hysterical males played by Williams are the centre of the audiences' hostilities. Similarly, it is the nature and purpose of the jokes they tell that generates hostility towards them. Many of the jokes in the Carry On films have a double meaning. Freud recognised that some jokes with a double meaning are not simply jokes that are a play upon words. Puns 'pass as the lowest form of verbal joke'.⁹⁰ He says:

[t]here are a very large number of [jokes] with a double meaning, of which the effect of the joke depends quite especially on the sexual meaning. For this group we reserve the name of 'double entendres' [*Zweideutigkeit*]⁹¹

Puns, for example, those with a double meaning accompanied by double entendre, have the most 'violence'⁹² done to the repeated word says Freud. These are surprisingly consistent with the characters that have the most 'violence' done to them, namely those played by Williams. Similarly, the jokes that Williams's characters tell have a purpose; they are what Freud calls 'tendentious'⁹³ jokes and their aim is to wound people. These jokes are *characterizing*. Conversely, puns that have a double meaning not accompanied by double entendre are non-tendentious. These jokes characterise the

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p. 102.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p. 45.

⁹¹ *ibid.* p. 40.

⁹² *ibid.* p. 37.

⁹³ Tendentious is translated from the German substantive '*Tendenz*'. It means 'play with purpose', Freud, *ibid.* p. 90 n.1.

hysterical males played by Kenneth Connor. An analysis of two jokes, one made by Hengist in *Carry On Cleo*, and another made by Sir Bernard in *Carry On Matron* will illustrate this.

i. Puns with a double meaning not accompanied by *double entendre* that are non-tendentious.



Caesar: You are impregnable aren't you?

Hengist: No sir, it's just that Senna didn't want any kids just now.

Figure 1 Carry On Cleo (1964)

Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

The first example analysed here is when Hengist is brought (literally “kicking and screaming”) before Caesar, who wants to meet the “superman” who he thinks has saved his life. “You are impregnable, aren't you?” he asks, “No sir, it's just that Senna didn't want any kids just now” replies Hengist. The joke is an example of what Freud called a double meaning not accompanied by double entendre. Hengist simply misunderstands what Caesar asks him. Caesar has not made a joke. It exists outside of the diegesis of the film's narrative. Caesar and Hengist's sexual innocence reflects the implied innocence of the young adolescents in the audience for whom the word pregnant literally refers to the impregnable female who is *no joke*. The pregnant woman reminds them of mum. It is their fear of her that they laugh at, not any sexual double meaning.

This is completely different to the smutty joke which acknowledges sexual awareness, even if its purpose is to divert sexual desire because a woman is unreceptive to it. The humour of the joke relies as much on the sight of Hengist kicking and screaming as it does on the minimization of the spoken word. It is a source of innocent pleasure that comes simply from the play upon words. There has (it must be said) been some violence done to the word *impregnable* if we are to accept the word pregnant as the pun on it, but Freud explains:

It is enough for a pun if the two words expressing the two meanings recall each other by some vague similarity, whether they have a general similarity of structure or of rhyming assonance.⁹⁴

Hengist thinks he has answered Caesar's question correctly; he does not know he has interpreted the word incorrectly, because he is a foreigner (and presumably the Roman word sounds familiar to the British one). If the words are written down the similarity of their structures (something Freud calls 'condensation with a slight modification')⁹⁵ can be seen more clearly.

**IMPREGNABLE
PREGNANT.**

But there is more that shows the special relationship that the joke has with the hysteric. We know that Hengist is impotent and he cannot possibly get Senna pregnant, but it does not mean he does not want to or does not know that that is what Senna wants. His attachment to Senna (the woman that feeds him) is paralleled in his attachment to Caesar (who he has to protect) and in the succession of others who take their place, (Horsa/Cleopatra). His childlike pleas are intended to attract audience sympathy, not condemnation. A comparison is made in Chapter Three with Caesar who pleads for his life and gets no sympathy. When Hengist is carried by the centurion guard kicking his

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 45.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p. 26.

legs and “pleading for his life” it is his cowardice that makes the audience laugh at any suggestion that he is impregnable. The joke is about courageousness not sexuality. Equally, the word *pregnant* is alluded to, but it is not actually spoken.

The comic element of the joke-work is essential to the success of the verbal joke. Freud says: ‘To make other people comic, the principal means is to put them in a situation in which a person becomes comic as a result of human dependence on external events.’⁹⁶ This is certainly true for Hengist who is a long way from Coccium-in-Cornovii. But Hengist is also dressed to look like a woman for comic effect. Compared with the Roman soldiers in battle dress his long hair and even longer toga make him look ludicrous. The sight of him dressed in a white gown scrunched over as if he is suffering from some form of phantom pregnancy saying: “Senna didn’t want any kids just now” invites the audience to laugh at the idea that he is trying to ‘act’ pregnant. They compare themselves with Hengist:⁹⁷ they laugh because they imagine themselves trying to act like a woman⁹⁸ just to make someone (like Caesar) more inclined to listen to them as they plead for their life. His remark to Caesar is not intended to be funny nor is it thought of as anything other than Hengist’s inability to understand him. This is confirmed by Caesar who inverts the words “You are” at the beginning of his question to “Aren’t you?” which does not require an answer from him. Interestingly, Hengist’s confessions share the technique of the comic. Freud states: ‘In the case of the comic, two persons are [...] concerned’⁹⁹ and quite clearly it is the audience that finds Hengist’s remark funny. But, it is precisely because Hengist is not joking that exposes his innocence. He does not try to make a joke about himself (exposure) or make a joke

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p. 199.

⁹⁷ Freud calls this ‘ideational mimetics’ *ibid.* p. 192.

⁹⁸ This is taken to its comic grotesqueness in *Carry On Matron* by Sir Bernard Cutting who actually believes he is turning into a woman.

⁹⁹ Freud, *op. cit.* p. 144.

about Senna (obscene) to find a release for any hostile feelings he may have towards his enemies. Hengist is too innocent, and too infantile to be knowingly aggressive, and this prevents him from making a joke that might anger Caesar by insulting him. What he says is funny outside the diegesis of the film because the audience understand (and gain pleasure from) a play with words that Hengist cannot. In this fundamental way an innocent play with words is quite unlike the comic because it ‘demands another person to whom it can communicate’¹⁰⁰ explains Freud. When Hengist unintentionally makes a joke none of the other characters understand him because his play on words is so childish compared to the seriousness of the situation they are in. Audiences who went to watch the Carry On film though were primed to laugh. They would have expected Connor’s infantile characters to express themselves in this childish way whenever they found themselves having to behave like grown ups in a frightening world that they imagined was unreal. A good example of this is the scene where Hengist and Caesar “gather round to ‘ave a butchers” at a fire in which a soothsayer is trying to invoke a Roman goddess to grant them a vision. Hengist is suddenly reminded of home when the soothsayer calls out the deity’s name: “Isis, sweet Isis...” “Ah lovely ices” interrupts Hengist, remembering the sweet ice-cream he must have enjoyed on a hot prehistoric summer’s day. “Sorry, it’s a saying we have back home” he explains to Caesar who is irritated, not least because he does not understand him, but because metaphorically at least, Hengist’s ice-cream has put the fire out. This example is illustrative of all the oral¹⁰¹ characters played by Connor. They are different from those played by Williams because they are at an earlier stage of infantile development. Many of Connor’s characters can be used to illustrate this, not least, Horace in *Carry On*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 144.

¹⁰¹ ‘oral’ is equated here with ‘anaclitic’.

Sergeant who is “dragged” to the doctors by Captain Clarke (his replacement mother) in his long johns (baby-grow).

Conversely, the hysterical males played by Williams are fixated at a later stage of infantile development – the anal phase, a phase where the child finds the voluntary control of its bowels pleasurable. There are many examples of anal humour in the *Carry Ons*. Again these jokes characterise the hysterical male played by Williams even if some of the jokes are less subtle than others. In *Carry On Spying* Desmond Simkins comes out of a WC smiling and warns a man coming in: “I’d give it a moment if I were you.” But, the narcissistic characters who makes jokes for their own pleasure are not good joke-tellers even if they think are. Their joke telling is a counter feint for seducing the listener whose attention the hysterical males played by Williams crave for themselves. The purpose of these jokes is self-serving so they corrupt the technique necessary for the tendentious joke to fulfil its social purpose - to make the listener laugh. There is no better example needed to illustrate this than when Caesar or Sir Bernard burst into hysterics when he laughs at his own jokes. All of Williams’s hysterical male characters are conspicuously narcissistic. From the first film, where James Bailey is seen admiring his ‘soldier-self’, (his ego-ideal) in a mirror, to the last film where Emile Prevert is seen posing in front of a full-length mirror admiring his half-naked body. This narcissism, this “looking” at one-self, that so defines the hysterical males played by Williams has a special relationship with the joke-work when the look changes, when it becomes a look at the camera.¹⁰² The audience then is being positioned to share the joke with the character. As Mark Vernet says, ‘there is a reference to the spectator as a sort of “Third Party,” the role of which Freud analysed in

¹⁰² See Vernet, M. ‘The Look at the Camera’, *Cinema Journal*, 28, No. 2, Winter 1989.

the case of the pun or play on words.¹⁰³ He gives Groucho Marx as an example because of the way he made jokes about other characters by addressing the camera but some of Williams's characters do that too. An example of the type of pun that exposes the joker, (not the *joked about* who is supposed to be exposed by the joke), will be illustrated now by analysing what Freud calls tendentious jokes.

ii. Puns with a double meaning accompanied by *double entendre* that are tendentious.



Matron: I want to be wooed.

Sir Bernard: Ooh, you can be as wooed as you like with me!

