

Research article

Sexual Humor in Dickens' Works

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Abstract. This paper attempts to investigate a sexual selection-based argument about the significance of humor in courtship. The huge range of Dickensian sexual humor suggests that the extroversion of female characters is associated with their inferior position. Females were formerly under-represented in producing humor. Jokes and humorous acts were primarily associated with males, particularly in the domain of sexual humor. Dickens' use of sexual humor is evidence for the critic and becomes a valuable tool for revealing gender stereotypes in the 19th century. In this study, the social and cultural context were included in order to articulate more clearly and thereby understand more completely the different stereotypes of gender. Dickens shows that bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie were the initial causes of the sexual selection-based argument regarding females. By understanding the art of humor, which consists of idiomatic expressions and the social and cultural context, the reader can better distinguish the distinctive gender stereotypes through sexual humor, while at the same time, sexual humor can be performed as a strategy to attack society's inaccurate perceptions of women.

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1. Introduction

Humor is a universal phenomenon that occurs everywhere and has been a part of our daily life [1]. Humor has become a culturally universal phenomena and has been studied in various field of research. Humor may lead to a positive or negative repercussions such as in the study of sexual humor. Sexual humor refers to the types of humor that include the participation or anticipation of sexual pleasure. Sexual comedy, according to Raskin, is any verbal jest that makes an explicit or implicit allusion to sexual intercourse [2]. Sexual humor can be used to mask beliefs toward gender roles in leadership, power, and status relationships. The Victorian era began to be characterized as an era of sexual repression in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century [3,4]. During the 1960s and 1970s, this image was given a fresh lease on life. The Victorian era was considered as the epitome of sexual and moral hypocrisy, with the idea of sexual emancipation and a trend towards a

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new 'permissiveness.' It was described as a time of public purity and private sin, with an outpouring of both.

Charles Dickens as one of the great authors in the Victorian era are fascinated by the power of sexuality and portrayed the phenomena in the form of humor. The huge range of Dickensian sexual humor suggest that the extroversion of female characters associated with their inferior position. Females have formerly been under-represented in humor production [6]. Joke and humorous making are primarily a male activity, particularly in the domain of sexual humor. Dickens' use of sexual humor as an evidence for the critic and becomes a valuable tool for revealing gender stereotypes in the 19 period. Analysis of sexual humor should not be ignored in order to understand the concept of humor and sexualism in the context of gender relationships. Recognizing that sexual humor may be used, consciously or unconsciously, to undermine power in the Victorian era [7]. Charles Dickens captures distinctive gender stereotypes through sexual humor while at the same time perform it as a strategy to attack the societies' wrong perception and misjudgment to the women at that era.

2. Methods and Equipment

2.1. Methods

The analysis method used in this study is primarily qualitative. Qualitative research describes and analyzes the quality, or substance, of human experience in great depth [8]. This study focuses on jokes (spoken or written words) and acts (indescribable by words) that evoke laughter or cause merriment. Therefore, the qualitative approach is used as the data are word based and use languages as measurement in deciding the conclusion. In conducting this research, the researcher used the mechanisms of humour theories i.e. incongruity, superiority, and release theory. Humour analysis can be used more frequently by qualitative researchers to study diverse cultural and social issues.

3. Results

Traditionally, theories of humor have been divided into three sorts of view: incongruity theories, superiority theories, and relief theories. Although there are different theories of humor studies conducted from philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and linguistic viewpoints, the semantic theories of Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo [9] are likely the most important approach to comedy at the moment.

These theories look for the source of humor in the structure of jokes and larger comedic texts, eschewing any interest in specific performances in favor of offering a theory of speakers' competency in producing and interpreting comedy [10]. The theory emphasizes aggression theories (in which every

humorous experience arises as an expression of a human being's superiority feeling toward another human being), release theories (in which humor is the result of a release of accumulated energy), and incongruity theories (in which humor is the result of a release of accumulated energy) (according to which humor is based on the discovery of a reality or a thought that turns out to be inconsistent with what was expected). Attardo argues that when interested in the structure of a humorous text (namely, what makes it amusing), one can and must abstract away from the reception of said text by any given, the archetypal aspects of such a theory can be found in sociological and ethological studies.

Under the mask of humor, our society allow to differentiate and even discriminate the social status of human being. In the context of humor and sexuality the culminating of laugh relies on the portrait of sexuality. The discussion about sex and sexuality are always associated with women. In patriarchal culture, women's bodies are consumed as sex objects, ideological objects, and objects of view [16]. Women's bodies are given certain meanings which are culturally merely sex, so that a woman's body which is full of beauty is a sex object that can be seen and enjoyed by men. Therefore, women are perceived as objects of sexuality to attract the opposite sex.

"...woman is brought up to attract men. It cannot be otherwise. But you will say, perhaps, that that applies only to young girls who are badly brought up, but that there is another education, an education that is serious, in the schools, an education in the dead languages, an education in the institutions of midwifery, an education in medical courses, and in other courses. It is false... "Every sort of feminine education has for its sole object the attraction of men.

