



Revelry and Realism in Shakespeare and Dickens' World

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Abstract. As the greatest literary master in the history of British literature, Shakespeare living in the 16th century exerted great influence on Dickens living in the 19th century. Owing to the proficient command of literacy and language, Dickens' works broke the existing rules in literature language and manners fettered by the hierarchical order and social regime. Characters in the works were totally lost themselves in the world of revelry to show their sentiments and expectations towards the new era even beyond a far-reaching status for the wholly-revolutionized social system. The indebtedness to Shakespeare in *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, is all full of intense feelings of noise and excitement under the extreme social background exemplified by *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This thesis mainly adopts the theory of carnivalization seen as a basic principle of Dostoevsky's art that everything exists on a contrary border including love and malice, self-esteem and self-destruction, faith and atheism, loftiness and degradation, purity and evil. Dickens' ideal visions for Victorian society under the influence of Shakespeare would be further discussed to uncover mutual morals and ethics on the foundation of political and social meaning through realistic carnival pictures.

Keywords: Revelry · Victorian society · Hierarchy · *Great Expectations* · *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

1 Introduction

Being confronted with the unprecedented social reformation brought about by the turmoil of industrialism, the British Empire during this stage unavoidably underwent a tremendous revolution both for its indoor society and outdoor matters concerning issues of politics, economy and culture. "Dickens is the greatest novelist to have written in English as Shakespeare is the greatest poet" [1]. Researches about Dickens' works mainly focus on analyzing works' language style, comparing characters' characteristic and development manner, going deep into the roles' psychological mindset to explore their moral behavior when facing life dilemma, or penetrating into the work to disclose the realistic social context.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization and his bold adoption of fantastic situations for proving truth under the revelry and chaotic world endows us with fresh impetus for elucidating Dickens' work's indebtedness to Shakespeare. Most of Shakespeare's

plays are greatly imbued with a tint of sarcasm, comicality and fantasy. The uniqueness in his language art is mostly embodied in Dickens' realistic fictions with the trait of paradoxes, satire, grotesqueness, humor and scandal scenes mirrored in the intense situation of chaotic and bacchanalian revels. The joyful relativity could be further characterized in these two great writer's realistic world, reflecting complexities of life on the very border of dichotomy. This thesis intends to probe into the social and political context through delineating characters' images in different episodes under various grand pageant scenes. By means of studying Dickens' renovation in form and structure from Shakespeare's works in respect of characters' normal or abnormal behavior in a chaotic atmosphere, similarities and distinctions between the two masters indicates Dickens' "some affinity with Shakespeare, but much more on account of that feeling of universal sympathy with human nature which breaths through his pages like some 'broad and atmosphere'" [2]. Meanwhile, the main body could be divided into two parts including the carnivalesque scenes in Shakespeare's works and the carnivalesque scenes in Dickens' works, by which we will get a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's influence on Dickens and a panoramic view of the social reality would be uncovered through their language style and the context in their works.

2 Carnavalesque Scenes in Shakespeare's Works

Carnival scenarios could happen everywhere like streets, bistros, bathhouses and decks, standing for "the disunification of what has traditionally been linked, and the bringing together that which has been traditionally kept distant and disunified" [3]. Under the carnivalesque impulse, folks would be intoxicated in the world with self-indulgence, catharsis and hilarity by instinct to release their the passionate and zealous emotion without the oppressive inhibitions of social classification. "Shakespeare's drama has many outward carnivalesque aspects: images of the material bodily lower stratum, of ambivalent obscenities, and of popular banquet scenes" [4].

Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night* originated from the Christian holiday as the twelfth night's entertainment for the close of the Christmas season which is also the date of Epiphany. The comedy *Twelfth Night* mirrors this religious and cultural connotation by highlighting the revelation of order and disorder: the order of accepted religious and existing orthodox morals, and the disorder of pagan "Saturnalian licence". Whereas, in the whole play, nothing seems correlated with Christmas or Epiphany. In the era of Queen Elizabeth, Epiphany was mainly treated as the day of carouse and high jinks. Under this specific circumstance, the comedy's name *Twelfth Night* might intend to illustrate an unrealistic carnival world with caricature and humor, in which all of the existing grotesque scenarios seem reasonable and idiomatic. On such a contextual occasion, the shipwreck site is settled in the sea foreshadowing that the carnival plot would be tinted with fantasy and confusion, driving the plot at the beginning into a drastic and intense atmosphere. Following the chaos and disorder on the ship deck, what happens next dramatically separates the twins Viola and Sebastian due to natural forces. All of these fantastic plots seem absurd and grotesque, but in turn full of wonders and humor. Viola disguises herself as Cesario as the footman that loses her heart to the Duke Orsino, who in turn adores Countess Olivia. Upon meeting Viola, Countess Olivia falls in love with

her mistaking her for a man. The capricious emotion ubiquitously flooded the characters' hearts, being exemplified by the interwoven misunderstanding plots, which takes them into a world of confusion, rejection but reconciliation and reunion finally. Additionally, an ominous image that enshrouds the comedy also intensified the quick sense of humor and joviality.

