CONCLUSION

Narayan expresses an aversion to the 'study of humour': "If you love humour, don't talk or write about it," said an eminent guru to his disciple... I am happy, and feel repeatedly happy at the thought that humour is not made a subject of study in our universities, which has spared us from the predicament of having Ph.Ds of humour in our midst."

I wonder what this eminent writer's reaction would be were this thesis to be laid at his feet. All that I can say in my defence is, that readers will continue to enjoy humour even after reading a book on humour; that a discerning art-lover may yet take time off from gazing at landscapes, portraits and abstract paintings to know more about colour and harmony; at best it will influence him, at worst it will not affect him. Books on humour are necessary: when the object of humour passes into antiquity, when humourous allusions have passed into oblivion, and a comic situation has become an anachronism, then footnotes are required.

Science explains that any given situation is the effect of some cause. Humour in a situation can arise out

of making the effect different, or even contradictory, to what is supposed - producing an 'It was so unexpected!' effect. Again, humour can arise from what is expected to happen; making the reader or viewer burst out between spurts of laughter - 'I told you so!' Yet again, two persons engaged in a situation may not perceive the humour, but an outsider can.

Thus, "the unexpected, the strange and the incongruous are some of the sources of humour, and despite the diverse cultural backgrounds, the comic element which is common to all of them unites them because one of the things that bind men together is a shared sense of the comic." ²

II

It can never be emphasised enough that the telling of a joke is as important as the joke itself: building up the suspense, omitting no details, winding up with the punch line and so on. The author/narrator can flashback to historical times, juxtapose the past and the present using the montage technique, or even look ahead as in science fiction, but the humourist must never narrate a joke backwards.

Mark Twain, for example, reminisces about one of his childhood experiences in Chicago, when he went up to an unattended cart heaped with watermilons, stole one and ran away to eat it. "The moment I took the first bite," he says, "an uneasy feeling came over me."

'Conscience,' we nod understandingly. And so we continue to nod, as he proceeds, "I went back to the cart, and put it back." Then comes the Kayo. "I put it back, and took a riper one!"

Suppose Twain had told it backwards 'Did I ever tell you about the time when I put back a stolen water-melon to pick up a riper one? No? Well ...', That would be disastrous. One of the finest humorists, Leacock, says how difficult it is to tell a funny story:

"Few people realise how extremely difficult it is to tell a story so as to reproduce the real fun of it - to 'get it over' as the actors say. The mere 'facts' of a story seldom make it funny. It needs the right words, with every word in its proper place."  

In Narayan, every detail and every sentence is geared to the central purpose. As in his description of the astrologer:

3. Twain, Mark,
"His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion... the power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position - placed as they were between the pointed forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks..."  

Apparently, the words create the setting and induce an Indian atmosphere, but it also effectively disguises the astrologer, so that he is not recognised even by his arch-enemy. Even in this situation, Narayan cannot resist a comment: "even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting."  

The 'facts' are that the protagonist had, much earlier, gambled and stabbed a man, and fled, mistaking him for dead, and now again escapes his old enemy. It is in the telling that... Narayan's art, and humour, lies.

III

Alluding to Narayan's genius, Walsh says: "Literature can be read as the chronicle and the embodiment of the state and the history of the language... the new mind requires the new mind requires the new voice, and the new voice is discovered by the writer's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world."

6. Ibid.,
Narayan began his career at a time when "Indian English" was mentioned with some amount of contempt or condescension. Expressing his displeasure at such an attitude, he insists that Indian English is a legitimate phenomenon and needs no apology. He writes: "... In our college days, Prof. J.C. Rollo, who was a purist, said 'Avoid like the plague the expression 'Needful'. Never say 'Do the needful' under any circumstance.

... I have always rebelled against Prof. Rollo's decrees, feeling that 'Please do the needful' and 'and oblige' are a brilliant combination which conveys all the meaning, command and request in a couple of phrases... a masterpiece of economy and contribution to the English language."\(^8\)

In a land where English is of enormous value as a link language, its influence never waned. Apart from familiar English words derived from Indian languages - 'chowkidar' 'bandh' and 'charpoy' to name a few - there are also typical Indianisms - terms which, though formed by English words, are incomprehensible to the outsider, 'Cooling glasses', for example, means sunglasses; 'out of station' instead of 'out of town'; a 'co-brother' is one's wife's sister's husband; and a 'standing seat' means standing room.\(^9\)

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In Australia, English naturally turned to native Aboriginal languages for words like 'kangaroo', 'boomerang', and 'billabong'; some terms obliquely take a dig at the English: for example 'London fog' is a nickname for a person who loaf on the job.

