

THE USE OF LITERARY DEVICES IN DEPICTING THE “ANGER” IN “LUCKY JIM” BY KINGSLEY AMISS

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ABSTRACT

“Lucky Jim” is a post-war novel which portrays the absurdity of human action in the English society in the 1950s. Kingsley Amis creates a bitter image of society using a great variety of literary devices. He describes both personal and social flows using parody, allusion, metaphor, irony and farce. The novel depicts absurd the old-established values of the English nation, which is suffering from severe class clashes. Dixon, the protagonist, is a vulnerable angry man, which is characteristic of the post-war condition in England. His life is full of uncertainty, dissatisfaction, anxiety, absurdity, discord and estrangement. He is enraged for financial, emotional and social reasons. His sense of insecurity comes from his temporary low position at the university. He works there for two years; however his future is bleak, as he may be fired as well. For this reason, he tries to treat Welch nicely hoping that he might be useful in this matter, though he does not like him and the hypocritical institution he represents.

Keywords: *parody, comedy, allusion, humour, farce, vanity, academic life.*

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that the novel criticises and ridicules the absurd condition of the academic life. The pretentious arty-weekend meeting of the Welches illustrates this aspect. Amis uses parody, farce and satire to ridicule the fake life of the college. The affectation of the Welches is clear, for instance, in their imitation of the French, as it is obviously seen in Bertrand's name. Bertrand's use of language also shows affectation and pompousness as it is seen in Chapter 4:

“It seemed to encourage Bertrand” Yes, I do, he said even more loudly, so that all his listeners looked quickly and thim 'And shall I tell you what else I happen to like?

Rich people. I take pride in the contemporary way of unpopularity of that statement. And why do I like them? Because they're charming, because they're generous, because they've learnt to appreciate the things. I happen to like myself,

because their houses are full of beautiful things. That's why I like them and that's why I don't want them soaked. All right?"¹

Hypocrisy and vanity in the academic life are especially depicted through Professor Welch and Editor Dr. Caton. Through Welch's incompetency in his profession, Amis criticizes and ridicules the silly condition of the academic life. In Chapter 1, Dixon's thoughts about Welch demonstrates not only his professional incompetence but also his over-reliance on him to secure his position at the university, which points out Dixon's insecurity and Welch's abusive exercise of power. Dixon talks to himself:

"How had he become Professor of History, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how? As usual, Dixon shelved this question, telling himself that what mattered was that this man had a decisive power on his future..."

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

It is seen that Welch uses his authority by including his personal life and relations his professional decisions and relations. His thoughts about Dixon are related to personal reasons, as well as Dixon's relations with his family. Dixon relates Caton with Welch as he considers both men fake, rigid and boring and ridicules them. In Chapter 19, when Dixon calls Caton to believe that his article will be published by Caton soon, he is disgusted with Caton's unreliable answers and laughs at his repetitive mechanical words such as "Things are very difficult" which possess a comic effect. Dixon makes comparison between Caton's evasion and Welch's evasion: "A rival to Welch had appeared in the field of evasion technique, verbal division, and in the physical division of the same field this chap had Welch whacked at the start" Repetition, parody, grotesque imagery, and farce make up the ludicrous situation in this scene. Dixon seeks ways to control his anger, being denied a satisfactory answer by Caton:

"nothing answered him except the metallic tapping. "Things are very difficult, things are very difficult, things are very difficult", Dixon gabbled into the phone, then mentioned a few difficult things which occurred to him as suitable tasks for Dr. Caton to have a go at. Still devising variations of this theme, he went out muttering to himself, wagging his head and shoulders like a puppet. ..."

Dixon's own view of his own article shows his dissatisfaction with his work and mocks at academic pretentiousness and fallacy. In Chapter 1, Dixon considers his unpublished article as "niggling mindlessness," "yawn enforcing," "worse than

¹ Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim*. Penguin Books, 2000. Epub, 97801419344846.

most articles in considering its own usefulness and significance".He considers himself "more of a hypocrite and a fool" as he has not destroyed it..."

Dixon constantly creates faces or mimics to cope with some kind of deviation or eccentricity. Both masquerade and mimicry, as essential tools for humour, create an opportunity for a sense of superiority and victory over the antagonistic forces in the protagonist's life. Such comic devices empower him to maintain his self-confidence and self-esteem. Masquerade and mimicry an alternative to the fact that life is full of disagreements and senselessness of reality. In Chapter 17, for example, Welch's unexpected habits as he first pushes the wrong door to go out of the library and then hits his head on the panel, makes Jim Dixon create his monkey-face, looking at Welch by "allowing his mandrill face full play". In other words, humour provides Dixon with the ability to survive in an incongruous world. Dixon then makes mimics to Welch, which he thinks, helps him to deal with the nasty reality around him and people: "Dixon went away, beginning to whistle his Welch tune in a solemn, almost liturgical tempo. He felt that it was things like this that kept him going".

