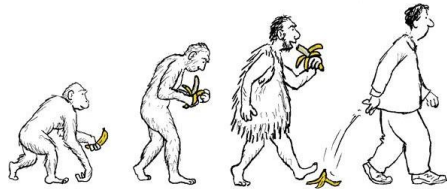


Investigating how humour is used in family feature animation in order to relieve serious situations

Introduction and overview



Humour can be categorised under three main theories, which all focus on specific roles that humour plays in different situations. (Monro, 1963) These theories are listed below.

The Incongruity theory is a concept developed by Immanuel Kant who states that humour “*arises from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.*” (Kant, 1914, p.233). This theory builds on the idea of using the element of surprise with things that give the story ‘a twist’.

The superiority theory claims that all humour involves feelings of superiority above others, and that these feelings are frequently found in many cases of humour. Thomas Hobbes states that laughter is “*The sudden glory arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others*” (Hobbes, 1994, Part 1 p.54)

The third theory is the relief theory, which describes humour along the lines of a mode of tension release. Rather than defining humour, theorists discuss the psychology that produces laughter and link it to the release of tension.

Investigating the relief theory and its use in Family feature animations to make serious situations palatable will be the focus of this paper.

In order to understand the relief theory more clearly it is imperative to look at arguments from different relief theorists, in this instance, Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud.

Investigating the ideas brought forward by these theorists and applying them to animated feature films will prove that aspects of the relief theory are highly prominent within them when relieving tension and appropriate case studies will be presented and reflected upon to evidence these findings.

Chapter 1: ‘Relief Theory’ – Spencer and Freud, and its components.

Spencer and Freud share similar ideas on the ‘relief theory’ and have both developed specific views on the matter.

Freud argues that laughter arises from the release of previously existing static energy and maintains that laughter involves the use of certain elements whilst being placed at certain intervals to prevent audiences from becoming emotionally exhausted. (Freud, 1960)

On the classification of Jokes, Freud states-

“The classification that we find in the literature rests on the one hand on the technical methods employed in them (e.g. punning or play upon words) and on the other hand on the use made of them in speech (e.g. jokes used for the purposes of caricature or of characterization, or joking snubs).”(Freud, 1960, p.12)

Spencer, however, reasons that that laughter serves more as a release of energy and states that laughter, however produced, serves as a break of tension. (Spencer, 1860)

“Mirth is caused by the gush of agreeable feeling that follows the cessation of mental strain”
(Spencer, 1860, p.4)

When comparing these arguments to animated film one can determine that humour as a release mechanism is key, and can link Spencer’s theory of tension release with Freud’s use of puns, jokes and characterization.

It is logical to conclude that as well as both theories being linked; the placement of this relief in animated film is not done haphazardly yet is placed at intervals which will best serve the story.

The method to this placement can be described as a continuous cycle of the build-up of tension and its release.

The case studies examined will investigate the elements of humour found from using the above theories in order to determine how this method of build-up and release is used to relieve tension .

Chapter 2: The use humour with characterisation in The Hunchback of Notre Dame

“Though the gargoyles are the most prevalent purveyors of comic relief in the movie, elements of humour and lightness are threaded into the story by many of the supporting characters, including Phoebus, Clopin, Djali, and even Esmeralda, who each subtly oppose the som bre stiffness and rigidity that Frollo represents.” (Robello, 1996, p.133)

Through observing the film, one can see that the most prominent form of humour is found in the gag as portrayed through the characters.

The use of relief through characterisation is evident sporadically throughout the film. Although its presence is most prominent within the gargoyles, other characters such as Phoebus, Clopin and Djali also provide slight relief. (The Hunchback of Notre Dame, 1996)

Below are some instances of gags and jokes, which are linked with the characters, found throughout.



The continuous 'gag' that no one knows the gargoyles are alive. In this case, this caused Djali to act comically confused, adding relief sporadically (Robello, 1996, p.136)



'I'm free!' (29min in)



'Dang it!' (29min in)



'I'm free!' (1hr 16min in)



'Dang it!' (1hr 16min in)

This recurring gag appears twice and involves an old man whom escapes imprisonment simply to be trapped again. (The Hunchback of Notre Dame, 1996)



'Achilles, Sit!' (18min in)



'Achilles, Sit!' (1hr 17min in)

This next gag, which appears twice, involves Phoebus's horse 'Achilles' being ordered to sit on the 'bad guy'.

In both of these above instances, the gags are used in the midst of serious situations as an attempt to relieve the tension built up from them. (The Hunchback of Notre Dame, 1996)



'Fly my pretties, Fly!' –During tension (1hr 17min in)



'The city of love is burning, true, that's because it's on fire' –During tension (57min in)



'No, you're the fat and stupid one' –After tension (56min in)



'It's hopeless!' 'You're telling me, I'm losing to a bird!' – During tension (55min in)



'Oh great, I could use a drink' –After tension (1hr in)



Clopin adds relief through his silliness in impersonating others in between serious scenes.

