The Facets of Dickens's Savage Comedy

Ružić, Mislav

UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Mislav Ružić

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Supervisor:

Sintija Čuljat PhD

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Abstract

Charles Dickens, a prolific Victorian writer and social critic, operated with varied literary devices in his works to reflect the Victorian-age mores. An era marked by fervent changes in the lifestyle, impact of the Industrial Revolution, inequalities between the social classes motivated Dickens to conceive his singular authorial perspective. While employing an array of literary techniques to breathe life into his characters, comedy prevailed as an incumbent piece of the complex Dickensian puzzle. Many of his works displayed a variety of comedic literary strategies to spark a humorous reaction in a reader, to ponder and criticize social and political oddities of the Victorian-era England. Irony pointed out the characters flaws and foibles while also railing against prominent English institutions. Grotesque added to comedic character descriptions and lashed the absurdity of the situations befalling his protagonists. Comedy of manners relied on overdrawn character delineations as to provide comic relief on the part of the reader. Invective sharply attacked and satirized the system with the subtle desire to enact a change and resolve those defects. Dickens painted a mirror image of what he saw and experienced between the lines of his novels, leaving behind an outstandingly defamiliarised canvas of the nineteenth-century England.

Key words: Charles Dickens, comedy, irony, grotesque, comedy of character, invective

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INTRODUCTION

"*There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour*."

(Charles Dickens, *Christmas Carol*)

This quote made by Charles Dickens in one of his most famous works, *Christmas Carol*, seems to be a great introduction into the world of the Victorian-era thinking, but also modern-day thinking, of how to entertain the wide public through literary means. Observing the quote from today's modern reiteration, one would assume that the literary genre expressed would most certainly be comedy. But what really is comedy? How does it constitute laughter and humor? Could it be possible that Dickens understood comedy differently from his predecessors and could it be that we understand comedy differently from Dickens or perhaps ancient Greeks?

In order to understand it all, one must first look at the definition of comedy. The true definition, according to a number of theorists, is difficult to underline. The most general one would be that comedy is *"a play, movie, etc., of light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion."*[1] Taking the definition in the most restrictive aspect found in the literature, comedy can be understood as *"…reasonably graspable literary form, most properly applied to drama, that uses stock character types in a scenario where some kind of problem must be resolved. Comedies end happily, often concluding with a communal celebration such as a feast or a marriage. We might add that we would expect a comedy to be funny, and that during the course of its action no one will be killed."* (Stott, 2005: 1) While comedies, as the film genre seen in Hollywood, base themselves on these tropes accentuated by Stott, comedy as theatre and literary genre throughout history needed to be effected in a more elegant way. The first instances of comedy, achieving its growth with the writer Aristophanes (*c*. 448-380 BC), focused itself on *"…overt and satirical commentary…"* (Stott, 2005: 5). Another similar point of view can be seen in Sommerstein's *Tragedy, Comedy and Polis* where comedy *"…has usually been*

[1] www.dictionary.com/browse/comedy (Date accessed: 28th November 2021)

thought also […] to have engaged itself regularly with the contested political issues of the day, to have supported or (more often) opposed particular contenders for political power and influence, and to have advocated specific policies." (Sommerstein et al, 1993: 12). Later in the literary history, the commentary became more implicit and disguised behind several comical instances. Similar machinery can be seen nowadays, most notably, in the monologues of the late-night talk show hosts. Comedy by itself evolved over a span of centuries contesting for its different types and ways it achieves and reaches its potential. The comic identity can be achieved through various types of comedy. Since there is no agreed unison theory of comedy, even the types themselves can become interpolated and used interchangeably. The typology of comedic genres entails satire, parody, burlesque and comedy of character.

Comedy, as a means of translating messages and humor, has another important aspect which is laughter. Laughter here serves as a product of the comedy. In order for comedy to work and fulfill its purpose of inducing laughter, a couple of aspects need to come in to place. According to Bergson, *"…attention should be called is that the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly HUMAN."* (Bergson, 2003: 8) The author explains the aspect providing the example of when we as humans laugh at a cat. The laughter occurs not because an animal is funny by itself, but because one sees human traits in their behavior, to which one relates. Bergson further deducts that in order for laughter to work, *"...a symptom equally worthy of notice, the ABSENCE OF FEELING which usually accompanies laughter."* (Bergson, 2003: 8) When jokes are produced, they have to be taken without getting feelings involved because feelings would cloud the ability to understand a joke. The only aspect that should guide a person when understanding a joke is intelligence. Guidance of the mind can be the way the joke can effectively work and provoke laughter. In a close manner, Bergson in a way instructs that in order to produce *"…the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple."* (Bergson, 2003: 9). The third and final constituency, according to the author, lies in the fact that it must be understood in a group, in a social context. Laughter is better felt in the surroundings where there are more people as it *"…appears to stand in need of an echo. Listen to it carefully: it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain."* (Bergson, 2003: 9) Bergson mentions that, in order to understand laughter, *"…we must put it back into its natural*

environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. Such, let us say at once, will be the leading idea of all our investigations. Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a SOCIAL signification." (Bergson, 2003: 9)

A conclusion to the lengthy analysis of laughter and the inner workings of the comic character, Bergson delineates in a profound statement. *"What life and society require of each of us is a constantly alert attention that discerns the outlines of the present situation, together with a certain elasticity of mind and body to enable us to adapt ourselves in consequence. TENSION and ELASTICITY are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play."* (Bergson, 2003: 11-12) Such a conclusion brings back the question posed in the beginning of the possibility of Dickens's different understanding of comedy to his predecessors. More appropriate questions would be: How did Dickens understand comedy? What were Dickens's strategies of comedic delivery in some of his most prominent works? In order to better understand the marvel behind the comedy and how it was reflected in Dickens's works, a look in the historical background of the Victorian era, a period in which the author lived and worked, needs to be taken into consideration.

1. THE HISTORICAL INSPIRATION BEHIND DICKENS'S SAVAGE COMEDY

1.1. CHARLES DICKENS

In order to analyze the comedic apparatus of the prolific works of Charles Dickens, a better understanding of him as a writer and the background that sparked the imagination and the social commentary in his works needs to be observed in great detail.