Figure 2 Carry On Matron (1972)

Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

In *Carry On Matron* Sir Bernard Cutting tries to seduce Matron. She is so shocked by his sudden sexual interest in her that she needs time to think but he won't give her time. "Think it over for about ten minutes" he tells her. He cannot wait (she might say "No!" - which she does) so he persists. Matron gets very uncomfortable so she resists him. Frustrated by her he gets angry and accuses her of having an affair. "You've got a lover haven't you?" he says grimacing at her. "Certainly not!" she says defending herself: "It's just that I'm a simple woman with simple tastes and I want to be wooed." / "Ooh,

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p. 52.

you can be as wooed as you like with me” he says turning to the camera. He is so excited and frustrated now that he must find a release for his sexual impulses quickly. The pun he makes on the word “wooed” requires very little effort given the circumstances. The smile he makes to the camera suggests that it has afforded him some temporary relief. But puns, Freud says, ‘pass as the lowest form of verbal joke [and] can be made with the least trouble.’¹⁰⁴ This is one of the reasons he says that puns are regarded with contempt.¹⁰⁵

Certainly, Matron has nothing but a growing contempt for Sir Bernard who seems so confident that she will comply with his request that if she offered any resistance to him he would treat it like a joke - which he does. He thinks he does not have to woo her at all; he just has to show her (with grimaces and arm wrestling gestures) that he is sexually excited and she will ‘yield at once to a sexual action.’¹⁰⁶ His look to the camera certainly (pro)positions the audience to participate in the joke but they are more likely to laugh at him than with him because they are not convinced by his display of sexual bravado, especially when he can only express his feelings verbally with a “wooed” word. The audience sees him for *what he himself is* and *what he himself would like to be*. They would have been very familiar with the characters played by Williams who were always looking in the mirror and admiring themselves. His look at the camera is a reminder to the audience that they can see through Sir Bernard, and that his desperate attempts to woo Matron reflect his narcissism because all he really wants is to “prove to himself that he is a man.” At this point in the scene Sir Bernard does not think that Matron will resist him. It is only once she does that his wooing speech

¹⁰⁴ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* p. 45.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* p. 99.

'passes over into'¹⁰⁷ smut. In the next section the presence of a third party in the scene is used to explain the technique used in smutty jokes. How the audience plays a part in the joke-work is explained and how smutty jokes are used to characterise Sir Bernard and influence the audiences' declamatory opinions towards him is analysed.

iii. Smutty jokes

It is worth analysing the dialogue from the scene where Sir Bernard tries to seduce Matron with smutty jokes. The presence of Doctor Goode, played by Charles Hawtrey, in the scene is important because he helps to explain the part the audience plays in the smutty joke and also why Sir Bernard's smutty jokes fail in their purpose. Dr Goode and Matron are watching television when Sir Bernard knocks on her door. Knowing how neurotic he is they are afraid he will not accept any explanation they give him. So, Doctor Goode hides in a closet and listens in. His 'invisible' presence in the closet is interesting for a number of reasons: its cinematic function, its function in the joke-work, and the psychoanalytic insight that not only positions the audience but determines their attitude to Sir Bernard. A comparison between the closet and the unconscious can be made. So, too can the assumption that it would have been better if Sir Bernard's repressions had remained locked up in his unconscious. Similarly, Doctor Goode's presence in the dark closet represents the audience in the dark cinema, who respond to Sir Bernard's smutty jokes by watching his reactions. His presence is not accidental; it is essential because he plays an important part in the joke-work. 'A smutty joke', says Freud, 'calls for three people: In addition to the one who makes the joke (Sir Bernard) there must be the second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* p. 99.

that has been locked up (repressed) in Sir Bernard's unconscious has at last been released by psychoanalysis. "By suitable you mean willing?" says Sir Bernard. "And able" replies Dr Goode. Sir Bernard is convinced Matron is a *suitable* ("willing" and "able") *mate* so, adorned in corduroy and cravat, and carrying a bunch of flowers¹¹² he bursts into her room, his libido rampant, his lust eager to find satisfaction. But he has not the wit to woo her so he tries to seduce her with smutty jokes which results in insulting her even more. The main purpose of the smut: of liberating pleasure by getting rid of inhibitions, has already become unnecessary to Sir Bernard because his repressions have already been released through psychoanalysis. It negates the purpose of his smutty jokes and their aim is diverted. Instead of Matron being the butt of the joke, he is. So, here smutty jokes serve the same purpose as "the kick up the arse" does in slapstick comedy. The social function of the joke lies in the shared contempt the audience is invited to have for Sir Bernard. This is why it is funny when Matron starts to beat him about the head with a bunch of flowers instead of laughing at Sir Bernard's smutty jokes. An analysis of dialogue below illustrates this. The comments in italics track the moments in the scene where Sir Bernard's 'sexually excited speech [...] becomes positively hostile and cruel'.¹¹³

Sir Bernard Cutting

Matron a man and a woman are here to fulfil one basic function.

You know what that is don't you?

He is reasonable at this point. There is a suggestion of sexual aggressiveness in the tone, but Matron does not feel threatened, in fact she seems flattered that he is asking for her professional opinion.

Matron

Huh huh

Not a laugh just a cheerful acknowledgement.

¹¹² For a discussion of camp humour and the characters played by Williams see, Bannister, J. 'Charles Hawtrey, Kenneth Williams, and Susan Sontag: Campaigners of Camp and the Carry On films', *Forum*, The University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts, Issue 4, Spring, 2007, *Camp!* <http://forum.llc.ed.ac.uk/issue4/bannister.html>

¹¹³ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 99.

I should after fifteen years in a
maternity hospital.

Sir Bernard Cutting

*Encouraged by the fact that he knows she knows, he
explains his predicament.*

That's what's wrong with me.

I need to prove myself a man.

*His admission to Matron that he is sexually impotent is
quickly replaced with a statement of what he intends to do
about it.*

Matron

Well the proof of the pudding is
in the eating.

*She feels a little threatened and tries to distract him, but
not too much.*

Sir Bernard Cutting

Exactly!

*He thinks she is ready to yield. The invitation to eat 'her' is an
unconscious reminder of the oral/sexual pleasure at the
breast of his first love-object (mother). The thought compels
him to make a smutty joke.*

So will you lay the table, or shall I?

Get your cruet out.

His double entendre offends her.

Matron

Sir Bernard you can't be suggesting...

*He is, and wants Matron to lie down, so he can lay with
her, but she resists.*

Sir Bernard Cutting

Why not? (he pleads) You know
there's a mutual attraction between
us. You must have felt it working
together all these years. Side by side
brushing against each other.

*He is becoming impatient and dispenses with allusions to
the sexual act through joking. He decides to use language
that is more direct and explicit.*

Then a telephone rings in Matron's room. It seems to function like an alarm going off, as though the producers recognised that the farce might descend into a fiasco and undermines the comedic value of the duologue (which of course it already has) if they did not put a stop to Sir Bernard's relentless phallic-frenzy. An interruption is used again later in the scene for the same purpose. After Matron answers the phone she tells Sir Bernard that there is an emergency. He is piqued and sees his own situation as a desperate emergency. Matron decides that she will yield to Sir Bernard but only if he

asks her to marry him. Marriage is an important theme in the rehabilitation of the hysterical male in *Carry Ons* and it is explored in Chapter Four. "I don't have to get married to prove myself" he tells her. "Well you do to prove yourself with me" she replies. Sir Bernard is not distracted by this, he sees this as an opportunity to manipulate the situation because Matron has admitted she is sexually attracted to him, and he is conceited enough to make another smutty joke to her. But his smutty joke only serves to expose his own selfishness and his concern with satisfying his own impulses: "I mean it's like do it yourself with wallpaper isn't it?" he says. "Wallpaper?" she replies bewildered. "Yes! You don't just go into the shop and buy yourself enough for the whole room. You tear yourself off a little strip and try it first" he explains to her while laughing hysterically at his smutty joke. His behaviour, though, is no longer funny and laughter is directed at him. Again, this is a clear example of how jokes function as a release valve for the audience. The emotional tension that has built up between Sir Bernard and Matron has built up between the audience (super-ego) and Sir Bernard (Id). The audiences' laughter is almost cathartic in its condemnation as Matron rejects Sir Bernard by having the last laugh in this battle between self-control and selfish desire, between smut (Sir Bernard) and wit (Matron). "That may be so, but, you're not going to stick me against the wall" (and have sex with her), she tells him angrily.

The scene is interrupted here with a cut to another one which serves no narrative function at all. It has a psycho-social one. Its purpose is simply to create a comparison between Sir Bernard (an abnormal male) and a promiscuous (normal) male. Mr Darling (Robin Hunter) is observed waving goodbye to his pregnant wife who is being taken to hospital to have a baby. He then goes back to the house where his au-pair dressed in a

negligée embraces him. The males in the target audience are invited to compare this rampant male (who they are supposed to wish they could be like) to Sir Bernard who they are not. Matron's last words are meant to linger in the mind as a wish that might be fulfilled too - that they stick Sir Bernard against a wall and shoot him.¹¹⁴ This is important because returning to the scene serves no other purpose than that of exposing Sir Bernard. Dr. Goode's presence in the closet and his discovery by Sir Bernard is crucial to this. Sir Bernard has not found a way to release his libidinous impulses because he has not got an audience to share his smutty jokes with. When he discovers Dr. Goode in the closet (who has started a fire because he has dropped his cigarette) it coincides with the moment when he tells Matron: "I'm aflame with passion, burning with desire." He needs to douse his burning passion quickly before he is consumed by it and he does this by turning his desire into anger. He rushes out of the room and comes back armed with a fire extinguisher. He sprays (ejaculates/shoots) Dr. Goode with foam (semen/bullets). By putting out the fire in the closet he finds a release but it is an unnatural one. He has put the beast back in the closet-cell of his unconscious to repeat the need to kill again. As Freud says: 'The neurotic repeats instead of remembering',¹¹⁵ the wish to 'kill' is a kind of *coitus interruptus*. This *death wish* is analogous with what Freud called the 'death instinct.' It is particularly useful in an analysis of the hysterical males. It helps to "define" the self-destructive timid types played by Connor, as "different" from the aggressive types played by Williams in

¹¹⁴ This wish is fulfilled in some of the films. In *Carry On Cleo* Caesar is murdered over and over again: by Cleopatra, his cousin Agrippa, his bodyguard Bilius, and finally by the Senate (who represent the people/audience). In *Carry On Henry* Thomas Cromwell is executed in public as is Citizen Camembert in *Carry On Don't Lose Your Head*.