Meanwhile, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the comedy consists of five interlinking plots, interwoven by the celebration of the wedding of Duke Theseus of Athens and the Amazon queen, Hippolyta. Furthermore, events in the vivid episodes take place simultaneously in the woodland and in the Fairyland zone, under the captivating and bright moonlight scene. The arbitrary rule seems to manipulate the young couples, which might reveal that selections decided by Hermia and Helena mainly start from arbitrary behavior aroused by the chaotic and disordered condition. The subplot involving a conflict among four Athenian lovers and the scenario of rehearsing the show before the wedding ceremony among other amateur actors simulate the characters to find themselves in a fantastic forest in which fairies inhabited. Moreover, the chaotic odds and intrigue manipulated by the fairies who possess supernatural power make the common folks engaged themselves in a world imbued with clownish speech and behavior. The wild elements embodied by the grotesque performance reflect Shakespeare's fairy style in language and form, and also "salvage some elements of the Bakhtinian carnival grotesque for a wedding performance" [5]. Additionally, Bottom, the prominent figure, acted vividly in a role of a clown being back to the fool's attire when he recalls:

Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was - there is no man can tell what. Methought I was - and methought I had - but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had [6].

"Both men are punished for an affectation that threatens the order of rank and the stability of custom in society, and in both this affectation is expressed by conduct and imagery relating to clothes" [7]. Except for the clamor of the rehearsal occasion before the wedding site, Bottom's melancholy utterances about the festival motif appear reasonable and introspective under the hypocritical reality. The constant festival motif connected with the Bakhtinian grotesque in the carnival condition should be sensitively sensed by Bottom's sentimental wooing, which also reveals that after the revelry, the common folks would come back to their realistic world inundated with conflicts, hypocrisy and ignorance, distinguished from the fairy dreamlike world.

3 Carnavalesque Scenes in Dickens' Works

Comparative context of the motifs is throughout nineteenth-century fiction. "Dickens's works are preoccupied with ludic themes, not only because of the way Dickens reinvigorates traditional play motifs but also because of the way he reinvents them, especially those of the folkloric or carnivalesque variety as represented by Bakhtin's notions of grotesque realism like 'billingsgate, banquet liberties and boisterous buffoonery'" [8].

In *Great Expectations*, Pip's lingering in the graveyard and his benevolence of endowing Magwitch some bread and Brandy could be an omen to predict the upcoming destiny would be diverted afterwards. The dramatic changes in his life were highlighted by his inheritance of a large fortune from a generous anonymous patron. In *Great Expectations*,

“The tragedy and the comedy, the realism and the dreamer of life, are fused or mingled together with little less than Shakespearean strength and skill of hand” [1]. Pip’s shift from the country cottage to the noble gentleman’s circle in London, pushes the revelry and carnival to a peak point. With the traits of being threatened and anxious at the beginning, the riots and catharsis released in that condition presages the turbulence and turmoil of the social order represented by Pip’s gradual integration into a fanatical and obstreperous occasion, on which the arrogant and hysterical noble gentlemen behaved like wild animals by breaking the cup of wine, throwing food to the servant with indifferent feeling. The final conflict among Magwitch, Compeyson, and the policemen, was ended by the shipwreck in the sea, in which riots and struggles were turned into silence, losses and redemption. The hideous but benevolent convict Magwitch, the grotesque and shabby castle, the reclusive and eccentric spinster Miss Havisham, the hullabaloo in the chaotic and messy London market, the portly and greedy lawyer Mr Jaggers, the strange-looking but righteous clerk John Wemmick, all of these witty and dramatic views and roles are vividly illustrated to interweave the characters’ development courses with the changing environment, which put Dickens’ world into a pageant of dreamery and comicality with wealth and poverty, love and hatred, and the eventual triumph of good over evil.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the extremely intense struggle embodied by the event of capturing the Bastille paves the way for expressing the irreconcilable conflicts between common people and Jacobean royal tyranny. The besieged cities occupied by fervently frantic people are trapped in devastation and horror, revealing that destruction and revolution could be one of the realistic means of reconstructing the morbid society with a new order.

The men were terrible... The women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their bare poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions [9].

People are lost in an insane world and their lunatic status is an embodiment “of this political kind of carnivalization, of course, revolves around the destruction of images sacred in other, different, often opposing cultural levels and language” [10].

