

THE FUNCTION OF HUMOR IN 19TH CENTURY BRITISH NOVELS

Eshmamatov Artur Bekmamat o'g'li

Tel nomer: +998939045104

A Student of Chirchik State Pedagogical University

Scientific Advisor

Abduramanova Diana Valerevna

A teacher of Chirchik state pedagogical university

ABSTRACT: *This article explores the multifaceted role of humor in 19th century British novels, examining how it serves as a tool for social critique, character development, and the exploration of human relationships. The analysis focuses on prominent authors such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and George Eliot, illustrating how humor reflects societal norms and challenges conventions. By situating humor within the historical and cultural context of the time, this study highlights its significance in shaping narrative structures and thematic concerns in British literature.*

Key words: *19th Century Literature, British Novels, Humor, Social Critique, Character Development, Literary Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century was a period of profound transformation in British society, marked by industrialization, class struggles, and shifting gender roles. In this context, humor emerged as a vital literary device that authors employed to navigate complex social landscapes. Novels from this era often employed wit and satire to address serious themes such as morality, class disparity, and human folly. This article aims to analyze the function of humor in selected 19th century British novels, demonstrating how it not only entertains but also provokes thought and reflection on societal issues.

Humor as Social Critique

One of the primary functions of humor in 19th century British novels is its role as a vehicle for social critique. Charles Dickens, for instance, frequently utilized comedic elements to expose the absurdities and injustices of Victorian society. In "Oliver Twist," the comedic portrayal of characters such as Mr. Bumble serves to highlight the failures of the poor law system and the hypocrisy of social institutions.[1] Similarly, Jane Austen's novels, such as "Pride and Prejudice," employ irony and wit to critique social norms surrounding marriage and class. [2]Austen's use of humor not only entertains but also encourages readers to question societal expectations and the value placed on wealth and status.

Character Development Through Humor

Humor also plays a crucial role in character development within 19th century novels. Authors often use comedic interactions to reveal deeper truths about their characters' motivations and relationships. For example, in "Middlemarch," George Eliot employs humor through the character of Mr. Casaubon, whose pretentiousness is both amusing and tragic. The humorous portrayal of Casaubon's scholarly pursuits allows readers to understand his character's limitations and foreshadows his eventual failure in personal relationships. Through humor, Eliot adds layers to her characters, making them more relatable and complex.

Exploration of Human Relationships

In addition to social critique and character development, humor serves as a lens through which authors explore human relationships. The playful banter between characters in Austen's novels often reveals underlying tensions and societal constraints. In "Emma," the humorous misunderstandings between Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley illustrate the complexities of friendship and romantic attraction. Such interactions not only provide comic relief but also deepen the emotional resonance of the narrative, allowing readers to engage with the characters' inner lives. Moreover, the use of humor in these novels often serves as a mechanism for character development. Through witty dialogue and humorous

scenarios, authors reveal the intricacies of their characters' personalities, motivations, and relationships. This interplay between humor and character allows readers to engage deeply with the narrative, fostering empathy and understanding for the characters' struggles and triumphs.[3]

Conclusion

In conclusion, humor in 19th century British novels is a multifaceted device that enriches narratives by serving as a means of social critique, enhancing character development, and exploring human relationships. Authors like Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and George Eliot skillfully employed humor to reflect the complexities of their time while inviting readers to engage critically with societal norms. As such, humor remains an essential component of understanding the literary landscape of 19th century Britain, revealing both the absurdities and intricacies of human experience.

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