Firstly, let us look at the master himself, Charles Dickens. Charles John Huffam ("Boz") Dickens was born of February 7th 1812 in Landport near Portsmouth, England as *"…the second child of JOHN DICKENS, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office there, and ELIZABETH BARROW DICKENS."* (Davis, 2007: 3) Born into the bourgeois family that was not well-off by the Victorian-day standards, it seemed *"…Dickens was an unlikely candidate to become a towering literary figure."* (Currie, 2014: 10) While having humble origins and his father having a steady job, a tragedy struck when John Dickens was imprisoned for debt. In order to provide for his family, Charles was forced to abandon education and go work in the factory at the age of twelve. (Currie, 2014: 10) *"Instead of completing his education, he went to work in an office, then branched out into theater and journalism."* (Currie, 2014: 10) His venture into journalism was primarily based on sketches that he published in the "Morning Chronicle", a daily newspaper that credited them as a reporter. After a multitude of the sketches published, all of them were encompassed into a first series of sketches entitled *Sketches by Boz* in February 1836. (Davis, 2007: 4) The success of the sketches earned him the vocation of the writer and a contract for a monthly series of publications that would soon be titled *Pickwick Papers* in 1836, which would ultimately become his first novel. (Davis, 2007: 4) He married Catherine Thomson Hogarth on April 2nd of 1836, with whom he had ten children. (Davis, 2007: 5-10) The success of *Pickwick Papers* brought him the fame and motivation to write a prolific number of works, including *The Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, A Christmas Carol, Bleak House, A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. The writing expertise continued until June 9, 1870 *"…after spending the afternoon at work on the novel, he suffered a stroke and died that evening. He was buried in WESTMINSTER ABBEY on June 14."* (Davis, 2007: 10)

What most absolutely sets Dickens apart from other writers of the time is the time and dedication he attributed to the characters he created. As historian and author Stephen Currie so justly brings forth, Dickens is an author *"…perhaps best known for his well-drawn characters, many of whom are memorable if for no other reason than their inventive names:*

Gradgrind, Fezziwig, Jellyby, Flintwinch, and many more. Dickens is also known, however, for the actions of those characters." (Currie, 2014: 11) They go on to mention the character of Ebenezer Scrooge, a protagonist of *A Christmas Carol*, thinking only about the money until the Christmas Eve when he is visited by three ghosts that show him what his life was, is and will be. Currie further develops his thinking by pointing out that, outside the popularity of certain characters, Dickens had the incredible *"...ability to describe the real conditions that pervaded England—and particularly its capital city, London—in the middle 1800s."* (Currie, 2014: 11) Being in the middle of the cultural bustle of the London in that time period, Dickens was able to observe it very methodically and offer realistic background for his characters. By doing so, the characters do not only grow and interact in realistic situations but it serves the author himself to distribute the social commentary through such characters.

As Dickens's works honestly portray the society in the London between 1830s and 1870s, they are the best conservatory example and excellent sources of information. In the following part, an analysis of Victorian Era and social classes will provide a better understanding of Dickens's imagination.

1.2. VICTORIAN ERA AND THE RISE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Dickens's time interestingly coincided with two time periods. The first one is early beginning of the Victorian Era, named after Queen Victoria *"...who ruled from 1837 to 1901."* (Currie, 2014: 13) The second, most significant of the Victorian period, is Industrial Revolution. This period marked the extensive rise in technological advances, primarily the harness of the steam power. Steam as a mean of powering became used in a wide range of machinery in order to respond to the needs the technological advance brought with itself. *"Factories sprang up, producing consumer goods such as cloth and lumber; railroads carried these goods to customers across the country. The rise in factories, which tended to cluster together, made it desirable to consolidate workers in small geographic areas; the improvements in transportation made it possible to bring food to people far from farms."* (Currie, 2014: 13) Such rapid change brought more people to live in the city next to factories in hopes of securing jobs and providing for their families. This period also saw an exponential increase in population number. While there is a general debate as to why such a positive

growth, Mitchell ponders that the reason could lie in the notion *"...that plentiful jobs with good wages allow industrial workers to marry younger, and that the range and variety of foods available to city dwellers have a positive effect on nutrition"* (Mitchell, 2009: 13) These factors contributed to more children being born. Along with population expansion, according to Currie, taking into account the encompassing power of industrialization, this period marked advancements on all fields of the British economy. It was mostly beneficial for industrialists and financiers who *"...made their fortunes in commerce and factories."* (Currie, 2014: 13) Then slowly other constituents came to prominence "… *from clothes to coal became more readily available to all levels of society—and in most cases became cheaper as well.* […]*The death rate was dropping; educational levels were rising.* […] *English warships were laying claim to territory from Africa to the South Pacific, English industry was leading the rest of the world, and English cultural productivity was second to none."* (Currie, 2014: 13)

As much as this seems to convey the perfect picture the industrialization brought with itself, Dickens's portrayal of society in that time paints a starkly different picture. Currie once again provides the exemplification. *"Millions of men, women, and children led lives that verged on utter misery. To them, the Industrial Revolution meant back-breaking work for little pay, and urbanization meant living in cramped hovels in dirty, crime-ridden city neighborhoods."* (Currie, 2014: 13) In a sense, Dickens tells the story of two distinct worlds, two different social levels and two different stories: the rich and moderately rich on one side, who largely benefited and for whom Victorian era was a time of proliferation and the poor on the other side, who saw the aforementioned time period as the time of struggle and battle for survival and hope for a better standard of living. *"Those who had it generally lived well, while those without it did not. Indeed, the divide between the wealthy and the poor was enormous, and the poor stood little chance of becoming significantly better off."* (Currie, 2014: 15)

The distinction made above in the text, the rich and moderately rich opposite the poor underlies the foundation of some of the most famous Dickens's novels. In order to better understand the novels and the connections of the characters, a detailed analysis of the social hierarchy of the Victorian's British society is needed and shall be provided.

1.3. THE HIGH AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

People will say that in order to be in a high position on the social scale, one needed money. However, in Victorian England money was only part of the story. Mitchell elaborates that even though money was a determining factor of a higher position, other elements such as *"...birth and family connections."* (Mitchell, 2009: 17) defined in a sense a status of a person in the society.