In the quotation above it is stated that women are essentially figures who have sexual attraction for men. Thus, they are educated and raised to organize and express these sexual desires in order to attract men. The teachings that have been taught to women are to serve and please their husbands, of course the initial stage is to attract the attention of men so that they can then marry and have a position in the neighbourhood. The society is constructed to assume that women are men's sexual servants and that certain parts of women's bodies are men's sexual attraction [17]. The study of humor with a sexual theme is introduced by Dickens in some of his works such as David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby, Pickwick Papers, and Oliver Twist [18,19,20]. Those novels portray

the involvement of sexual term in the form of humorous language. In this era, the term sexuality and humor play a key moment of the Victorian society. It was during this time period that the present terminologies we use to structure how we think and talk about sexuality were developed. It is also the period where Dickens acknowledge the use of humor in sexual theme broadly for public. There are an

enjoyment of Dickens works through the use of humor and comic narrative [21]. Erotic humor is by far the most popular of all sorts, accounting for a significant portion of jokes still in circulation. A denudation of a person of the opposite sex at whom the joke is meant is the clearest general statement of the function of sexual humor. The individual who has been attacked is pushed to imagine the portions of the body in question or the sexual act by the use of filthy phrases, and the aggressor is shown to be seeing the same thing. The pleasure of witnessing the sexual portrayed was, without a doubt, the original aim of the smutty comedy. The attacked person is generally a woman, a sort of seduction or preparation of the woman for the man's actual physical approach.

4. Results

In the nineteenth century when Dickens wrote his novels, women are still trapped in the old patriarchal system. The obsession of the Victorian society with the sexual innocence and moral chastity made the figures of women are stigmatized and labelled. A female ideal was a perfect wife and mother who was submissive, obedient, loving, unselfish, naïve (both sexually and intellectually) and lacked any opinion. While fallen women were those who had premarital intercourse (usually with prostitutes) or committed adultery, fallen males were those who had literally fallen into sin. However, if spinsters, women who refuse to have children, and new women are included, the concept of "fallen women" can be expanded. This gender-based social norm was assessed not just in terms of the law, but also in terms of the idealized image of womanhood. With the advent of sexology towards the end of the nineteenth century and the rise of feminism. the Victorian age began to be portrayed as an era of sexual repression. This image is cleverly portrayed by Dickens through the use of sexual humor.

"those two forms dangling on the top of the entrance gateway ... the woman a fine shape; so elaborately corseted and artfully dressed, that it was quite unchanged in its trim appearance as it slowly swung from side to side" (Charles Dickens: Pickwick Papers).

This quotation taken from Dickens's description of this tragic image is a seamless merging of the horror. The hanging body is explained as 'swung from side to side' The mingling of death and erotic attraction are used to describe the execution process.

The female characters of Nancy and Bet in *Oliver Twist* introduce to the reader as prostitution 'a lot of hair and makeup' is quite a hint to the reader that they are prostitute and belongs to fallen women.

"They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and look quite stout and hearty"

"they are remarkably free and agreeable in their manners" and believes they are "very nice girls indeed" (Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*)

The female characters of Nancy and Bet become prostitute not because they lack of moral but because of the circumstances. During the poor condition of Victorian era, many women had to fall in the crime and prostitution. Dickens use the idea of sex and moral to attack the societies perception. The description of 'stout', 'hearty' and very 'nice girls' are opposed the prostitute's moral deterioration to the quality of the respectable women.

The denudation of fallen woman is not only labelled to individuals who sell their body for money but also for a woman who fell into sin and committing adultery. In Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*, the female character named Agnes is not literally fell into sin but in fact being abandoned and betrayed by her lover.

"AGNES there is no coffin in that tomb; and may it be many, many years, before another name is placed above it! But, if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love – the love beyond the grave – of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round the solemn nook. I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring"

The name 'Agnes' without stating her family name or even her complete name give us an understanding that Agnes is described as the fallen woman. She was a mistress who became pregnant, and the scandal of her pregnancy while unmarried caused her to die in shame. The last sentence, however, is a humour as the power of woman can only be used in her home and the church and the description of "weak and erring" come up because of her pregnancy as an unmarried woman.

Two female characters Martha and Emily in Dickens novel *Great Expectations* portrayed as the fallen women because of the family lost. The character of Martha is come

from a respectable family, however, the parents died and she became an orphan. The lack of family was then contribute to moral ruin. Martha has become a social outcast as a result of her fall, and she must bear the derision of the entire community. While Emily who rejects the wedding proposal had to live mile away from the city.

“Oh I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. I am not, I know!”