¹¹⁵ Freud quoted in Appignanesi, op.cit. p. 129.

whom 'the instinct of destruction [...] when it is directed towards objects, provides the ego with the satisfaction of its vital needs and with control over nature.'¹¹⁶

This theme of the death wish - expressed in terms of gallows humour - is explored in the next chapter with reference to *Carry On Cleo*. Caesar exposes *himself* with his jokes when he is exposed by his "body belt...I mean body guard" Hengist to the ultimate neurotic fear of the bed-chamber, where honourable¹¹⁷ men are supposed to face death with the same kind of bravado as if they were making love to a beautiful Egyptian "bit of alright." Caesar's failure is Hengist's triumph. The hysterical males played by Williams would become infamous from now on for their *indifference* towards sex, and their "difference" to heterosexual males. Consequently, the hysterical males played by Connor disappear from the films after Hengist is given a "love philtre" by Cleopatra and he goes home to make love to Senna.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Freud, S. *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930 [1929]): *The Standard Edition Of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI, London, 1975, p. 121.

¹¹⁷ Antony. So are they all, all honourable men[?], Shakespeare, W. *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar*, Dorch, T. S. (ed) III: 2: 85.

¹¹⁸ In fact Connor disappeared from the series for six years. When he returns he plays the role of the frustrated husband.

CHAPTER THREE

“Infamy! Infamy! They’ve all got it in for me.” The hysterical male played by Kenneth Williams.



Caesar: Infamy! Infamy! They’ve all got it in for me!

Figure 3 Carry On Cleo (1964)

Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

When Caesar runs towards the camera and screams: “Infamy! Infamy! They’ve all got it in for me!” during an assassination attempt, there are a complicated set of reasons why the audience laugh, (when they perhaps should not), given his tragic circumstances. The relationship between the comic and the verbal joke is crucial since it is this that creates pleasure for the audience. As we have already noted, writers on film comedy (Palmer, Neale and Krutnik, Olson, King), borrow heavily from Aristotle to explore the visually ‘ludicrous’ and ‘ridiculous’ characters that we recognise and laugh at in the sight-gag, while others, like Neale and Krutnik, acknowledge the ‘semiotic anomaly’¹¹⁹ between the gag and the joke. Yet, none of these writers analyse the actual words of the joke and their relation to the comic actions of the character and this seems to be crucial to any comprehensive study of film comedy. John Marmysz boldly asserts that ‘out of all the [...] theories, Freud’s which offers the most sophisticated and comprehensive

¹¹⁹ Neale & Krutnik, *op. cit.* p. 71.

treatment of the subject'¹²⁰ can only provide a theoretical foundation. Consequently he does not offer any practical examples for its application either. Freud's analysis of jokes, as we have seen, blends the pleasure of looking and listening with psychoanalytic interpretation, and so provides a blueprint for a lived-in-the-same-way understanding by audiences who can share the same joke. 'The close connection between recognising and remembering [...] and the factor of topicality, is a fertile source of pleasure in jokes'¹²¹ says Freud. So, when we analyse the pun, "Infamy! Infamy! They've all got it in for me!" the success of the pun relies not just on the technique of joke-work that puns employ; 'the multiple use of the same word, as a whole and again in the syllables into which it falls'¹²² states Freud, but on the pleasure that is derived because the word "infamy" is repeated. According to Freud, 'the accent falls on rediscovering what is familiar, on the correspondence between the two words that makes up the pun.'¹²³ So, the 'sound-image' produced when Caesar screams out, "They've all got it in for me!" is what creates the laugh, because the audience is placed in a position of superiority over Caesar who represents an image of authority that has been reduced to an image of ridicule. What Caesar says makes sense in its narrative context, but it takes on the special purpose of a tendentious joke when its double meaning is understood outside the diegesis of the film. Freud says,

by external circumstances [...] the hostile purpose of the tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority.¹²⁴

The spectators implied are not accidental, they are explicit. The audience is positioned to compare the plebeian Caesar with their noble selves. They have come to bury

¹²⁰ Marmysz, J. 'Morreall vs. Freud: A battle of Wit(z)', p. 13. <http://users.aol.com/geinster/Hum.html> [Accessed 15/09/2005].

¹²¹ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 122.

¹²² *ibid.* p. 32.

¹²³ *ibid.* p. 47.

¹²⁴ *ibid.* p. 105.

Caesar, not to praise him. This moment of exposure, of mockery, occurs when Caesar is at his most vulnerable, when he is pleading with the spectator for an “audience” to save him. Caesar turns and makes a direct address to the camera: “Infamy! Infamy! They’ve all got it in for me!”

As Mark Vernet points out, ‘the address to the spectator is a forming of the spectator as witness’;¹²⁵ a witness to murder that awakens the audiences’ aggressive and hostile instincts. The pleasure found in the play on words like these provides a release for the violent emotions of ‘pity and fear’¹²⁶ that the same scene in Shakespeare’s tragedy does. ‘The pleasures in tragedy’, says Aristotle, is found in ‘language made pleasurable’ and in ‘spectacle’.¹²⁷ As Malcolm Heath explains, according to Aristotle, ‘there is pleasure to be got both from the verbal text of tragedy, and from its visual and aural realization’¹²⁸ and more importantly, ‘these pleasures of the verbal text and performance are not distinctive to tragedy; they are present in comedy as well.’¹²⁹ So, what, or rather ‘who’ distinguishes one as comedy and the other as tragedy? According to Aristotle, Heath explains, ‘tragedy is essentially concerned with people who are of high status and of good moral character; by contrast the slaves in comedy (whatever their virtues) are likely to be lazy, dishonest and self-seeking.’¹³⁰ While Caesar remains an aristocrat, and Hengist a slave, there is a complete reversal of the roles expected of them in comedy. It is Caesar who is of poor moral character and Hengist who is good. And while Hengist is lazy in the bedroom because he is suffering a ‘lack’ he is not lazy in

¹²⁵ Vernet, op. cit. p. 52.

¹²⁶ Malcolm Heath in the introduction to *Poetics* says, Aristotle ‘distinguishes the characteristically tragic pleasure from other pleasures which tragedy arouses, but which are not distinctive to it.’ op. cit. p. xxxv.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p. xxxv.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* p. xxxvi.

¹²⁹ *ibid.* p. xxxvi.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* p. xliv.

love.¹³¹ Neither is he dishonest or self-seeking, like Caesar. This reversal, or what Aristotle calls *peripeteia*, where ‘there is a change to the opposite in the actions being performed, as stated’¹³² is characteristic of the hysterical male roles played by Williams in the Carry On films whose authority figures are always objects of ridicule. But in *Carry On Cleo* there is (or seems to be), a reversal of the reversal role played by Williams when Caesar makes Hengist change places with him to discover the identity of the assassins who murder him in a vision he has seen. What is interesting is the opportunity the film gives us to compare the two types of hysterical male in two scenes that (except for the change of roles) are practically replayed word for word. In the first scene where Caesar and Hengist see themselves in a vision, Caesar’s boastful declaration, “Oh, it’s me” tells us as much about his character as Hengist’s pleasantly surprised expression, “And me”, does about him. Caesar’s reaction reveals his narcissistic character (*what he himself is i.e. himself*); Hengist’s reveals his anaclitic character (*his attachment to the man who protects him*). It is not difficult to see how the vision functions as a mirror for Caesar’s narcissistic gaze or how the controlling function of the spectator’s gaze is reversed because Caesar enjoys his ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’¹³³ when he is holding the mirror. But Caesar’s illusion is shattered and seen to be just a smoke-screen when the fire dies and the vision vanishes. When he looks into the mirror again the vision reveals the truth about who is in control. Caesar sees himself dead with a “dagger in me [his] vitals.” He is not in control of the Empire, his destiny, his sexuality, or his narcissism. The camera controls the spectator’s gaze just as the scriptwriter positions the audience/listener to laugh at his jokes. But, it is the second scene (replayed) that is most interesting because Hengist as Caesar reflects Caesar as he

¹³¹ Caesar is not lazy in love; he just loves himself too much to share his love with Calpurnia. Even when he shares the marital bed with his wife Hengist sleeps on top of the four-poster so that Caesar can go to sleep rather than make love to her.

¹³² Aristotle, op. cit. p. xxx.

¹³³ Mulvey, L. *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, 1989, p. 19.

really thinks he is. By looking at Hengist he gazes at himself looking back at him and he loves it. Hengist is his “double”. He reflects Caesar’s ego-ideal. He is a great lover. But Hengist is only disguised as Caesar. By fooling Cleopatra Caesar himself is fooled. He is not a great lover. He is not really interested in a sexual “alliance” with Cleopatra. In an earlier scene with Calpurnia he dismisses the actual existence of women, he says, “They don’t have them abroad you know” and when Mark Antony is describing Cleopatra as the “Siren of the Nile” he says, “Ooh I hope she doesn’t go off!” His fear of women, of sharing his love with one (“I don’t want to get married. I’m a confirmed bachelor” says Percival Snooper in *Carry On Loving*) is absolutely connected with his fear of castration (of death), of that *dagger in his vitals*. All Caesar is interested in is self-preservation. Seeing himself dead in the vision triggers a psychic defence mechanism similar to repression (the ‘death instinct’) that might help him to prolong his life. But the abnormality of Caesar’s narcissism is exposed in a tendentious joke that makes *him* the butt of the joke which the audience is invited to share with the scriptwriters because he is prepared to let Hengist take his place and die (as Caesar) for/while making love to Cleopatra. “Oh woe is me. Is there to be no succour?” he moans pitifully. “There’s always Hengist” replies Mark Anthony laughing sarcastically. Here the joke’s purpose (to ridicule Caesar) is signalled by Mark Antony who is the audience’s representative.¹³⁴ The double meaning implied in the pun “succour” for *sucker* incriminates Caesar’s character because the audience knows that it is Caesar not Hengist who will die. There is no doubt left in the viewers’ minds which of the two is the object of the humour and aggression and who is meant to provoke their feelings of sympathy. The comparison between the two ‘ideals’ produces, states Freud,

¹³⁴ Robert Ross talks about characters that are the audience’s representative who get their own back on Williams’s characters (Ross, op. cit. p. 71).