The social scale by itself could be arranged as a three-tier pyramid. Even though, legally speaking, *"...England had only two classes: aristocrats (who had inherited titles and land) and commoners (everyone else)."* (Mitchell, 2009: 18), most people of the time considered their society constituted on three levels. The very top consisted of a handful of aristocrats and *"...large landowners with titles (such as duke, lady, and so on) often handed down from parent to child, but other well-born, well-off Englishmen and Englishwomen ranked nearly as high."* (Currie, 2014: 16) Next tier, much larger in size, were the middle-classes. *"They were what might be termed white-collar workers today: They did what Victorians called clean work, or work that involved little manual labor."* (Currie, 2014: 17) This included a wide range of activities that would provide them with the financial security to be able to live well and to afford certain privileges. Among those that often did well financially were bankers and business leaders, (Currie, 2014: 19) as well as *"...Church of England clergymen, military and naval officers, men in the higher-status branches of law and medicine, those at the upper levels of governmental service, university professors, and the headmasters of prestigious schools."* (Mitchell, 2009: 20) An interesting fact about the middle class is that they often tailored their lives towards the social tier they always admired, the high class or, in other words, the aristocrats. By trying to do so, they created their own type of suburban ideal, since this part of any town *"...was imagined as a space that enabled its inhabitants to walk the narrow line between constant and uncontrolled contact with the urban "residuum" and rural isolation from the sources of capital."* (Baker Whelan, 2010: 15) Prior to eighteenth century, the suburbs *"...housed the theater district and the red-light district and were the haunts of prostitutes, actors, sailors, thieves and those of the lower classes without any particular occupation."* (Baker Whelan, 2010: 13) During the eighteenth century, due to the expansion of the cities and the rising problem of overcrowding in the city centers, suburbs offered the middle-class an escape from the picture of the inner-city circles and a dose of privacy, something they strived for since it was upper class that also enjoyed the

privacy and silence. However rich the fantasy of the suburban ideal was, the real picture of the middle class was vastly different. Even Dickens himself *"...struggled with the difference between the ideal and suburban experience throughout his career, and thus he is a major figure in this study. He begins, as in The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist, blithely confident about the suburb's ability to fulfil its ideal, but ends, in later Introduction 23 novels like Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend, by raising serious doubts about the suburbs' redemptive power."* (Baker Whelan, 2010: 22-23) This tendency to be closer to the higher class diminished the space between the two social tiers. Contrarily, by doing so, it created a much wider separation between the two classes and the third widest tier, the poorest British citizens. This separation became beneficial to the high and middle classes as they enjoyed a plethora of possibilities in many aspects of social life. In the next few paragraphs there will be an overview on how upper and middle class lived in Dickens's England.

As far as housing is concerned, upper class had a tendency to live in large country houses, often called manors that consisted of multitude of rooms, an extensive area of land and a view of the nearby fields, woods and adjacent areas. (Currie, 2014: 19) In these types of housings, there would be entire parts dedicated to sleeping rooms for the family living there on one side and ballrooms, sleeping rooms for guests, dining rooms on the other side. The houses themselves, according to Currie, *"...were already quite old by the time the Victorian era began. Indeed, many of them date from the late 1500s and early 1600s. Others, however, were built during or shortly before the Victorian period."* (Currie, 2014: 19) Depending on the status and the financial wealth of its owner, these country houses were lavishly decorated and were kept in pristine conditions. Such care can be seen not only as presentation of the social position and the power of the upper-class family living there and not just as a building *"...but as a central part of their identity."* (Currie, 2014: 22) This identity went as far as owners of the houses naming them just like they would name their own children. On the more diminutive level, the middle class did not live up to the standards of their wealthy counterparts. Without the financial succession or the land that could be rented out, a manor or similar housing of the wealthy could not be afforded. *"In towns and in the countryside, members of the middle class most often lived in relatively sturdy houses that might include from four to ten rooms."* (Currie, 2014: 22) However ostentatiously lesser the housing on the middle class seemed, they still try to keep up with wealthy in certain aspects. The copying of the design or perhaps the interior decorating was in full effect, often to the point of disorder, as the richness of the interior meant idealistic paragon with the higher class. *"Rooms were*

crowded with plants, fire screens, embroidery frames, bird cages, decorative china and glass, paintings, family pictures, collections of seashells or souvenirs. The cluttered and crowded appearance results partly from the casual arrangement (romantic disorder), a distinct contrast to the formality of eighteenth-century rooms where delicate furniture was symmetrically lined up along the walls." (Mitchell, 2009: 114)

Another indicator of wealth in Dickens's England was clothing. *"The wealthiest women in Dickens's day took fashion quite seriously. Women of the gentry wore long dresses, often made of silk, with petticoats and other undergarments beneath them."* (Currie, 2014: 23) The more dresses wealthy women owned, the better picture they painted about themselves and their families. Middle-class women did not have the necessary financial output so the number of the dresses owned was often very limited. *"Silk dresses were rare among middle-class women, for example, and the varieties of wool and cotton were not as desirable or as well made as the ones used by the wealthiest women of the time."* (Currie, 2014: 24) The men's clothing style also differed between the upper and the middle class. *"Typically these differences had to do with cloth, workmanship, and cut, or styling. The wealthier the owner, the more expensive the material."* (Currie, 2014: 24)

The most important aspect and the reflection of wealth was certainly education. Education was highly valued among the wealthy. Up until the age of eleven or twelve, the upper-class children were educated at home, with their parents hiring private tutors. (Currie, 2014: 56) The upper classes also attained the opportunity to send their children to elite boarding schools that *"...had their origin in old charitable foundations meant for teaching Latin to boys who would enter the priesthood."* (Mitchell, 2009: 176) Middle-class children also had tutors if their parents were rich enough to afford them. If there were no tutors, the children attended schools. Up until the mentioned age, both girls and boys enjoyed in the same basics of education. *"Both sexes learned to read and write, for example, and both boys and girls studied basic arithmetic, history, and French."* (Currie, 2014: 57) After the age of ten, the program for boys and girls started differing quite a bit. The girls started learning less rigorous things, such as music and drawing, while also being crammed with superficial general knowledge. *"These collections of random facts might have enabled girls to carry on conversations interesting on the surface, but the information was rarely linked to other ideas and subject areas. Thus, early Victorian girls seldom had a well-rounded education."* (Currie, 2014: 57) On the other hand, boys were regarded of a much higher intensity and were considered to be much more successful, ultimately taking the highest occupying position in

governmental bodies, in the church, in the army and in the court. Following such a preconceived notion, *"…they not only studied the basic operations of arithmetic—addition, division, and so on—but received instruction in geometry, algebra, and other more advanced mathematical topics, too."* (Currie, 2014: 57) Additionally, there were instances where they were invigorated to study science, history and philosophy. After the age of eleven and twelve, it was common for the boys of the upper-class families to spend their knowledge maturation in boarding schools. They would usually be sent to well-respected schools that highlighted their social status. According to Currie, the aim of these schools was maybe *"…less about filling students with knowledge than helping them take their rightful positions in society."* (Currie, 2014: 59) Such prestige that upper-class boys had cannot be said for middle-class boys. Since those types of institutions generally had no preference for the middle class, *"…these students attended less prestigious boarding schools or day schools in the towns where they lived."* (Currie, 2014: 59) These types of boarding schools painted a slightly different picture as they were more burdensome since a wide range of subjects were being studied and there was more engagement during lessons *"…in part because boys from the middle classes knew they would have to compete with others for jobs and status, while those from the upper classes had no such need."* (Currie, 2014: 59) While the upper and middle classes enjoyed the leverage of their social position, if one jumps to the other side of the significant gap previously mentioned over to the lower class, a different story arises, one completely different from what has been seen up to now.