Yet, although Dixon is hypocritical, the reader is sympathetic with him, as knows his hypocrisy unlike the Welches. He combines his pretentiousness with self-respect when he is honest with himself, as he comes to his true self, and he is fired from the job and the place he hates and goes to London.

Another major comedic device in the novel is the disruption of the serious by the comic or unexpected situations. James Gindin relates this to Amis's acceptance of contemporary existence in its incongruity, mainly, the disruption of the serious by the irrelevant or trivial from daily life. He also relates this use of the comic to the absence of moral instruction in Amis's novels. Gindin expresses this conception of the comic as follows: "The comic acceptance of the contemporary scene, along with the verbal texture of incongruous image and reference, provides whatever unity exists in Amis' fiction..."²

An example of the interruption of the serious by the incongruent acts is obvious in Dixon's conversation with Christine Callaghan in Chapter 19. While talking about the future of their relationship, Dixon has a nervous moment and begins to think about the waiter. The comic disagreement between the waiter and Dixon over the tip, interrupting the latter's thoughts about this relationship with Christine after leaving her enhances the comic effect by emphasizing the unsuitable nature of things as a source of the comic.

² Gindin, James Jack. *Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes*. University of California Press, 1963.

Dixon's relationship with Margaret is another source of ridicule, as Margaret's hypocrisy, neurotic excess and pressure on Dixon result in contempt and hatred in him. In Chapter 16, Dixon has an imaginary vision of "rushing at her and tipping her backwards in the chair, to make a deafening rude noise in her face, to push a bead up her nose" .Lodge contends that "Her (Margaret's) complains on Jim's emotional loyalty is similar to the university's claim on his professional allegiance" .³

The role of chance and the sense of contingency is a key component of the novel. The precariousness of existence in post-war society is portrayed through the means of comedy. Dixon's funny experience and acceptance of life provide a bright example of post-war situation. Dixon thinks about the power of chance in life, which is also ended through the happy ending. However, the ending is ironic, as it is through certain values and humane ways such as sincerity, honesty, and decency that Dixon attains happiness and success. Dixon wins over his antagonists and overcomes his sickness with his environment including the university, its members and the Welches in particular, through his satirical lecture, entitled "Merrie England" in Chapter 22. Dixon feels sick, as he faced up to intoxication, nervousness and irritation. However, his feeling is symbolizes his nausea or disgust due to his meaningless existence as well. The language provides a comic effect in this scene. Although Dixon hates Medieval History and has difficulty in coping with the university life, being drunk, he turns his lecture into a parody of the language used by Welch and comes up with a note on the failure of that period. Dixon parodizes institutional and social ills in his speech by changing his intonation, his accent and parodying through mimicry the speech of the people of authority, such as the Principal and the Head of the department. His derisive speech helps him to show the bitter truth to the audience and aids to correct the wrongs in society. The lecture is a high point in Dixon's coming to self-awareness. The crowd's laughter enables him aware of the absurdity of his own situation and the uselessness of the idea of Merrie-England. Far from happiness , Dixon demonstrates his audience, that the history of England ironically involves the opposite: "What finally, is the practical application of all this?"

Pale in face (Simile).Speaking of Jim's visit while recovering from a suicide attempt, Margaret describes his appearance as follows:

"You were white as a sheet, with all blank eyes, and you looked like you had witnessed a horrible, horrible operation." He must have been perplexed and confused

³ Lodge, David. "Introduction". Lucky Jim. Penguin Books, 1992, pp.1-16, Epub, 97801419344846.

because he didn't know how to say and behave. And his "hollow-eyed" expression is the best proof of his embarrassment.

Call from the beyond (Simile). After spending the night with Margaret at the bar, Dixon went to the bathroom and as he left, instead of quietly closing, the door slammed open, the effect "like the release of a weapon". It was like a call for him to leave the restaurant and Maragator and Welch's life and never come back.

Embedded in the Middle Ages (Metaphor). When Dixon looked for a position as a history teacher at a university, he took the Middle Ages as a subject to show his interest in the concrete and narrow. And he was rather disillusioned when he found that he had become medieval, but there was nothing he could do at this point. , it seems that not only part of the field but also the limits of expression and development were not seen. He seems to be limited mainly in a period called the Dark Ages, which is having a negative effect on his life at this time. It is full of dark clouds and the sunlight is not unable to penetrate.

Hangover effect (Simile). James woke up after whiling away the night drinking beer in a bar, he felt under the weather and "felt like his esophagus and stomach were being sewn together". It was so much fun that he got used to that feeling. James often drinks a few pints of beer, so a hangover is common for him. This fact also shows some of his qualities - he may be less responsible relying on the situation characteristics of his – he may not be very responsible in some situations.

Allusion refers briefly to a person, event, thing, a literary work, that is widely familiar. To be more clear, it empowers a writer to include a lot of meaning to the literary work. It is a kind of intertextuality. "Lucky Jim" is rich in examples of allusion. It allows any reader to comprehend meaning better and wider.