“She might have married well a mort of times, ‘but uncle’, she says to me, ‘that’s gone for ever” (Charles Dickens: Great Expectation)

“That is a black shadow to be following the girl”

“Many were hard upon her, some few were hard upon her” “Stamp upon me, kill me!” (Charles Dickens: Great Expectation)

Both women remain mostly mute throughout the story except when expressing their guilt and shame. Emily feels that she is not a good girl and that she never had marry because of her decision of rejecting a man who propose her. Although perhaps the man may not be good for you, but woman at that time had to married and has a husband. It is because the unmarried woman doesnot have a place in the society, and she will be labelled and stigmatized as a fallen women. Martha herself after the lost of the family ignored by the neighbourhood and feel the unfair treatment of the society that make her wish to die soon. Here, the idea of wedding, sexuality, and single woman are used to create the humor of the whole conversation.

She’s the only sylph I ever saw, who could stand upon one leg, and play the tambourine on her other knee, like a sylph”. (Charles Dicken: Nicholas Nickleby)

While other fallen women are depicted as seductive and submissive, Dickens illustrate the woman in the above quotation as a beautiful fairy “like a sylph” but with the disability and imperfection. Now let’s compare how societies view the Victorian ideal woman through Dickens illustration on Rose character.

She exemplifies all the attributes of the “mould”: she is young, beautiful, frail, mild, gentle, pure, ethereal, intelligent, sweet, pleasant, charming, coy and blessed.

She even possesses the right physiognomy (“intelligence...stamped on her noble head”), and she is performing domestic tasks, adorning both table and self for the gratification of others. The “blessed” spirits give

her approval. Even Nancy calls her the angel lady. (Charles Dickens: Oliver Twist) Rose is the ideal Victorian woman: innocent, sexless, and pure. Unlike Nancy and Agnes, who do not have a last name, Rose does have one, which gives her a sense of belonging to a family. It also denotes authority, the ability to make major life decisions, as she has the ability to make any decision and is not labeled as a fallen woman. Rose is unmistakably

associated with Victorian values. She lives up to the ideal portrait of Victorian values i.e. pure, gentle and beautiful with good moral standards.

The use of sexual humor sometimes also use in the name of the character. Dickens use a particular sexual part of the body as the name of the character. In David Copperfield, Dickens use the word 'dick' as a name of a respectable man.

"Mr. Dick, listening with a face shining with pride and pleasure, in his heart of hearts, believed the Dictionary to be the most delightful book in the world... reading with his complacent smile, an occasional flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of this head" (Charles Dickens: David Copperfield)

In Victorian culture, the subject of 'fallenness' was a source of tremendous anxiety, since it

was commonly believed that any woman who lost her sexual innocence, and so violated the much-admired feminine ideal, would surely lose her respectability. This case is not particularly caused by seduction or moral degradation but mostly occur because of the social condition at that time. Poverty, gender inequality, and the ideal Victorian women become the sources of this phenomenon. Charles Dickens' portrayal of the so-called 'fallen' women in his works gives the showcase with regard to morals and the way women were viewed. Through the use of sexual humor, Dickens observed that in the Victorian age, a clear distinction was drawn between men's and women's sexual desires, as Carpenter argues (63) "Sex in men is an organized passion, an individual need or impetus; but in women it may more properly be termed a constructive instinct, with the larger signification that that involves." Male desires were viewed as a natural requirement, similar to the urge to sleep or eat. Female cravings, on the other hand, were viewed as potentially hazardous and should be suppressed. As a result, men were allowed to have sexual desires, while it was considered unacceptable in women. Women who engaged in sexual intercourse for the sake of making money were, without a doubt, fallen women. The implication of word meanings used in the novel such as pure, beauty, sweet, spirit, or the opposite word such as bad girl, dick, black, die used to show the inferiority of women at that time. Although sexual abuse may concentrate on the use of human's part of body, Dickens concentrate more on the use of general word such as wedding, prostitute, virginity, and use the sexual item as a name of the character to soften the idea of gender issues and fallenness of women in Victorian era.

Through the novel Dickens portrays these fallen woman as possessing a moral conscience, kindness, fears, and courage. Defining both the fallen women or the ideal Victorian women are actually similar as they gain no power and lost their freedom.

Dickens use of sexual humor then become a critics to the society especially in viewing the woman position who is regarded as a second class in the rank of the social status.

5. Conclusion

Sexual humor plays a role in leadership, power, and status relationships and may disguise attitudes toward gender roles. In the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Victorian age began to be portrayed as an era of sexual repression. Charles Dickens as one of the great authors in the Victorian era are fascinated by the power of sexuality and portrayed the phenomena in the form of humor. The huge range of Dickensian sexual humor suggest that the extroversion of female characters associated with their inferior position. Dickens' use of sexual humor as an evidence for the critic and becomes a valuable tool for revealing gender stereotypes in the 19 period. Under the mask of humor, the Victorian society allow to differentiate and even discriminate the social status of human being. This gender-based social norm was assessed not just in terms of the law, but also in terms of the idealized image of womanhood. The portrayal of so-called "fallen" ladies in Charles Dickens' novels serves as a showcase for morals and how women were seen. Through the use of sexual humor, Dickens put a critics to the society especially in viewing the woman position who is regarded as a second class in the rank of the social status.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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