"A lazy wharf labourer was known as 'the Judge' because he was always sitting on a case, another was called 'London fog' because he would never lift."10

'Tea and sugar' means a train carrying supplies to the Trans-Australian border. A tea and sugar burglar is the same as a swagman. Lawson, in 'On Track 130' says, "could I explain... I was a tea and sugar burglar? They'd think I had been a tramp all the time..."11

A 'wriggler' is a snake, but 'get a wriggle on' means 'get a move on'.

These few examples show that, Indian few examples show that, Indian English, like Australian English, is increasingly developing a sense of independence, and both are looking to their own linguistic resources, assert their unique identities in various areas including humour.

10. Quoted from The Australian National Dictionary, Oxford Univ. Press, (Copy right Australian National University), 1988, p.647
IV

A few centuries ago, anyone who was less than fifty inches tall was, almost by compulsion, a humourist: the idea of humour was looking down literally upon the dwarf and laughing at him. Today what amuses people is a sort of "mental dwarf" - a man who gets jittery when he enters a bank, or a Walter Mitty who can't park his car right.

But humourists have also been intimidated by the hyper-sensitivity prevailing in society - which borders on touchiness combined with a militant belligerence. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* for example, has an incident where the boy Swami makes a remark against his teacher of the Albert Mission High School, who happens to be a Christian. In the televised version, the word 'Christian' was censored, for fear that it might hurt the members of that religion. We have to think ten times before making a joke about a particular caste or community these days, for fear of inciting a riot. One is reminded of the indignant responses to Jonathan Swift's pamphlet on the Irish, where he satirically suggested that human babies be eaten. Even if a writer satirically remarks (on the comforts enjoyed by a household pet) that a dog's life is the best life, he is likely to get nasty letters beginning, 'Dear Sir, Are you aware...?' giving details, descriptions and statistics about the number, trials and tribulations of
wild dogs, hunting dogs, circus dogs, dog neglect, dog
diseases and so forth. As Walter Gibbs remarks, "In order
to be a humourist, you had to see the world out of focus ...
Today, when the world is really out of focus, people insist
that you see it straight."  

V

Good humour, therefore, seems to be a blend of
seriousness and hilarity: a direct transcript of life. But
it is not so simple as deciding what to say and then saying
it. Narayan's and Lawson's stories are told so simply and
naturally that readers may be misled into the impression
that they tell themselves. According to H.M. Green, there
are two kinds of simplicity in literature: "one is the result
of long training in taste and expression and infinite labour
in execution, by means of which the genius of a Flaubert, a
Moore, a Manpassant may produce work in which every word and
phrase and sentence and paragraph appear inevitable.... the
other kind of simplicity, though it also of course involves
talent and pains and training, ... it is much less elaborate,
much more instinctive ... <with> literary honest and
considerable natural taste."  

12. Gibbs, Walter, quoted in the extract 'Some Thoughts on
Humourists' from the essay "Over Seventy" by P.G. Wodehouse,
published in the New York Times, 1971. Also published in
The serious theme 'Pride of Place' for example, by Narayan is treated with his own special brand of humour, but succeeds in making us aware of the foolishness of prejudice. Lawson too, stands up for the gentleman in the monocle, who represents a John Bull and therefore an object of ridicule to other writers; this shows that Lawson's theory of mateship was genuinely democratic, and did not confine itself only to an Australian circle. To quote Leacock again, "The world's humour, in its best and greatest sense is perhaps the highest product of our civilization.

"One thinks here not of the mere spasmodic effects of the comic artist .... but of the really great humour which once or twice in a generation at best illuminates and elevates our literature. It is no longer dependent upon a mere trick and quibble of words, or the odd and meaningless incongruities in things that strike us as 'funny'. Its basis lies in the deeper contrasts offered by life itself."14

No description could be more apt for the short stories of Lawson and Narayan.