'an economy in the expenditure upon ideation.'¹³⁵ The males in the audience comparing themselves to Caesar would rather take up their psychic-swords and stab their own castrated Caesars before allowing another man to take their place in bed with a beautiful woman. This spectator/other's self-assassination, this psychic killing, (and "What a way to make a killin'" it is, Mark Antony remarks), is what precipitates the laugh (Freud calls it a kind of fore-pleasure)¹³⁶ that disarms their inhibitions. By aligning themselves, by (making an allegiance) with the Mark Antony character, the audience align their support with the Senate/patriarchy. Hence, the producers/scriptwriters have 'bribe[d] the hearer [with a joke] into taking sides with them.'¹³⁷ The spectator is made omnipotent. Sitting in a kind of cinema-senate the audience give Caesar the thumbs-down. By placing the spectator/audience in a superior position over Caesar; 'by making their enemy small, inferior, despicable [and] comic [they] achieve the enjoyment of overcoming him.'¹³⁸ If jokes whisper to the repressed inhibitions of hostile and unpleasurable impulses, and the comic puts a light on them, then cinema provides the producers with a dark arena where they can encourage the audience to confess to themselves what they dare not in public. Jokes provide a safe release for an individual's aggressive impulses because they give him permission to laugh out loud with everyone else at someone else who they have all agreed to despise.¹³⁹ As we have seen, Caesar is certainly a figure that is despised by the other characters (all except Hengist) and the audiences' attitudes are meant to mirror them. Caesar symbolises everything that he is not suppose to. He is a coward and sexually impotent. But so is Hengist. The

¹³⁵ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 236.

¹³⁶ In the footnotes to *Jokes* Strachey (ed) points out, 'Freud discussed the mechanism of fore-pleasure as it operates in the sexual act. It is mentioned here because many of the jokes in the Carry Ons are examples of double entendres and smut. Freud, op.cit. p. 137.

¹³⁷ *ibid.* p.103.

¹³⁸ *ibid.* p. 103.

¹³⁹ Robert Lapsley, commenting on the purpose of humour in a first draft of this thesis, reminded me that: 'What is unpleasurable at a conscious level can provide unconscious satisfaction.' E-mail correspondence, 08/12/2006.

difference, however, is that Hengist is a sympathetic character. He evokes feelings of pity. His character (as we have noted) is an attachment type so it is not surprising that the audience feels some emotional attachment towards him. The audience laugh with him at his self-deprecating jokes but they never laugh with Caesar. They laugh at him because he makes others the butt of his self-serving humour. He is preoccupied with his own death (under the circumstances that is not surprising) and with staying alive. Consequently he finds no pleasure in living (he is suffering from “a stinking cold” when the audience first see him) and he places no value on the lives of others (Hengist) who he expects to die in his place. The idea that people should die with dignity is anathema to him. He either faints every time that his life is threatened (literally clinging to the “if we close our eyes they might go away” notion) or he runs away screaming “help me!” Because Caesar cannot face death with dignity he undermines people’s belief that they can. This can be done just as well with *Galgenhumor* (‘gallows humour’) as it can with a gladius. In *Carry On Don’t Lose Your Head* (1966) when the French “aristo” the Duc de Pommfrit/ Hawtrey is lying on his back looking up at the blade of “Madame la Guillotine” he quips, “Short back and sides, not too much off the top.” The crowd erupts with laughter and applauds the Duc who has been performing for them.¹⁴⁰ Freud says, ‘there is something like magnanimity in this *blague*,¹⁴¹ in the man’s tenacious hold upon his customary self and his disregard of what might overthrow that self and drive it to despair.’¹⁴² Their anger towards him is inhibited, as Freud says, because they ‘are

¹⁴⁰ In the film *The Wicked Lady* (1945) ‘Lucky’ Jerry Jackson/James Mason does not disappoint his audience either, “Mind you boys don’t fall down and hurt yourselves” he says to the men securing the noose on his gallows. “We’re safer than what you are” comes back the reply. The joke is shared. The men on the scaffold and the audiences’ fear of death/castration is disavowed by the joke and the imminent hanging of the [un]lucky Jerry Jackson.

¹⁴¹ *blague*: *blag*, pretentious but empty talk; nonsense. *Collins English Dictionary*, op. cit. The word is defined in *The Concise Oxford French-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1974, as ‘a joke, falsehood, and a hoax’.

¹⁴² Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 229.

infected by the rogue's indifference'¹⁴³ and they have to find another channel to release the cathexis (psychic) energy they have built up so they 'laugh it off.'¹⁴⁴ The crowd who the Duc has been *playing to* do not want to be reminded of their own mortality or their wretched existence compared to the extravagant life the aristocrats live; they want to be entertained with 'gallows humour', something that Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael call 'survival humour.'¹⁴⁵ But the real purpose of the jokes is to make the crowd watching from their cinema seats laugh. So, when the Duc looks at the camera (at the moment he delivers the joke) he involves and positions the spectator/audience in the same space as the crowd enjoying the bloodthirsty spectacle. But his "look" serves another purpose: it reveals the actor playing a part who makes the audience aware that he is playing a part, and that they should not take anything seriously. His "look" makes the audience aware that they are watching a film 'comedy'. It reveals his own sense of humour because with a simple glance he makes the audience do a *double take*. He steps out of the film, not to escape his execution as Caesar/Williams does when he looks at the camera and screams, but to see if they are laughing at his joke. Hawtrey reminds the audience how close the film comes to pantomime where audiences are often directly addressed, and where their essential role in the joke-work is made obvious by their active participation as 'listeners'. He seems to say, "Hey, this is not real, I'm just play acting, this is not meant to be serious, I'm just kidding you it's just a joke, let's have a laugh together." All of the things in fact that his character the Duc is doing when he tells his joke on the gallows are there to avoid the reality of what is about to happen to him. His sense of humour provides the audience with what Palmer calls 'comic

¹⁴³ *ibid.* p. 230.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 230.

¹⁴⁵ Nuttall, J. & Carmichael, R. *Common Factors/Vulgar Factions*, Routledge & Keegan, London, 1977, p. 37. Freud calls it 'the crudest humour.' *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 229.

insulation'¹⁴⁶ against pain and death in the real world. It is why the audience are able to sympathise with the Duc and not with Caesar. Freud explains:

The principle thing is the intention which humour fulfils, whether it concerns the subject's self or other people. Its meaning is: Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play – the very thing to jest about!¹⁴⁷

The hysterical males that Williams plays (like Caesar, Sir Bernard Cutting or Dr Watt) seem to reverse the whole purpose of gallows humour. They cannot hide their fear behind humour and they wilt behind their abnormal narcissism. They scream at the dangerous world. They generally despise everyone in it. These characters do not have a sense of humour that can be shared with any one except perhaps themselves. In *Carry On Cleo* when Agrippa and his men ask Caesar to “die with dignity” and fight them on the deck of the galley, Caesar becomes hysterical because no one will defend him. “Let Hengist do it. He will despatch them easily” he says to Mark Antony before turning to Hengist and saying, “after all, you are the chief dispatching clerk.” Then he bursts into hysterical laughter. The other characters look disdainfully at him. None of them laugh at Caesar's joke and they do not sympathise with him. Instead, audiences' sympathies are with Hengist (whose reluctance to ‘kill’ means he puts some value on people's lives). The hysteric must never become hysterically funny and Connor's characters never do. Laughter exposes them.¹⁴⁸ With Williams's hysterical males laughter is always associated with the ‘unpleasant.’ Neurosis would be a normal mental defensive reaction under such life threatening circumstances. The displacement of neurosis through humour provides the mind with an escape from reality by making that threat appear to be nothing but a joke. At the end of *Carry On Don't Lose Your Head Citizen*

¹⁴⁶ Palmer, op. cit. p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ Freud, S. ‘Humour’ (1928), *Collected Papers*, Vol. V, London, 1957, p. 220.

¹⁴⁸ Marmysz, op. cit. paraphrases John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, New York, 1983. ‘Hysterical laughter is motivated by some trauma which overcomes its victim [...] it is a defence mechanism against an impending breakdown’ (p. 11).

Camembert/Williams and Citizen Bidet/Butterworth end up on the guillotine together. Bidet turns to Camembert and says, "I hope the rain keeps off, I've forgotten my hat." Camembert does not laugh but the crowd does. Camembert cannot understand Bidet's "indifference" to his fate because he has never got to know him. He is incapable of sympathising with other human beings. The audience know how badly Bidet has been treated by Camembert so they share his sense of humour; they know he (like them) is getting the last laugh on Camembert. As Freud explains:

It is not easy to say what happens in a person when humorous pleasure is generated; but we can obtain some insight if we examine the cases in which humour is communicated or sympathized with, cases in which, by an understanding of the humorous person, we arrive at the same pleasure as his.¹⁴⁹



Citizen Bidet: I hope the rain keeps off. I've forgotten my hat.¹⁵⁰
Figure 4 Carry On Don't Lose Your Head (1966)
Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

¹⁴⁹ Freud, *Jokes*, op.cit. p. 229.

¹⁵⁰ An example of gallows humour contemporary with the period of the French Revolution is given by Robert Southey: 'When to the gallows he was led / "Twas a short way to Heaven," he said, / "Though not the pleasantest." Southey, R. 'The Pilgrim To Compostella', *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey*, Vol, VII, London, 1860, p. 253.