4 The Indebtedness to Shakespeare’s Carnavalesque Scenes in Dickens’ Works

Shakespeare’s language style has lots of connotations to Dickens’ works. The Shakespearean comic effect elaborated in Dickens’ works is mainly exemplified by the dramatic role in a series of witty humor, joviality and wonders. Corresponding to Falstaff, Samuel Pickwick in *The Pickwick Papers*, is normally portrayed as a round-faced, clean-shaven, obese gentleman wearing spectacles. Micawber, the greatest comic figure in Dickens’ long novel *David Copperfield*, depicted as a melodramatic and kind-hearted gentleman who has the wisdom of words with eternal optimism towards life, is arrested in prison for his debt and then sincerely befriends David in London. Compared with Dickens’

Pickwick image as a comical figure, Falstaff was characterized mainly by his sleek sophistication and passion for his friendship with Prince Hal in *Henry V*.

“Laughter tempers accounts of social and moral depravity and the essentially comic resolution offered by both writers hold out hope of a reform both in society as a whole and in the individual” [2]. The Shakespearean works mostly start from natural feelings and emotions with fewer theories, which also resembles Dickensian works. Possibly inspired by the Shakespearean writing mode, most of Dickens’ later works endows with natural and intense emotion and end with marriage as a proclamation of integration of harmony and reverence. The availability of the assertion of these love stories could be testified under the form of marriage with reference to *The Tempest* in which Miranda and Ferdinand, declaration of marriage for the two couples: Duke Orsino and Viola, Olivia and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Pip’s union with Estella in *Great Expectations*, Walter union with Florence in *Dombey and Son*. The happy ending takes people into a world of revelry and equality which integrates two different families together and “There was no doubt many more of them than we are encouraged to suppose by the view commonly taken nowadays of the Greek tendency to treat marriage as a mechanism for the inheritance of property” [11].

Under the circumstance of moving forward together with characters, Shakespeare and Dickens bring these vivid lives of walks into the process of a radical world with a carnival narrative. Might be motivated by the Shakespearean language mode, Dickens’ later works are more and more intricate and richer in content, diction, language style and mindset interwoven with a carnivalesque narrative mode. This realistic literature manages to revitalize their humanistic ideals and spiritual world in their works by delineating vivid figures with various capricious personalities. To a great extent, the authors’ intention is explicitly disclosed that they are armed with their own humanistic sentiments to challenge the existing social order reigned by the ruling feudal aristocratic class in order to break the restrained routines and serious hierarchical life.

5 Conclusion

Bakhtin provides us spaces and freedom to study the aesthetic beauty of our human existence through the theory of carnivalization poetics, which allows “participants to investigate themselves freely, to study the disparity between their reality, in the text as well on the street” [10]. All his words in the literature show the spiritual meaning of communication and dialogue. All “language of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them are specific points of view on the world, the world in words, specific world views, own objects, meanings” [3]. Literature as means of transforming real life into imagination and revelry, then Bakhtin expects literature to be truly cultivated as a spiritual home for human beings to inhabit there in peace and harmony. In the world of literature, human beings can communicate equally and freely so that their inner depression and confusion could be purified and redeemed.

By comparing the literary works between Shakespeare and Dickens, we can realize that the profound influence exerted by Shakespeare on Dickens is ubiquitous. Based on the foundation of the humanistic ideal and Renaissance spirit, these two great masters

portrayed characters' development paths and expressed their sentiments and expectation for the carnivalesque and comical world without very intrigued theories. In the free-theory world, the writers' longing for liberty and democracy could be emancipated, enabling them to enjoy the hilarious and unbounded moments together with the characters entitled to experience the unprecedented revelry and emancipation. Instead of being fettered by the hierarchic tyranny under the lock down, the stratification under the hierarchical society seems less important than the integration into a passionate world though inundated with conflicts, outrage, clamor, disorder, renewal and eventual reconciliation. Everything is featured with intense traits of caricature and humor since construction and deconstruction is here and there.

Under the influence of Shakespeare's uniqueness of language art, Dickens, to a great extent, set about decomposing the "seriousness" in the text itself with the help of witty humor to break through taboos, and entered into a state of unfettered freedom. The poetic wit contains the spiritual theme of humanistic liberty overflowing with enthusiasm and comity under a carnival consciousness and carnival ceremony. With his keen eyesight into the world through carnival-style descriptions and carnival-style world feelings, Dickens comprehensively satirized and ridiculed the social reality of the Victorian era, and artistically disclosed the dark side of society in such a historical ear. It is through the fresh spiritual manifestation of carnival literature that the author's attention to social issues at his age, his yearning for mutually equal relationship among people, and his realistic expectation for freedom and harmony, as well as his pursuit of rebuilding an ideal society, are all prominently elucidated through the carnivalesque narrative mode.

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