1.4. THE LOWER CLASS

If one is to observe the Victorian-era social structure as a pyramid, the lower class, often the poorest, would make the lowest tier since it consisted of most people with least the power. In Dickens's England, much of the lower class lived in the countryside, villages and small towns. As time progressed and Industrial Revolution took its course, *"…more and more of them moved to the cities of Britain. In both rural and urban areas, living conditions for the lower classes were often appalling, especially in comparison to the comfortable lives of the British middle class and the luxuries enjoyed by the gentry."* (Currie, 2014: 29) The mentioned divide not only separated the upper and middles from the lower class based on the social status, but also on the style of thinking and attitude. The upper and the middle class took little preference to think about the poor, which was ultimately seen as an ineffective

strategy. This indifference was recognized by many influential Britons, including Dickens, as *"…the most intractable problem in English society of the time."* (Currie, 2014: 29) Even though there were a lot of initiatives going on that the gap be diminished and that certain rights of the lower class be heightened or even equated with those of the upper and middle class, it is safe to assume that only certain battles were won, while the stark differences persevered on. In the next few paragraphs, a detailed presentation of the life of the lower class will be provided.

As far as housing is concerned, those that lived in the countryside rarely had few financial resources, so their residences were usually *"…cottages that were drafty and dirty and often had bare stone or earthen floors. The cottages were cramped, and though some had two stories, that did not increase the available space by much."* (Currie, 2014: 30) As far as housing in the city was concerned, with many of the people arriving in the cities from the countryside in search for a better life and better opportunities, there was often misuse of housing situations. *"Sensing a business opportunity, speculators bought existing homes and rented them out to the newly arrived, packing as many people into the space as it could hold—and sometimes more."* (Currie, 2014: 31-32) The logical solution would have been to build new buildings. The problem was that any major British city already had *"…streets and alleyways were lined with houses, homes that were small, squat, and often windowless."* (Currie, 2014: 32) As such, people used every opportunity to find a place to stay, even resorting to stay in oldest parts of the city, the grim slums. *"Whole families lived in single rooms in run-down houses. During the eighteenth century, when cities expanded, buildings had been jammed into every yard of open space. Courts and warrens of interconnected alleys virtually excluded fresh air and prevented adequate policing. In common lodging houses, people of both sexes and all ages slept on beds or pallets jammed into open rooms. A fire with a grate allowed lodgers to fix a meal."* (Mitchell, 2009: 115) Even though there were suggestions, they were completely ignored and the problem of overcrowding became just another aspect people were going to have to live with.

While clothing for the upper and the middle classes were signs of their identity and influence, *"…the poor wore whatever they could afford—which was generally not much. In contrast to wealthier ladies, lower-class women often wore shapeless dresses made out of cheaper, less-comfortable materials—scratchy wool, light cotton, and the like*." (Currie, 2014: 38) As materials were scarce, the clothing would be consisting of whatever could be found and if the holes appeared in the dresses, they would be mended with whatever material was

close. Slowly, those dresses looked less like dresses and more like erratic quilts. Lower-class men had less probability to emulate the style of the upper and the middle classes. *"Farmers wore long smock-like shirts, soldiers the uniforms of their regiments. Ordinary factory workers wore simple canvas pants and heavy linen shirts. Miners, who worked in sweaty, stifling conditions under the ground, often wore only their underwear—and sometimes dispensed even with that. During their free time, lower-class men, like their wives, tended to wear rough clothes made from cheap, easily torn fabrics."* (Currie, 2014: 40) In hindsight, it is obvious why there was no need for such regarded style of clothing. The conditions men found themselves with hard manual labor and scarce financial possibilities simply required no need for such items to be worn.

Apart from the upper and the middle class, the lower class lived of the work because it was the only way for them make a living and survive. Before the Industrial Revolution and the urbanization process, the foundation of the British economy was laid in the country and products that derived from it. Grains were usually the most cultivated crops but there were also potatoes, turnips and beans. Aside from the crops, cattle, sheep and pigs were common type of livestock living on the farms in the countryside. Some were butchered for food while others were used for wool, leather and milk to be used, or even sold. (Currie, 2014: 43) Even after a major influx of farmers into towns and cities in search of better opportunities, some remained and continued their craft. Contradicting the mechanization in the cities, *"...actual work on farms was done without machinery, and therefore required large numbers of agricultural laborers."* (Mitchell, 2009: 26) Another rural occupation was working in the mines. The primary product of mining was coal. Coal saw its assurgency in popularity during the Victorian Era because of its wide use, most notably when burned up because it would power the engines of the machines. And while coal served its purpose and allowed for the much needed advancement, the mining itself was not a pleasant occupation. *"...Miners labored underground and in the darkness, their activities illuminated only by lanterns that gave off no more light than a candle. They crept through narrow tunnels too low to allow a person to stand upright; they breathed in dust from the coal that surrounded them."* (Currie, 2014: 45) People working in the mines were also tired from working long hours and there was a possibility of death from mines caving in or from prolonged inhaling of the coal dust. On the other hand, in the urban parts of the cities, a popular occupation was factory work. *"...Weaving and spinning were two of the most common types of factory work, but British factories in the mid-1800s produced almost every consumer good known at the time."* (Currie,

2014: 46) As much as factory work, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, allowed for a faster and efficient production of a plethora of consumer products, there were downsides to working in a factory. *"Many factories had no ventilation, allowing fibers, dust, and residue to make their way into workers' lungs. Grease and oil spilled on the floor and soaked into the workers' clothes. The noise in factories could be unbearable, too."* (Currie, 2014: 48)