"The reason why Prometheus couldn't get away from his vulture was that he was keen on it, and not the other way run..."

"He reflected that the Arab proverb urging this kind of policy win complete: to "take what you wanted to pay for it" it should add "which is better than being forced to take what you don't want and paying for that..."

"This morning he looked more than ever like Genghis Khan meditating a purge of his captains. He halted contemptuously at his chair, clicking his tongue and sighing histrionically like one kept waiting in a shop..." At this point Genghis Khan is mentioned to depict the anger in Dixon, as is clear that this historic person is well-known for his deep anger and frustration towards his enemies.

Here Dixon implying that everybody should pay back what they have taken.

"And of course I wouldn't dream of letting him see it. It's not an easy situation. Having a relationship with an artist's a very different kettle of fish to

having a relationship with an ordinary man...”At this point Dixon is thinking about that it is completely to have a relationship with a person who is not the same background with you. Metaphor is used to describe the wide gap between the two classes.

The novel’s main literary technique, role-playing, serves a variety of purposes. For one thing, the players must role-play in order to survive in a fake, mechanical culture. After performing numerous roles in a corrupt society, Dixon had an epiphany, and as seen in Chapter 14, his credo is "truth to oneself" as the appropriate part that each individual must play. In the midst of post-war unrest, one might find security by being sincere and following their passions. Dixon, primarily due to Christine Callaghan's impact on him and his love for her, changes, attempts to accept the absurdity of his existence, and goes through a transformation.

“More than ever he felt secure: here he was, quite able to fulfil his role, and, as with other roles, the longer you played it the better chance you had of playing it again. Doing what you wanted to do was the only training, and the only preliminary, needed for doing more of what you wanted to do.

The novel is dominated by chance's involvement and a sense of improbability. Through the various forms of humour, the precariousness of life in post-war society is represented. Dixon's absurd experience and acceptance of life serve as a significant illustration of the post-war situation. Dixon ponders upon the importance of luck in life, which is further supported by the cheerful conclusion. The ending, however, is ironic because Dixon finds happiness and success by adhering to certain principles and decent behavior, such as sincerity, honesty, and decency. By using his surroundings, including the university, its students, and the Welches in particular, Dixon beats his enemies and recovers from his illness in his satirical lecture titled “Merrie England”

There are different memorable passages in the work that show the richness of language as a source of comedy. Here are several examples:

- “Next to Dixon was Cecil Goldsmith impelled to make.”

– In this example, Amis gains a comic effect by pointing out a straightforward fact (Cecil’s voice was powerful enough to neutralize Dixon’s) in a longer-than-necessary sentence with multiple clauses, by using colourful and powerful words (“savage”, “obliterate”, “impelled”) and through adding colourful detail (“especially above middle C”).

- “To have seen and talked to (...) third party”. – Here, the usage of words like “nonentity”, “handled” and “third party”, which are unusual in this context, generates the comic effect. The words seem to be somewhat strange.

- “The bloody old towser-faced boot-faced totem pole on a crap reservation” (Amis, 209) – Here we have an insult in what is also a symbolic moment of the novel: it is the first time that Dixon actually says out loud what he is considering .

- “As the body of a decapitated hen dance-steps.”– In this example, Amis uses a funny and cruel metaphor which refers to Dixon’s panic reaction when faced -by Christine as being the responsible for the fake Evening Post phone call.

- “As he left the bar to prevent him”– In this passage, the comic effect is achieved through the language chosen (accumulation of nouns, exaggeration), through the image of an “imbecile smirk” which points to the physical aspect of comedy and through Dixon’s self-deprecating humour (almost fearing to be arrested for dancing with such a beautiful girl).

CONCLUSION

“Lucky Jim” is a work that reveals the snobbish character and pretentiousness of the academic life. Through the use of wide use of humour, Amis deal with aspects such as, the lack of effort and of actual work made by the university’s most renowned teachers; - The failure of aristocracy as a means to achieve a successful career in the academic world, the distinction between low, middle-class and upper class members, the meaninglessness of several academic publications, the pretentious use of art and culture as status symbols. Even though the comedy sources used are abundant, and closely related, the three here isolated and presented are important for the success of comic purposes. The combination of these different elements empowers Amis to convey his opinions to different target audiences, especially sensitive to different types of humour, and the freedom with which he employs them often creates a powerful effect on the reader. Through various literary devices, Kingsley Amis shows the hatred towards the upper class members of the society. Irony, satire, metaphor, personification and simile are salient examples of the literary devices in the novel. As a satirical work, the novel ridicules the moral drawbacks, the grotesque inhumanity and hypocrisy of the wealthy people, while it means to correct the shortcomings of society through humour and satire of Amis. As is shown, comedy is considered as a powerful weapon to deal with and reform and remedy society, its monolithic minds and institutions.

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