In light of the analysis in this chapter the audience is clearly prompted not to have any sympathy for Camembert: his decapitation is a just penalty for the castrated male who threatened the institution of the family. Conversely, the audience would have some sympathy for the hysterical males played by Connor like Horace or Hengist who yearn to be part of a family. In the next chapter the army as a surrogate family that prepares the impotent male for procreation and marriage is examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

Marriage à la *Carry On* mode.¹⁵¹ The hysterical male played by Kenneth Connor



Symbols of marriage: Fruitfulness, ball and chain, a strong erection¹⁵²
Figure 5 *Carry On Up the Jungle* (1970)
Source: Courtesy of ITV plc (Granada International).

Marriage is an important theme in the *Carry On* films and many of the jokes reflect what Freud says about it: ‘one does not venture to declare aloud and openly, that marriage is not an arrangement calculated to satisfy a man’s sexuality.’¹⁵³ The double entendres, phallic symbolism and “nudge nudge” gestures in the *Carry On* films are a purely phallogocentric language of rebellion for the frustrated married man who must repress his natural promiscuous urge, especially when, as Freud points out: ‘marriage does not allow of the satisfaction of needs that [in consequence become] somewhat

¹⁵¹ Coincidentally, the earliest reference to ‘double entendre’ is found in John Dryden’s bawdy comedy, *Marriage à la Mode*, 1673, III. i. 36, *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://oed.com> [Accessed 15/08/07].

¹⁵² Hugh Rawson in *A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk*, London, 1979 states that ‘rabbit’ is a euphemism for ‘cony’, an original reference to an adult of the species, *Lepus cunicula*. He says from the 16th century ‘cony’ was both a term of endearment for a woman and a nickname for her private parts. ‘Cony’ is cognate to the taboo word ‘cunt’. The rabbit as a symbol therefore has a double meaning: in one sense it symbolises castration to the hysterical male and in another it refers to reproduction because the species is known for its ability to reproduce prodigiously, something which all males in the *Carry Ons* are expected to do too. ‘Ball and chain’ are words derived from the US in the 20th century; the former refers to testicles, the latter to wife. See Partridge, E. *A Dictionary of Unconventional English*, London, 1984. The banana is an obvious symbol of the ever potent male, just as the broken sausage speared by Mrs Tidey’s fork in *Carry On Matron* is a symbol of the impotent/castrated male.

¹⁵³ Freud, *Jokes*, op.cit. p. 111.

stronger than usual.’¹⁵⁴ “Try sleeping on your stomach” Captain Potts tells one of the recruits in *Carry On Sergeant*. Marriage in the Carry On films is an institution just like the army. Military duty is equated with marital duty and that duty has just one purpose: reproduction. In the *Carry On Up the Jungle*, an all-female tribe called the Lubidubies capture a regiment of soldiers whom they refer to as “real men at last” because the men they have already captured (a hysterical male amongst them) have failed in their duty as husbands to produce baby boys.¹⁵⁵ Kenneth Connor’s character Mr Chumley confesses his fear: “I don’t want you to think I’m complaining at all. I’ve always been an active sort of chap you know. What I’m getting at is I don’t think I’m active enough to get married every day.” The message to men in 1970 had not changed much since *Carry On Sergeant* in 1958: only strong men were attractive to women who wanted to get married and have children. Men who were physically and mentally weak were maligned and made fun of. Conscriptio in *Carry On Sergeant* provided a solution: the army, without the necessity to prepare men for war, would repair weak and weedy men and make them ready for active service in the marriage bed. Conscriptio was the Carry On way to copulation. Sex outside of marriage was taboo. In *Carry On Sergeant* when Charlie Sage makes an application for leave because he was called-up on his wedding day Captain Potts who is unaware of his circumstances asks, “You want leave to get married do you?” / “Oh no Sir, no sir, it’s just that I want to arrange things.” Captain Potts calls

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 111.

¹⁵⁵ Webber, Richard. *The Complete A-Z Of Everything Carry On*, London, 2005. Significantly, all of the babies in the Carry On films are boys born in wedlock, but when they are fathered by the hysterical males played by Connor their birth are celebrated as a kind of male bonding and national relief. In *Carry On Matron* when Mr. Tidey/Connor (who has taken seven years to get his wife pregnant) is told that he is a father, he celebrates as much with relief as jubilation: “Did you hear that mates, I’ve got a baby boy” he tells the men in the waiting room. “You’ve done it. Well done mate. Congratulations” says Sid Carter/James slapping him on the back. The baby boy is proof that the hysterical male has overcome his neurosis, can mate and call other men his mates. Mr Tidey is as much overjoyed because he has been accepted by his fellow mates as he is by the satisfaction that he has been able to prove that he is a man, unlike Sir Bernard Cutting/Williams who has not. At the end of the film, even when he has married Matron her affirmation to him that: “At last you can prove yourself” leaves the audience in no doubt that he still has to.

Charlie a “dirty rotter.” / “Oh, please sir you don’t understand” Charlie remonstrates. “I understand perfectly” says Captain Potts, “respectable girl, plus sex mad youth means three lives ruined.” It was only in the later films that the question of sex outside marriage was addressed, and then it was often portrayed as something the aristocracy indulged in as a kind of right of kings. In the first scene of *Carry On Henry* (1971) King Henry/James is out hunting on horseback when he chases a peasant girl into a barn as if she is literally a “game” bird.¹⁵⁶ The audience laughs because this behaviour would have been expected from Sid James’s characters by the 1970s, but they would also be aware of the myth of the stereotype aristocrat who was free to indulge his sexual desires. Captain Potts’s attitude towards Miles Heywood (Longdon) is quite different when he learns that Heywood’s father and grandfather were generals in the army: “What’s the first thing that comes into your head?” he asks him. “Women” he replies as though that there could be no other answer. “You’re a soldier by tradition and instinct” he tells him puffing out his chest and turning round to Sergeant Wilkins (James). Compare this to his attitude towards Horace Strong/Connor who he says is “indecisive”, and “timorous.” “Be decisive” he tells him. The hysterical male’s anxieties are exposed in public by the patriarchal figures of authority.

For Hudis, patriarchal institutions of the state like the army in *Carry On Sergeant*, had protected and preserved the moral, political and social amelioration of the people

¹⁵⁶ Appignanesi, op. cit. p. 51, states that Freud explained: ‘Vögeln, the German slang for sex, also means birds.’ This is incorrect. The word is easily confused with vogel, the German word for bird and vöglein, meaning little bird. (*Collins German-English Dictionary*, London, 1990, p 1229). But most amusingly vögeln, is the German slang, ‘to screw’ (to have sexual intercourse). This duplicity of meaning not only demonstrates how a common language must be sophisticated enough to allow for a play with words but ironically how that language becomes vulgarised when a society’s attitudes to sex are repressed and a way of expression must necessarily be found. This is the genesis of sexual jokes. Marion Jordan makes this observation when she talks about the Carry Ons: ‘The films celebrate the ingenuity with which the common language, so subjected to bowdlerization, nonetheless throws up sexual connotations, and in so doing, they celebrate the liveliness of sexual interest’, (p. 322).

against Nazism during the war¹⁵⁷ but the army had also exposed the nation's "nancy"¹⁵⁸ man. The country had needed men to fight for the Fatherland but alarmingly the army had thrown up some men who were more afraid of their mothers than the Germans. For Hudis psychoanalysis seemed to offer an explanation. *Mum*.¹⁵⁹ Mum is literally the "enemy within" (the unconscious). Her identity is exposed by Horace when he is psychoanalysed by the army doctors who associate his "various physical ailments" with her "cold" character. Horace's impotence is a result of his arrested psycho-sexual development. Rycroft's explanation of the neurotic male dominated by the 'phallic mother' is not just an accurate description of Horace, but of all the hysterical males played by Connor, who form 'an infantile conception of the mother during the pre-Oedipal phase of libidinal development. He says, 'this type has a neurotic conception of women [...], an aversion to women, or a masochistic, submissive attitude towards them.'¹⁶⁰

The patriarchal institutions depicted in early films scripted by Hudis, like *Carry On Sergeant*, *Carry On Constable* and *Carry On Nurse* offered a panacea for the impotent male. The institutions themselves were not the object of ridicule; they were respected and were thought to have a stabilising influence on society. The institution of marriage in these early films demanded the most respect and was thought to be the most stabilising of all. It never comes under attack. It is depicted as something that should

¹⁵⁷ Nigel Watson in 'Carry On Ealing' discusses the 'shared experience in such institutions as national Service and the national health service which had become a part of people's everyday lives'. Watson, N. 'Carry On Ealing', http://www.talkingpix.co.uk/Article_Carry%20Ealing.html [Accessed 12/11/2002].

¹⁵⁸ Sergeant Grimshawe in *Carry On Sergeant*.

¹⁵⁹ Lucy Fischer's 'Mama's Boy: Filial hysteria in *White Heat*' in Cohan, S., & Hark, I. R., *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, London, 1995, is a seminal work which is particularly relevant here because it offers a comparison with American GIs returning from World War II suffering from psychosomatic hysteria. In this instance *White Heat* (1949) concentrates on the relationship between the character of Cody Jarrett/Cagney and his mother Ma/Wycherly. See also 'Momism: Inflicting Perpetual Adolescence', Sebald, H. *Adolescence: A Social Psychological Analysis*, New Jersey, 1977.

¹⁶⁰ Rycroft, op. cit. p. 117.

be aspired to and it is the preoccupying motive of the central characters in these films. Questions never arise about marriage being an unhappy situation for couples to find themselves in until *Carry On Cleo* in 1964. Marriage remains central to the series, and is even a key theme in *Carry On Loving*.¹⁶¹ But right up until 1978 when the series ends with *Carry On Emmanuelle*, marriage is no longer depicted as blissfully as it is in *Carry On Sergeant*; it has become a battle ground. Wives are often the butt of smutty jokes, “This is the wife, don’t laugh, ha, ha, ha” says Vic Flange/James in *Carry On Abroad*, married men are not. This is because the wives are offended by their husband’s smutty jokes and will not submit. The consequence of this is that they are portrayed as ‘harridans’: middle-aged, fat, and undesirable. Curiously, their middle-aged husbands are always seen as desirable by young women, (Tarzan/Terry Scott in *Carry On Up The Jungle*, Sir Sidney Ruff-Diamond in *Carry On Up The Khyber*).