A well-known fact is that lower-class labor force consisted of both men and women. Unfortunately, the children were also part of the labor force. The combined income of both parents did not often suffice to make ends meet with one of the response being to send children to work to earn money as well. (Currie, 2014: 50) Children were always known for helping out their families in the countryside, either by milking the cows or by helping collecting the harvest. However, in the urban areas, they were known to work in factories. What is more, business owners were very pleased to be able to hire children to work in their factories or their mines. There were even agreements with the manufacturers to take in children as work force in order to relieve the burden of some impoverished areas. *"Millowners made agreements with the local authorities in impoverished areas to take orphan children as young as age seven off their hands. They were lodged in dormitories and worked in shifts, 12 hours at a time, day and night."* (Mitchell, 2009: 41-42) Business owners took particular pleasure in having children to work in their factories due to their small stature and nimbleness. *"Children's small fingers were ideal for fine work such as tying together the ends of snapped strings in a textile factory, and their small bodies fit more easily into mine shafts than the bodies of their parents."* (Currie, 2014: 51) Even though seen as an indescribable advantage, the work itself was not suitable at all for children. *"The repetitive movements of factory workers were especially hard on children's still-developing bodies. The lack of sunlight in mines and mills contributed to a pallid, sickly appearance; and industrial accidents involving children were all too common."* (Currie, 2014: 51) By challenging children to work from such a young age deterred them from other aspects that children had in common: playing with their peers, experiencing life freely, the right for education. Even though Victorian Era, with regards to child labor, was always described as a dark time for conduct towards children, the situation was not simply ignored. During Dickens's time, there were a couple of laws passed that would set the amount of hours children would have to work, improve the safety precautions for the workers in factories and set a minimum age for the child labor at ten. (Currie, 2014: 52) The reform was partly pushed by Dickens himself, *"...whose weekly magazine Household Words published scathing nonfiction pieces*

advocating for mill hands in general and child workers in particular." (Currie, 2014: 52) Owing to the legislation and writings, child labor in Britain was diminished in stature and eventually completely eliminated.

Those children that were not vigorously involved in labor from a young age, tried to acquire education. It has to be said that the education for lower-class children was nowhere near as extensive and rich as upper and middle-class education. Even though it was not on that desired level, lower class did acquire some sort of education. *"In London and other cities, some schools were devoted to the education of the poor; many of these, intended for the truly destitute, were informally known as Ragged Schools."* (Currie, 2014: 60) The education process was far from shiny lights of perfection. It was rather difficult because children were either disinterested in learning altogether, or had problems at home that prevented them from learning. They were also too tired from either looking after their younger siblings or from work in the factories. These behavioral practices made room for disobedience in the classroom which was solved very swiftly by the teacher, usually through physical and verbal punishment. (Currie, 2014: 65)

The low condition and the disheartening picture Britain portrayed about its widest and biggest social tier, the lower class, caused government a slight concern for a possible revolution. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were mass uproars of the lower class Britain's neighboring countries. *"For example, Poland had suffered a civil war between 1733 and 1738. In 1830 Belgium fought for independence from Netherlands. There were bloody uprisings in Spain in 1808 and in Portugal in 1820."* (Stewart, 2014: 20) But it was Britain's immediate over-the-channel neighbor, France causing a rise in the concern factors when in *"…1789 the impoverished French underclass demanded equality and an end to the inept absolute monarchy of Louis XVI."* (Stewart, 2014: 20) The concern for a possible British Revolution was based in the fact that Britain saw France as *"…a nation much like their own, with a monarchy, a strong army, and a vibrant and colorful culture."* (Stewart, 2014: 20) With the development of the French Revolution into a violent period called "The Reign of Terror" (Stewart, 2014: 20) where a multitude of people died by the sharp blade of the guillotine, even the king Louis XVI, the British aristocracy primarily feared that a similar scenario could take place in their own land. Not only because the likeness the two countries shared, but for the possible retaliation of the lower classes and their demand for the constitution of democracy, exemplified by French. Williams connects the repercussions brought by French revolution and their desire for democracy with culture. (Williams, 1960:

xvi) The same mindset emerged with the British. By ousting monarchy and establishing democracy, there would be blossoming of culture. On the other hand, the fear of aristocracy towards democratic constitution of the country led to vicious attacks. Most prominently, politician Edmund Burke was highly dismissive of it stating that such concepts would crush British values. *"The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror."* (Clark, 2001: 446) Fortunately for them, there were only rebellions by the British mob that wanted to also establish democracy as French did, but not to that magnitude as the ones in France or other neighboring countries. The opposing views motivated Williams to describe the mood of the country in those times as *"a mood of contrasts."* (Williams, 1960: 3)

Such a lengthy discourse into the historical background of the Victorian Era's British society served its purpose not only to highlight the situation happening in the past, but also as points of references through which Dickens masterly conveys and positions the characters, living vicariously through them but also enabling the reader to experience the merits and the atrocities of the society of that time. Without doubt, Dickens's main objective is, by using comedy, to bring out and criticize the problems of the Victorian-era society.

Even though Dickens drew all of his inspiration from the reality around him imbuing it with comedic prevalence, he was certainly not the first to delve into such thematic. Worth mentioning are also his predecessors and literary paragons of the novel genre Defoe, Richardson and Fielding who, much like Dickens, tried to portray the reality of the contemporary society while criticizing it through the comedic devices. In order to grasp the comedic ploy and its incorporation into the English novel, a brief reflection of comedy will be provided in the following chapter.

2. COMEDY AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN THE ENGLISH NOVEL

The findings of the origin of comedy as a literary genre can be traced back to ancient Greece and the philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato and poets like Aristophanes. While Aristophanes is credited to be among the pioneers of prominent comedy, it was the likes of Aristotle and Plato that tried to divulge this wide and encompassing genre. Both of the

philosophers, most notably, challenged comedy as a genre in opposition to its darker counterpart, tragedy. Another opposition they made, specifically Plato, is to what societal level comedy pertains to. In a society of ancient Greece heavily predicated by the distinction of classes based on wealth and moral instincts, comedy was thought to be appertaining to the classes containing lower moral instincts and an aspect that a man of high morals and reasoning must not divulge in. This is outlined perfectly by Plato himself in his grand work, *Republic*. *"If there are amusing things which you'd be ashamed to do yourself, but which give you a great deal of pleasure when you see them in a comic representation or hear about them in private company—when you don't find them loathsome or repulsive— then isn't this exactly the same kind of behaviour as we uncovered when talking about feeling sad? There's a part of you which wants to make people laugh, but your reason restrains it, because you're afraid of being thought a vulgar clown. Nevertheless, you let it have its way on those other occasions, and you don't realize that the almost inevitable result of giving it energy in this other context is that you become a comedian in your own life."* (Plato, 1994: 360)