The above scenarios portray comic relief in both the midst of tension filled scenes as well as after them. It is noted that most of the relief scenes appear in the climax of the film, where tensions are high as a result of built up tension throughout the film.

The use of humour in this case study can be linked to the method previously discussed in which building up tension and releasing it is used repeatedly. In this instance, it can be argued that the build-up of tension far outweighs the release, and could be classified as a circumstance in which this method was not used successfully as it did not offer enough relief.

Chapter 3: The use of humour with characterisation in 'The Lion King'

"The Shakespearean element to me, is not only the bad uncle and a would be prince, it is also the juxtaposition of the tragedy with the next scene which is hysterical"

(Mecchi, 1994)

This above quote relates the story to that of Shakespeare, in which elements of humour and tragedy collide.

The most prominent form of comic relief comes in the form of Timon and Pumbaa after the tragedy of Mufasa being killed. This method of introducing them after the most dramatic part of the film adds an element of light heartedness and a breath of fresh air. As opposed to the above case study in which the gargoyles are placed in between tragic situations, the use of Timon and Pumbaa as comic relief is done more effectively, as they provide an escape and contrast to the path that Simba needs to take. In the most dramatic moments, such as when Simba reconnects with his past and his face off with Scar, they are absent and silent. They arrive in lulls of the movie, demonstrating the use of the comic relief formula, in which the story is a cycle of tragedy and relief. (The Lion King, 1994)

This case study is an example of this method done well, with the tragedy not taking over the story and being the most prominent thing (such as it is with The Hunchback).

Below are some visual examples of the use of Gags and Jokes undeniably linked with the use of characterisation, placed at intervals between serious scenes. (The Lion King, 1994)



'What's eating you kid?' 'Nothing, He's at the bottom of the food chain!' –After tension (36min in)



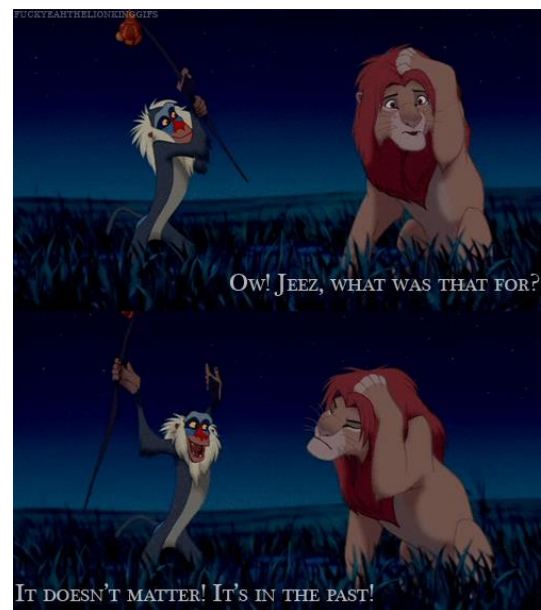
'He looks blue' 'I'd say he's more of a brown-ish gold'- After tension (35min in)



Gag following previous line of 'what do you want me to do? Dress up in drag and do the hula?' The scene changes to show them doing it – In the midst of tension (59min in)



Funny use of pun. After tension (37min in)



This input of comedy is not as prominent as it is with Timon and Pumbaa, but acts as a compliment to the growth of the character, not interrupting the flow – Done in between scenes of tension. (56min in)

Overall, the use of the method of build-up and release is used more subtly throughout this case study, in which the side characters and their use of gags and jokes help to move the story forward and are not simply there to add pointless humour. The placement of these funny scenes further proves the idea that this method is in place and prominent when humour is being written as a relief for serious scenes.

Conclusion

Gags, Jokes and Characterisation are linked in such a way that they alone are arguably not enough, but when used together are able to work in a way to relieve tension brought about by serious situations through appearing at certain intervals.

Through this argument, it is imperative to note the importance of the Sidekick character as the main use for tension relief when used in conjunction with the method noted in which there is a constant cycle of the build-up and release of tension.

This involves the character being placed at certain intervals, noted above as being placed during the tension and after it as a means to relieve tension build up with the use of jokes and puns told through the character.

The use of Characters as a relief for serious situations is immensely important, not only in order to make the gags and jokes throughout come across well, but also in using their own personality traits in order to be comical and likeable. It is this likeableness added with the use of inserted gags and jokes that makes the use of the sidekick character the most prominent and effective use of comic relief.

This, when placed together with the method of a cycle of build-up and release of tension, can be noted as the main way in which humour is used to relieve situations in family animation to make them more palatable.

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