Likewise, the smutty jokes, which are conspicuous in the later films, are absent for the early ones. This coincides with the absence of the hysterical characters played by Connor and by their replacement with those played by Williams. These two very different kinds of hysterical male are the vehicles for two very different kinds of jokes that reflected new attitudes¹⁶² to the repressive institution of marriage. One, as we have

¹⁶¹ Later films like this one could seem to be the cinematic equivalent of William Hogarth’s *Marriage à la Mode* paintings (1734, National Gallery, London), which were ‘a remarkably exuberant satire of marriage.’ *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia*, 2002, [Accessed 15/08/2007]. The earlier, arguably more ‘innocent’ films might be compared with the family group portraits of landed gentry by the 18 century painter Arthur Devis, ‘A family group on a terrace in a garden, 1749’. Many writers on the Carry On films have suggested they were the cinematic equivalent of Donald McGill’s saucy seaside postcards and this fact has been corroborated by Peter Rogers who said, ‘the real humour of the Carry Ons has its basis in the seaside picture postcard [...] I remember on one occasion buying a whole set [...] from the publishers and sending them to the censor as a guide to the kind of humour to expect from us’, (quoted from Sally and Nina Hibbin, *What a Carry On: The Official Story of the Carry On film series*, London, 1988) p. 12. The later films I would suggest are closer to the comparison Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael make with the 1970s postcards of Fitzpatrick, Milla, Bob or Bashful. They display a lecherousness that is more knowing than the ‘saucy innocence’ of McGill (37).

¹⁶² These attitudes were not new, as Simon Schama in *A History of Britain* (BBC 2000-2002), points out. The problems caused by unhappy marriages (especially amongst the working classes) began to be discussed in the Victorian times. The bad marriage between Sidney Bung/Corbett and his wife

seen, is the kind of jokes used by Williams's characters, generally identified as smut, the other belong to a group of jokes that Freud calls cynical jokes:

Among the institutions which cynical jokes are in the habit of attacking none is more important or more strictly guarded by moral regulations but at the same time more inviting to attack than the institution of marriage.¹⁶³

But, while characters like Sir Bernard Cutting, played by Williams in *Carry On Matron*, often dismiss marriage as repugnant, "I don't need to get married to prove myself!" he says, they are not directly attacking the institution so much as declaring their own aversion to sharing the love they have for themselves with anyone else. Hence, Williams's tendentious jokes are undisguised attacks on everyone, they have a selfish purpose, whereas Connor's characters' jokes have a social purpose: '[w]hat they disguise are cynicisms'¹⁶⁴ Freud says; they are jokes that are 'directed against the subject himself or, [...] against someone in whom the subject has a share - a collective person, that is (the subject's own nation, for instance).'¹⁶⁵

These jokes have a share 'value' because they are impersonal, that is, their purpose is not to do harm by ridiculing people. What is significant is that Connor's cynical jokes are not directed at the institutions in order to ridicule them either, but to show the characters' frustrations with them and his sense of alienation and powerlessness. This is why Williams's hysterical males, as powerful figures of authority in these institutions, always alienate themselves from the audience. They display a sense of humour which they are unable to share. Freud says, a person 'can keep to [themselves] the enjoyment

Emily/Sims in Victorian England is the central theme of *Carry On Screaming*; that these problems are timeless and perpetual is indicated by the marriages of Caesar and Hengist in *Carry On Cleo* in ancient Britain, just as it is in *Carry On Loving* when the newly married couples who have not been so perfectly matched by Sid's computer vent their frustrations with each other in a custard pie fight.

¹⁶³ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 110.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 110.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 111.

of the humorous pleasure that has arisen in [them], without feeling obliged to communicate it.’¹⁶⁶ Connor’s characters do just that; they manage to endear themselves to popular audiences with their common man¹⁶⁷ sense of humour. Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael call this ‘survival humour [because] it isn’t ‘me’ humour, it is ‘us’ humour.’¹⁶⁸ Cynical of any institution which curtails their individual freedoms the institution of marriage in the later Carry On films is the one most *moaned about* by the characters.¹⁶⁹ As Freud says: ‘There is no more personal claim than that for sexual freedom and at no point has civilisation tried to exercise severer suppression than in the sphere of sexuality.’¹⁷⁰

The very first scene in a Carry On film is one which concerns itself with marriage just as the last one (*Carry On Emmannuelle*) ends with the birth of baby boys. *Carry On Sergeant* begins at the marriage reception of Charlie/Bob Monkhouse and Mary Sage/Shirley Eaton. The weak male who poses a threat to a successful marriage and is the new enemy on the Home Front in post-war Britain is indicated in a number of ways. First, the father of the groom’s after-dinner speech does not just reflect his own anxiety about his son’s sexual prowess, but the nation’s, because he speaks for everyone at the reception when he looks at Charlie (not his wife) and says: “We hope that all their troubles will be little ones.”¹⁷¹ The implication is that if the couple do not have children

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 229.

¹⁶⁷ The characters Connor’s plays are often working-class. In *Carry On Nurse* Bernie Bishop is a boxer. His character is sharply contrasted with the middle-class university graduate Oliver Reckitt/Williams. In *Carry On Cabby* he is Ted Watson a mechanic and in *Carry On Cleo* he is a slave.

¹⁶⁸ Nuttall & Carmichael, *op. cit.* p. 26.

¹⁶⁹ “Moaned” is perhaps the best way of describing the cynical jokes aimed at the institution of marriage. They are a mere grumble because as Nuttall & Carmichael rightly state, ‘sex may not have been what it might be for some years, but divorce is out of the question. We slog it out.’ (p. 27).

¹⁷⁰ Freud, *Jokes*, *op.cit.* p. 110.

¹⁷¹ This joke is told in the film, *The Leather Boys* (1964) but it does not express any anxiety about the groom’s sexual prowess as it does in *Carry On Sergeant* because it passes over into smut. The joke is shared by the groom and his uncle, who suggestively nods at the young bride, pointing out that she, is

quickly¹⁷² it will be Charlie's fault. Secondly, the telegram he reads out telling Charlie that he has been "called-up", is the voice of patriarchal authority (the Oedipal father). Thirdly, in the following scene where Charlie meets Horace on the train, the audience does not just see the weak male personified comically (Horace shivers like a child beneath an oversized greatcoat), but cynically, in the remarks he makes about himself and the army. The visual and the verbal are married in a single joke which only works outside the diegesis. The audience "listening-in" to Horace complaining only becomes something funny because of the way he looks. But the aim of the joke is diverted away from him. "How did you pass the medical?" asks Charlie who cannot believe that a man as sick as Horace has been drafted into the army. "Medical! Huh! A farce, a criminal farce! A1, me! A f, f, flamin' 1. I tell you mate two of everything you should have two of and you're in." Although it is Charlie who makes the initial reference to the army medical, it is clearly Horace's comments that are a disguised cynicism about the army medical. And, because Horace emphasises the word "farce" by repeating it before and after the word "criminal", his feelings are less disguised, which leaves a space for something funny to be said. Repeating the word-pattern, "A1, me! A f, f, flamin' 1" redirects his cynicism. It is aimed at himself, not at the army doctors, who are just doing their job, and certainly not at Charlie because he wants his support. As Freud states, the 'rebellious criticism is directed against himself.'¹⁷³ The stuttered "f, f, flamin'" (Freud calls, this kind of conscious repression a parapraxis) exposes Horace's vulnerability and arouses compassion for him because they can imagine themselves in his position - a little aggrieved having to submit to an authority so austere that he is not

their sexual object. The double entendre is conveyed in the way the words are phrased and by the visual innuendo of the uncle's lecherous pouting grimaces.

¹⁷² The eagerness with which married couples were expected to reproduce is not over-exaggerated. In *Carry On Cabby* Terry 'Pintpot' Tankard/Hawtrey picks up a young couple in a taxi cab. "Just got married?" he asks. "Yes" is the happy reply. "Lovely, won't be long now" he says.

¹⁷³ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 111.

even allowed to “speak up for himself.” The authority of the army is absolute; it demands that he accepts its authority as a child has to accept the authority of its parents and not “argue back” with the men whose job is merely to enforce the demands of their superiors. Horace is the ‘little man’ (child) who wants to challenge the authority, but the only thing he is actually able to do is complain. And the only people he can complain to, are those in exactly the same situation as himself, so he becomes garrulous, overexcited and tongue-tied whenever he gets a chance to “speak up” for himself.

Horace may have substitute ‘parents’ in the army, but actual parents, in this film and in other Carry Ons are absent. Fathers, for example, are often only referred to or used as a means of comparing the sexually promiscuous male (the totem phallus) with its taboo (the impotent male). So, in *Carry On Cleo* Horsa introduces himself to Senna as, “Horsa, son of Ethelred” / “Not Ethelred the Unready?” asks Hengist looking down at the ground, anticipating what Horsa’s reply will be. “Oh no, no, my dad was always ready, so my mum said” he quickly asserts, looking at Senna who is flirting with him. Likewise actual mothers are absent. This may be explained by the fact that jokes made directly about mothers might risk offence; they would present ‘an obstacle in the form of opposition to the purpose the joke is trying to serve’ says Freud because they would ‘receive the joke against them with indignation and not with pleasure.’¹⁷⁴ Their absence not only prevents this but it demonstrates how much psychoanalytic ideas had permeated popular discourses. Leaving mother out left a space for the complicated psychoanalytic concept of ‘object-choice’ and ‘mother-substitutes’ who would become the targets for a phallogentric humour that was anxious not to blame men for their feminine faults (neurosis). These appear in a variety of forms, such as the traditionally

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 145.

hated fire-breathing” mother-in-law, who is so “hot tempered” that when she was “eaten by a brontosaurus”, Hengist explains to Horsa/Dale, the “Brontosaurus died within a week.” Here Hengist has innocently revealed his feelings towards his mother-in-law; he has not purposely made the joke about her to Horsa (who does not laugh). The joke becomes a tendentious one outside of the diegesis of the film because of two reasons, (a) the audience can accept the humour behind what Freud calls ‘the hostile impulses against our fellow men’¹⁷⁵ (here represented by the eating of Hengist’s mother-in-law by a dinosaur), (b) the audience can ‘read’ the image Hengist has conjured up of the monster/mother-in-law as comic, (c) the devouring of the mother-in-law represents the traditional nagging mother-in-law stereotype. In Freudian terms the death of the mother-in-law is a fulfilment of Hengist’s wish that she cannot interfere in his married life any more. The devouring monster represents the phallic woman castratrix, hence Hengist’s castration anxiety and his fear of women.