For Plato, comedy is an aspect that is displaced and does not make part of the everyday human. More so, humans in general are serious creatures, "...*for whom the comic is a temporary identity that may be encountered on occasion*" (Stott, 2005: 18). To a similar degree, Aristotle, in his work *Poetics* succinctly connects comedy with tragedy as categories of drama. Aristotle proposes that both categories in its entirety try to mimic the outside world. While tragedy mimics situations and actions that are reputable and carry certain weight, comedy is reserved for those "lesser" in nature. *"Comedy is (as we have said) an imitation of inferior people—not, however, with respect to every kind of defect: the laughable is a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction: for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain."* (Aristotle, 1996: 9)

This countenance of moral and immoral accompanied by inferiority started to effect the focus of the protagonist in the stories being told. This essence is immediately visible in the works of poet Aristophanes. In his works, there are ambers of what would later be called a comic hero. According to Henderson, ironically, comic hero *"...was always cast as an ordinary citizen with an ordinary citizen's complaints and aspirations, and because his/her competition was unlimited by the constraints of civic deliberation that were in place in assemblies and courts."* (Henderson as in Sommerstein et al, 1993: 309) This ordinary paradox casts a temporary shadow on the term, with reader wondering what the word "hero"

means in this context. Observing today's standards, the term could be described as a person on whom great admiration is bestowed and who has certain extent of power. In the ancient Greece, comic hero was considered, as previously mentioned, ordinary as *"…no hero represents any category of citizen who could or might be expected to compete for a position of leadership, nor does the hero seek to acquire such a position."* (Henderson as in Sommerstein et al, 1993: 309) The question that is to be pondered here is how the term "comic hero" was understood in those times. Henderson provides a glimpse into that precise answer, stating that comic hero *"…was unique, for only at the comic festivals could the mass of ordinary citizens see one of their own in the limelight, speaking their own language and voicing their own complaints and desires."* (Henderson as in Sommerstein et al, 1993: 309) By making the hero generic, nameless to a point, unlocked converging foci for the ordinary people, a way of connecting to the characters emphatically because the hero provided the voice of reason and agreement with the dissatisfaction towards the opponent, mainly being an actual contemporary,*"…often named, always impersonated, who currently enjoyed or were aiming for some kind of ascendancy."* (Henderson as in Sommerstein et al, 1993: 310) By pointing out their flaws and calling them out through various comedic devices, writers voiced the aspects others were thinking about, probably too afraid to tell them aloud.

This apparatus of comically bringing out the flaws continued into the Middle Ages. The tradition associated with comedy and humor were interpolated and extended to a broader level. Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most influential commentators and observers of historicism in literary studies, contributed to an understanding in comedy studies through his work *Rabelais and His world*. In it, through the analysis of Rabelais's works, Bakhtin suggests the societal geography of the Middle Ages was compounded in two worlds, contradictory in nature but simultaneously in concord. On one side, there was the official culture characterized *"…as ecclesiastical, sombre, excluding profanity, and suppressing the body, driven by the bureaucracy of the Church and the administration of Grace…"* (Stott, 2005: 31)

This world offered an identical image when it came to celebrations, referred by Bakhtin as feasts. *"…they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. The link with time became formal; changes and moments of crisis were relegated to the past. Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present. […] the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. […] This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien*

to it." (Bakhtin, 1984: 9) This constrained bubble was heavily contradicted by the other world, deemed by Bakhtin as *"…the culture of the marketplace, the popular and boisterous voice of the people."* (Stott, 2005: 31) This peculiar aspect of the culture of the marketplace, in its expansive generality, offers the space for the territory to grow and lean towards a more basic but open understanding. *"This territory […] was a peculiar second world within the official medieval order and was ruled by a special type of relationship, a free, familiar, marketplace relationship. Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of Church, palace, courts, and institutions."* (Bakhtin, 1984: 154)

The freedom of the spirit opened its doors to different way of celebrating, more carnal, which leads to the notion of the "carnival celebration" infused throughout the majority of Bakhtin's work. *"As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed."* (Bakhtin, 1984: 10) With the liberation of the soul, came also the liberation of the language use. Marketplace language was seen as *"…the idiom of the plebeian classes, the expression of 'natural' feeling, coarse, unlettered, and unmediated by the expectations of formality."* (Stott, 2005: 32) Being able to express the "natural" enabled the comedy to creep its way in and take control of how people express and see their vision of culture. *"This is a vision of culture at ease with, and making fun of, graphic descriptions of sexual activity and bodily functions, ridiculing officials and officialdom, and violating officially designated rules of etiquette and decorum. The world of the marketplace operates according to what is essentially a comic logic, one that runs parallel to official, serious, improving culture, laughing at it, and sometimes violently humiliating it."* (Stott, 2005: 32)

Comedy, particularly in its satire form, took over predominance in the English novel genre. What is accentuated by the term English novel here is not literature originating from any Anglophone speaking territories, but rather the one produced and originating from the British Isles from eighteenth century onwards. Authors such as Swift and Defoe planted the ideal of a satire in their works, but it was with Fielding and Richardson that the aspect originated in rich and fruitful observations, as they are regarded to be the founders of the English novel. Fielding himself argued *"…that all valid literature was derived from the*

ancient Greek and Roman literary forms." (Parrinder, 2006: 24) Much like the protagonists in ancient works, Fielding's characters were not individual portraits but summation of antediluvian human types. One interesting aspect is that Fielding's novels, like *Tom Jones*, *"…were read as embodiments of Englishness, not of universal nature…"* (Parrinder, 2006: 25) The characters were celebrated not only because of their uniqueness but also because of historical authenticities. Tautologically, the same can be said for Dickens and his characters. The descriptions of characters, scenery and customs not only allow a glimpse into the world of Victorian England, but also allow the reader to savor the characters and to connect with them. Dickens, notwithstanding his precursors, took the stories and interweaved them with comedic elements, creating the space to criticize the problem and situations facing Victorian England.

In the following part of the thesis, providing detailed examples in six of his prominent works (*The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*), the wide range of facets of Dickens's savage comedy will be brought into focus.

3. THE FACETS OF SAVAGE COMEDY

In this lengthy chapter, the facets of Dickens's use of comedy will be proposed through a gamut of stylistic devices, such as irony, grotesque, comedy of character and invective. These comic instruments will be provided with examples from the novels, delineating the social commentary of the Victorian England and author's own reflection upon the subjects brought up in the novels.

3.1. IRONY

One of the most recognizable instruments in conveying comedic element and or pointing out the hypocrisy of given situations is irony. This device bases itself on the notion of expressing the meaning by using the language that normally signifies the opposite for the purpose of creating humorous reaction.

While in the proceeding works irony delineates respective protagonists and situations, the creations of Tom and Sam Weller in *Pickwick Papers* employ irony in a different manner. In their Cockney idiom they make fun of the fact that famous proverbs or clichés, when taken literally, can be deemed wrong on certain occasions. *" " All good feelin', sir—the wery best intentions, as the gen'lm'n said ven he run away from his wife 'cos she seemed unhappy with him," replied Mr. Weller."* (Dickens, 1905: 346) *"There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off, to cure him o' squintin'.""* (Dickens, 1837: 366) *"There's nothin' so refreshin' as sleep, sir, as the servant-girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful o' laudanum.""* (Dickens, 1905: 202) Their speech mannerism, or wellerism, consists of three parts: firstly the established proverb "*There's nothin' so refreshin' as sleep*", then comes the subject "*as the servant-girl said*" and the punch-line is encased in ironical, humorous and quite literal explanation "*afore she drank the egg-cupful o' laudanum.*"

A similar instance where Dickens ironically comments on the institutions is in *Nicholas Nickleby*. After agreeing to proper education proposed by his uncle Ralph, he is sent to a school owned by Wackford Squeers. The Squeers are first introduced through an article Ralph reads in the newspaper. *"'EDUCATION. At Mr Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, Youth are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature."* (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 24) The institution itself at first glance seems like the perfect place for Ralph to get rid of Nicholas for a certain amount of time. In the encounter of Ralph and Wackford Squeers, it is revealed that they have history and that Ralph has sent people to educate themselves here. Dickens reels us in to sympathize with the Squeers after the loss of one of the boys that Ralph brought in.*" I remember very well, sir,' rejoined Squeers. 'Ah! Mrs Squeers, sir, was as partial to that lad as if he had been her own; the attention, sir, that was bestowed upon that boy in his illness! Dry toast and warm tea offered him every night and morning when he couldn't swallow anything a candle in his bedroom on the very night he died the best dictionary sent up for him to lay his head upon I don't regret it though. It is a pleasant thing to reflect that one did one's duty by him.'"* (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 33)

Later in the novel, upon arriving to the school, Dickens destroys the illusion of the idyllic place describing it through Nicholas's point of view. *"Nicholas had time to observe that the school was a long, coldlooking house, one storey high, with a few straggling outbuildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining."* (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 69) *"…and as he looked up at the dreary house and dark windows, and upon the wild country round, covered with snow, he felt a depression of heart and spirit which he had never experienced before."* (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 70). It turns out that this school is not the model institution it portrays to be, with Mr and Mrs Squeers undermining the children there, particularly a young boy Smike, by putting them in the same bed, showering with the water from the well, handing small and insufficient amounts of food. Ironically putting Nicholas in a prison-like institution where he works as an assistant master, Dickens heavily criticizes the hypocrisy of educational institutions. Although a vast majority of critics agree there is a level of overplay to these instances, it certainly did not diminish it efficacy as it prompted a reaction of the society to act upon the problems of mistreatment of underage children in these types of educational institutions.

In *Oliver Twist*, among many characters, there is one unlikely ironic character, William Sikes's dog, Bulls-Eye. When we meet William Sikes, the dog is described as loyal, even waiting for William's sign to lunge and suffocate Oliver at one point. Even though mistreated by his owner, throughout the book, the dog will be close by his master's side. After William murders Nancy, he tries to get rid of the evidence, including drowning the dog. Trying to lure the dog close, the dog itself is hesitant. Ultimately, the dog *"…advanced, retreated, paused an instant, and scoured away at his hardest speed."* (Dickens, 2014: 336) The irony of Bulls-Eye comes right at the end of the book, when, trying to save his master, *"…ran backwards and forwards on the parapet with a dismal howl, and collecting himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man's shoulders. Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains."* (Dickens, 2014: 354) Apart from the dog, Dickens also places irony in delineating Fagin's prigs. Jack Dawkins is known throughout the novel as Artful Dodger. Dickens explores the idea of his name and while he is successful in robbing unsuspecting people of London, dodging people and police in an artful way (hence the nickname), ironically gets caught for trying to steal a handkerchief from an old man.

Other interesting characters that obtain the ironic twist are daughters Mercy and Charity Pecksniff and their father Seth Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The names of the

daughters ironically write out their fates throughout the novel. The younger daughter Mercy, although described as *"...all girlishness, and playfulness, and wildness, and kittenish buoyancy. She was the most arch and at the same time the most artless creature, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, that you can possibly imagine."* (Dickens, 2000: 22) Even the description provides for irony of her character; sweet and playful, but at the same time vain and frivolous. She is married to Jonas Chuzzlewit after accepting his proposal in order to spite her sister, who originally wanted to marry Jonas. This existing spite is ironically enacted in Mercy being left at mercy of her husband who abuses her. Towards the end of the novel, after death of Jonas, she leaves her frivolous ways. The older daughter Charity, on the other hand, is described as having *"...fine strong sense, and her mild, yet not reproachful gravity..."* (Dickens, 2000: 23). Even though showing the hard exterior, her vindictiveness and bitterness also make her character poignantly ironic. It is made manifest after she is rejected twice, first by Jonas Chuzzlewit marrying her younger sister Mercy and second time by Augustus Moddle. After the second rejection the disappointment and bitterness come forward and take part in presenting her public self, leaving her to become an old maid.

The father figure, Seth Pecksniff, makes one of the antagonists of the novel. Dickens employs irony around this character in many ways. Right at the beginning of the novel, when the reader is first introduced to the character, an ironic situation arises when a strong gust of wind *"...slammed the front-door against Mr Pecksniff who was at that moment entering, with such violence, that in the twinkling of an eye he lay on his back at the bottom of the steps."* (Dickens, 2000: 21). Such a situational irony offers an insight into a character who will not be accompanied with redeeming qualities throughout the novel. The discernment of Pecksniff is further divulged when Dickens portrays him as *"...a moral man: a grave man, a man of noble sentiments, and speech..."* (Dickens, 2000: 23) relating to the morality "*...especially in his conversation and correspondence."* (Dickens, 2000: 23) The latter quote also foreshadows some of the mendacious actions that will be undertaken by Pecksniff. Much like with the name of Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist,* Dickens plays with the surname Pecksniff in this novel. Ironically, his surname perfectly supports the way the character's actions are transcribed. In a lot of situations where he thinks he will have some opportunities to profit for himself, he "pecks and sniffs", most notably in his scheme to obtain his cousin's, old Martin Chuzzlewit's, money.