In *Carry On Sergeant*, Horace’s stuttering on the train demonstrates a struggle to speak up for himself. This scene is not an isolated one and elsewhere slips of the tongue are very common in the hysterical males played by Connor.¹⁷⁶ Rycroft explains a parapraxis as ‘a faulty action due to the interference of some unconscious wish, conflict or train of thought.’¹⁷⁷ Clearly, the stuttered “f, f, flamin” has replaced the “F” word (fucking) which Horace has repressed. This is not accidental. His character is childlike; his behaviour and language determine a specific kind of humour appropriate for the character; a knowing innocence. If he was too childlike, like the characters played by

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 102.

¹⁷⁶ Slips of the tongue are not something Williams’s characters would do, but there is one example in *Carry On Cleo* when Mark Antony informs Caesar that a slave (Hengist) has saved him from an assassination attempt. Caesar who fainted when the assassins attacked him asks Antony, “What slay...(correction) what say you?” Mark Campbell in *Carry On films*, Herts, 2002, says, that ‘the line seems so well-timed [...] I can’t believe it’s not a last-minute script addition’, (p. 37).

¹⁷⁷ Rycroft, *op.cit.* p. 112.

Charlie Drake in films like *Petticoat Pirates* (1961),¹⁷⁸ he would risk alienating himself from an adult audience by annoying them and the humour would be undermined. Connor's characters always strive to be like the grown ups around them. In the early part of the films they are prepubescent. So, childish curses, slips of the tongue and being tongue-tied are not inappropriate to the characters at all because they reflect that period of time when a child is learning to play with words and finds pleasure in doing so. 'These pleasurable effects encourage children in the pursuit of play and cause them to continue it without regard for meaning of words or the coherence of sentences'¹⁷⁹ explains Freud. In *Carry On Cleo* Hengist expresses his pleasure with a baby-sounding "oogle". But, it is when the characters come into contact with women (when they are forced to negotiate the Oedipal stage) that they most resemble the psychological change from mumbling children to bumbling adolescents. In *Carry On Cruising* when Dr Binn is rehearsing what he is going to say to Flo/Dilys Laye he says, "Miss Castle, I have something to tell you. I am a plain and simple man Miss Hardcastle. I have plain and simple feelings and I use plain and simple words, and I simply have to let you know, plainly, that I, that I, slainly and pimply want (pause) whoar." It is not just his slips of tongue ("slainly" for "plainly") that reveal his fear of women, or ("pimply" for "simply") that conjure up an image of a tongue-tied spotty teenager in the audiences' mind; it is his look to camera that endears him to the audience because he takes them into his confidence. Young men in the audience could relate to him because he is like them, fathers remember what it was like when they were teenagers and mothers want to protect and comfort him just like they would their own son. The audience may adopt these characters because they are vulnerable, and because their humour never ridicules

¹⁷⁸ The slapstick humour that made Charlie Drake popular with children in his early years in television did not appeal to adult audiences at the cinema. The four films he made in the 1960s: *Sands of the Desert* (1960), *Petticoat Pirates* (1961), *The Cracksmen* (1963), and *Mr Ten Percent* (1967), were not successful.

¹⁷⁹ Freud, *Jokes*, op. cit. p. 128.

anyone; it is self-deprecating and its purpose is to reveal their embarrassment. This is in complete contrast with the characters played by Williams who try to conceal their embarrassment by ridiculing others with their smutty jokes. Connor's characters' childlike behaviour makes 'embarrassment' the subject of the joke, embarrassment that audiences may remember from periods in their own lives when they were growing up. So, in *Carry On Sergeant* when Horace is told to strip down to his underwear before going in to see the army doctor and he runs back out clutching his trousers to his breast and screaming, "Why didn't you warn me?" (Captain Clark/Jacques is a woman), men in the audience are reminded of the time when they became aware of their sexual difference from their mothers and were embarrassed about being naked in front of them. The way characters like Gregory Adams in *Carry On Teacher* find it "possossible" to chat up girls or try to "overcome their termodity, t, tim, overcome [their] timidity" like Dr Binn in *Carry On Cruising* was intended to reflect the embarrassment many young men first experienced with girls.

If the subject of the jokes was 'embarrassment', their target was the young men in the audience. This is reflected in the way that most of Connor's character's jokes are *directed against the subject himself*. But, it is important to remember that his character's jokes (where they exist at all) are non-tendentious; their purpose is never intended to wound. Freud calls these jokes innocent jokes. He explains: 'innocent jokes connote the opposite of tendentious jokes.'¹⁸⁰ In the same way Connor's hysterical male characters connote the opposite of Williams's too. Connor's characters "love and want to be loved in return."¹⁸¹ This is reflected in many innocent jokes that

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 92.

¹⁸¹ This sung refrain in *Moulin Rouge* (2001) reflects the romantic ideals about love that Christian/Ewan McGregor believes in but is unwilling to live out. He is prevented from wooing Satine/Nicole Kidman because of his shyness. The psychological turmoil that is created by his sexual timidity is recreated in the

his characters make. In *Carry On Cabby* (1963) Ted Watson walks into the works canteen where his girlfriend Sally/Liz Fraser works: "What do you want?" she asks. "I think I'll 'ave a nice quick four penny roll wiv you!" he says. The joke is a double entendre, but it is not smutty in the sense that Williams's character's jokes are. His intentions are sexual, but he is not coarse. He is playful but not aggressive. Like all innocent jokes, states Freud, 'the pleasure is in some way linked to their technique'¹⁸² not their purpose. The audience soon understand that Sally is Ted's girlfriend. There is no doubt that she would find him sexually attractive, therefore a smutty joke would serve no purpose. Similarly, in *Carry On Sergeant* Nora does not hide her sexual feelings towards Horace, so again, there is no need for smutty jokes. Instead, the pleasure of the joke comes from the playful choice of words that alludes to the act of sex in the 'innocent' way that a child's nursery rhyme does. "A quick four penny roll wiv you" sounds as innocent as the line, "Jack fell down and broke his crown/and Jill came tumbling after." The sexual double meaning raises a smile¹⁸³ rather than a laugh because it has been cradled in innocence, not crowned with smut.

In conclusion, the following examples help to illustrate how much emphasis the Carry Ons placed on the role of men in marriage as procreators and how the impotent hysterical males who were unwilling to do their duty threatened to undermined the whole social fabric of the nation. In *Carry On Up the Jungle*, at the end of the marriage ceremony, the leader of the Lubidubies asks Professor Tinkle/Howerd, Mr Boosey/James, and Claude Chumley/Connor: "Are you ready to assume your duties as husband?" That duty they have been told is "the only useful occupation for men." And

spectacular dance sequences at the Moulin Rouge. The frenetic displays of dream-like dances that simulate fornication can be read as a manifestation of his frustrated desires and male hysteria.

¹⁸² Freud, *Jokes*, op.cit. p. 102.

¹⁸³ Freud states that, 'the pleasurable effect of innocent jokes is as a rule a moderate one; a clear sense of satisfaction, a slight smile, is as a rule all it can achieve in its hearers', (p. 96).

in *Carry On Up the Khyber* the men of the Third Foot and Mouth Regiment are expected to “uphold the glorious tradition of the regiment” by living up to the regimental motto: *Always Ready For Action*. That the motto was necessary at all in 1968 was an indictment that very often men were *not* always ready for action on the battle ground of marriage. If films like *Carry On Sergeant* reflected anxieties about the weak male threatening the institution of marriage, the army would cure them by training them how to ‘strip down’ and fire off a few rounds from a Bren gun. By 1976 it seemed that those anxieties must have been as big as the anti-aircraft gun manned by women in *Carry On England*. But, just as *Carry On England* was a premature end to the series, so too, would be any notion that the institution of marriage had been threatened by the hysterical male. It was an outmoded institution by 1976, and any rose-scented ideas that remained about it was expunged when Captain S Melly/Connor (who “does not know the difference between men and women”) is put in charge of a mixed battery where “Men and women of both sexes” are enjoying their sexual freedom despite his attempts to keep them apart by building a chastity belt of barbed wire around their billets.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the jokes in the Carry On series produced from 1958 to 1978 and to explore the psychological and social function of the joke-work by drawing on Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. The films are a particularly useful site to explore since they exhibit a recurrent theoretical preoccupation with psychoanalysis, and the hysterical males played by Williams and Connor are often the vehicles for jokes about male sexual anxieties during this period. There has never been any attempt to suggest that Freud's theory of humour is a totalising one, only that his theory seems particularly useful for investigating the humour of the Carry On films that were preoccupied with the subject of sex.

The double entendres and smutty jokes in the Carry On films were part of a successful formula that lasted for twenty years, but how this was achieved has only partially been explored. Theories of film comedy are particularly useful because they help to identify the characters played by Williams and Connor as the site of the visual humour in the films, but not so useful in providing an explanation of the verbal jokes that seemed to coalesce around them. Mast's theory which concentrated on the importance of narrative may have been criticized by subsequent writers on film comedy for avoiding the issue of funniness like gags and jokes, but the Oedipal trajectory that the hysterical males follow, in particular those played by Connor in the early films scripted by Hudis, is fundamental to an understanding of the social function that humour serves. The purpose of the jokes was to reinforce the 'world-view', to re-affirm the normalising values of heterosexuality prescribed by the patriarchal order. Audiences were positioned to accept that Connor's characters could be integrated back into society and Williams's could not.

Many of the writers on film comedy (Palmer, Horton, Neale & Krutnik,) agree that the joke is fundamental to all forms of comedy, but their theories are incomplete because they neglect its importance by concentrating solely on the visual gag. Nevertheless, their work is useful. Horton's observation that comedy leans towards the non-comic can be seen in both the tragic characters played by Williams and those played by Connor whose psychopathological traumas are not funny, yet audiences would be expected to laugh at them. Similarly, Palmer's reinterpretation of Aristotle's observation of the ludicrous and ridiculous characters in comedy allows us to see the difference between the hysterical male played by Williams and those played by Connor in the Carry On films, but it raises questions about the purpose of displaying two kinds of male suffering from sexual hysteria and what their comic value was as individual characters. Palmer makes two important contributions: he defines the comic character, and he recognises the structural and logical features that jokes and gags exhibit. He comes as close to Freud's systematic typology for deconstructing humour in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* as anyone else. Unfortunately he does not discuss jokes; instead he concentrates on the visual gag in silent comedy. Because Palmer's definitions of the comic character are predetermined by his preoccupation with the silent pratfall they cannot explain the relationship between what Freud calls the 'comic' and the psychology of the verbal joke. A joke in the Carry On films can function in the same way as a "kick up the arse" gag in silent comedy but there is a complicated relationship between what the characters say and how they are seen. The way that the audiences were positioned by the 'male gaze' to have different attitudes towards the hysterical males could only be understood by re-interpreting the psychoanalytic film theories of Mulvey. The young males who were the target audience of the Carry On films were

encouraged to adopt a masculine position towards the hysterical male whose neurotic behaviour codified them as castrated males. Consequently, these neutered characters were displayed as objects to be despised and ridiculed. If they threatened the pleasure of the male gaze the jokes disavowed that threat through the comedy of castration. In the light of the analysis conducted in this thesis it would seem that whenever the audience laughed at the hysterical male it was because he was compared with the sexually rampant male objects of desire played by Sid James. His characters represented the phallogentric agenda of the producers who were promoting the patriarchal ideas of a 'heterosexual male utopia'.¹⁸⁴ Freud recognised the power of making someone else 'comic' by ridiculing them. The Carry On films reflected this. They employed caricature and parody in their humour to reject an identity that threatened institutions, and even nations (Horace Strong in *Carry On Sergeant*, Caesar in *Carry On Cleo*, Rhandi Lal in *Carry On Up The Khyber*). But Freud also recognised that the relationship between the comic and jokes played an important part in the success of the joke because he understood that the audience played a part in the joke-work too.

If sexual repression was the subject of the double entendre jokes in the Carry On films it was the linchpin of Freud's psychoanalytic theories of humour. He recognised puns and smut as one of the commonest types of jokes. But more importantly he understood the social influence of these jokes. In Chapter Two, puns (the commonest type of joke in the Carry On films) were examined using Freud's analysis. Those puns that were innocent were identified with the characters played by Connor and those that were tendentious were associated with the characters played by Williams. A deconstruction

¹⁸⁴ Hunt, L. *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*, London, 1998, p. 8.

of the techniques employed in these jokes was used to show how the jokes helped to characterise the two different types of hysterical male in the Carry On films. In the same way, the types of joke associated with the characters prompted audiences to either laugh with or at them. The last two chapters provided a complete analysis of the hysterical males played by Williams and Connor. By comparing them with each other they illustrate the special relationship between the verbal joke and the comic that is essential to understanding the humour of the films.

The final chapter returned to the commonest theme in the Carry On films: marriage. The institution of the army as the surrogate family that nurtured the neurotic male and prepared him for his conjugal duties is the psycho-social foundation of the joke-work in many of the Carry On films. The army defended the anxieties of male heterosexuality behind the thin-red-line of male camaraderie. The social institution of marriage became increasingly under attack; not by the hysterical male, but from within by “prohibition”¹⁸⁵ and without by promiscuity and free love. Eventually the reality of sexually frustrated couples caught in loveless marriages was captured in the last scene in *Carry On Loving* where the ill-matched newly weds wielding custard pies “cream each other”.

If the new Carry On film *Carry On London*, a comedy about the confessions of a cab driver, ever goes into production, Peter Rogers would do well to remember how central marriage was to creating Carry On humour and that it is still a very popular theme in popular entertainment. Television sit-coms like *The Royle Family* show how the family constructed around the social institution of marriage can still be very funny. The

¹⁸⁵ In *Carry On Camping* Sid Boggle/James says to his mate Bernie Lugg/Bresslaw: “Let’s face it, we are lumbered with two birds with prohibitions.” / “You mean inhibition” replies Bernie / “I mean prohibitions, they just won’t allow us” he avers.

producers of the Carry Ons never saw the potential for humour in the horror of a long marriage reduced to a state of ennui. Neither could Margaret Anderson who states: ‘the relationship between Hengist and Senna, for example, is so miserable that it appears to say to the audience: “Well, this is what it’s like between married men and women – utterly miserable – isn’t this what your life is or will be like?”’¹⁸⁶ She assumes (referring specifically to smut) that ‘the humour is in danger of being reduced’¹⁸⁷ but this is exactly the point where the humour is found in *The Royle Family*.¹⁸⁸ Jim (Ricky Tomlinson) has done his duty. He has fathered several children so he does not have to prove that he is a man or worry about his sexual libido. He can lie back, drink beer, watch television, get fat and ugly and make smutty jokes about his children’s sex lives.

Equally, double entendres and tendentious jokes are enjoying a revival after the political correct crisis of the 1980s. In Lenny Henry’s recent live show, *where you from?* he shared the stage with the public who had been recorded telling their favourite jokes in a booth on the streets of towns all around the country. It was a ‘quest to find the great British joke’¹⁸⁹ he said. Interestingly, the jokes that got the biggest laugh from the audience were double entendres or jokes about marriage. This is borne out in the findings of the research conducted by the “*laugh*”*Lab* team at the University of Hertfordshire in their scientific quest for the world’s funniest joke. The top jokes voted by men and women were those made at the expense of the opposite partner.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, the most popular jokes amongst teenage boys were those that revealed

¹⁸⁶ Anderson, op. cit. p. 42.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 41.

¹⁸⁸ The humour of the Carry Ons has survived, not surprisingly, in American cartoons like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* and in the jokes that parody “good old fashioned family values” even if they pretend not to envy them.

¹⁸⁹ Headline from *The Daily Telegraph*, January 10, 2007.

¹⁹⁰ British Association for the Advancement of Science, “*laugh*”*Lab: The Scientific Quest for the World’s Funniest Joke*, London, 2002.

their anxieties about exposed genitalia.¹⁹¹ Teenagers were always the target audience of the Carry On films. Now that nostalgia is attached to the films, the question of whether the psycho-sexual nature of the target audience has changed remains. But clearly Peter Rogers's belief that "comedy is dateless" and that "audiences do not like change" will be well justified if audiences – Carry On laughing?

¹⁹¹ For example, "Why do squirrels swim on their backs? / To keep their nuts dry." *"laugh"Lab*, *ibid.* p. 160.

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Events

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Lenny Henry, *where you from?* Guild Hall, Preston, April 4, 2007.

Filmography (in chronological order)

Carry On Sergeant, 1958.

Carry On Nurse, 1959.

Carry On Teacher, 1959.

Carry On Constable, 1960.

Carry On Cruising, 1962.

(Director Gerald Thomas. Screenplays Norman Hudis).

Carry On Cabby, 1963.

Carry On Spying, 1964.

Carry On Cleo, 1964.

Carry On Screaming! 1966.

Carry On Don't Lose Your Head, 1966.

Carry On Doctor, 1967.

Carry On...Up the Khyber, 1968.

Carry On Camping, 1969.

Carry On Again Doctor, 1969.

Carry On Up The Jungle, 1970.

Carry On Loving, 1970.

Carry On Henry, 1971.

Carry On At Your Convenience, 1971.

Carry On Matron, 1972.

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Carry On Dick, 1974.

(Director Gerald Thomas. Screenplays Talbot Rothwell)

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The Private Life of Henry VIII, Director Alexander Korda, 1933.

The Scarlet Pimpernel, Director Alexander Korda, 1934.

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Seventh Veil, Director Compton Bennett 1945.

White Heat, Director Raoul Walsh, 1949.

Captain Horatio Hornblower Director Raoul Walsh, 1951.

Beau Brummel, Director Curtis Bernhard, 1954.

Sands of the Desert, Director John Paddy Carstairs, 1960.

Petticoat Pirates, Director David MacDonald, 1961.

The Innocents, Director Jack Clayton, 1961.

The Cracksman, Director Peter Graham Scott, 1963.

Cleopatra, Director Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963.

The Leather Boys, Director Sidney J Furie, 1964.

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- Carry On Don't Lose Your Head*, August 1, UKTV Gold, 18:00-20:00, 2007.
- Carry On Again Doctor*, August 2, UKTV Gold, 18:00-20:00, 2007.
- Carry On Behind*, August 5, Film 4, 19:15-21:00, 2007.
- Carry On Sergeant*, August 6, Channel 4, 14:00-15:30, 2007.
- Carry On Behind*, August 9, Film 4, 19:15-21:00, 2007, 2007.
- Carry On Up The Khyber*, August 11, ITV, 16:55-18:35, 2007.
- Carry On Henry*, August 18, BBC2, 16:00-17:25, 2007.
- Carry On Constable*, August 20, Channel 4, 13:55-15:30, 2007.
- Carry On Follow That Camel*, August 31, UKTV Gold, 19:00-21:00, 2007.