Bleak House is a novel that is filled with examples of irony. The story revolves around Jarndyce and Jarndyce, an ongoing legal case in a court called Court of Chancery and its

many characters' trials and tribulations as they wait painstakingly for the resolution of the said suit. Dickens employs irony to heavily criticize the judicial system of Victorian England. The reader gets a feeling of what Chancery looks like right at the beginning of the book when Dickens sets the scene of what the inside of the courtroom looks like. *"...some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be—as here they are—mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of words and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—as are they not?—ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for truth at the bottom of it) between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them."* (Dickens, 2018: 3)

A vivid description of the inside offers the reader a sense of criticism, as it is expected that such a powerful institution should not be in such disarray and they should be working towards finding a solution for all the papers they seem to be stuck in. After such a description, Dickens is quick to follow with a general introductory remark about the institution itself. *"This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire, which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard, which has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance, which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right, which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope, so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!""* (Dickens, 2018: 3)

This small extract perfectly outlines the judicial system in Victorian England. The system that takes too long to solve its cases is bound to leave people mad, dead or poor, as the paragraph suggests. What Dickens does brilliantly in this paragraph is that, although criticizing, he also ironically foreshadows the fate of certain characters later in the novel. Another opportunity the author gets to describe the courtroom of Chancery is when Esther Summerson, one of the novel's protagonists and one of the people involved in the suit, visits the courtroom for the first time. *"Below the table, again, was a long row of solicitors, with*

bundles of papers on the matting at their feet; and then there were the gentlemen of the bar in wigs and gowns—some awake and some asleep, and one talking, and nobody paying much attention to what he said. The Lord Chancellor leaned back in his very easy chair with his elbow on the cushioned arm and his forehead resting on his hand; some of those who were present dozed; some read the newspapers; some walked about or whispered in groups: all seemed perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable." (Dickens, 2018: 297) The reader gets a feeling of judiciary deficiencies and lack of judicial conduct. Instead of doing their job, they are jocosely relaxing, making the courtroom setting feel less institutional and more homely. Not stopping on the description of the court, author introduces the reader to the case itself. While describing it, Dickens ironically portrays it as *"...scarecrow of a suit..."* (Dickens, 2018: 4), adding that the complications lead to a situation where *"...no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises."* (Dickens, 2018: 4).

Dickens accentuates the passage of time and perplexities of the suit by enumerating the myriad of characters that were or are involved in the process. *"Innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it. Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. The little plaintiff or defendant who was promised a new rocking-horse when Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be settled has grown up, possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away into the other world. Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality; there are not three Jarndyces left upon the earth perhaps since old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane; but Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its dreary length before the court, perennially hopeless."* (Dickens, 2018: 4).

The problem of Jarndyce and Jarndyce has become such that it has become the laughing stock of the courthouse whenever it comes on the table to be resolved. *"The last Lord Chancellor handled it neatly, when, correcting Mr. Blowers, the eminent silk gown who said that such a thing might happen when the sky rained potatoes, he observed, "or when we get through Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mr. Blowers"— a pleasantry that particularly tickled the maces, bags, and purses."* (Dickens, 2018: 5) Equating the phrases "when the sky rained potatoes" and "when we get through Jarndyce and Jarndyce" to mean never, further seals the

ironic fate of the legal case and the characters involved in it. Even the way the Lord Chancellor and solicitors take up the approach to resolving the case can be considered ironic. Dickens further displays the incredulousness of the situation through Esther's fresh and inexperienced perspective during her first visit to the courtroom. *"But I counted twenty- three gentlemen in wigs who said they were "in it," and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I. They chatted about it with the Lord Chancellor, and contradicted and explained among themselves, and some of them said it was this way, and some of them said it was that way, and some of them jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits, and there was more buzzing and laughing, and everybody concerned was in a state of idle entertainment, and nothing could be made of it by anybody. After an hour or so of this, and a good many speeches being begun and cut short, it was "referred back for the present," as Mr. Kenge said, and the papers were bundled up again before the clerks had finished bringing them in."* (Dickens, 2018: 297-298)

The confusion among the solicitors and the Lord Chancellor creates a sense of incompetence that further begrimes the already obscured picture of the judicial system in Victorian England. The matter is postponed for another time before all the legal paperwork is brought to table. Outside the courtroom setting, the Court of Chancery turns the model in little of English society. Dickens draws parallels between the image of the courtroom and the house of the landlord Krook being called Chancery and the character itself nicknamed Lord Chancellor. Krook himself provides the explanation. *'"You see, I have so many things here," he resumed, holding up the lantern, "of so many kinds, and all as the neighbours think (but THEY know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do THEY know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery.""* (Dickens, 2018: 45) Old man Krook's corruption is juxtaposed with the chaos and filth effected by the Chancery judges. The character is a parody - much like Chancellor cumulating old papers and searching for the authentic Jarndyce will, Krook stores a lot of things that are dear to his heart in hopes of using them one day. By drawing the poignant parallelism between the malfunctioning Court of Chancery and Krook's bottle and rag shop Dickens renders irony a constituent of his narrative allegory.

Fostering the representational form of irony, Dickens did not only use this device to comment on the institutions of his time, but also on the characters of various classes and their actions. In *Bleak House*, such is the interpretation of Sir Leicester Dedlock, a baronet, living with his wife Lady Dedlock, often referred to in the novel as My Lady Dedlock in Lincolnshire. When describing Sir Leicester, we get a sense of a man that is proud of his title but also as a *"...gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness and ready on the shortest notice to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man."* (Dickens, 2018: 8)

Perfectly unreasonable man is the exemplary combination of words that could be deducted as ironically declaring that people of higher social classes present themselves as faultless examples and ordinance to the rest of the society but on closer inspection they have many more problems than they are willing to admit. Then there is the middle class represented by Vholes, a solicitor that assists Richard Carstone to resolve the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit. Much like other solicitors in this novel, Vholes provides for Dickens an ironic role, most notably in his name. Implicating the characteristics of a burrowing rodent, Vholes drags Richard even deeper into the suit, slowly sucking the life out of him, making him a representation of *"...the law in its most murderous form."* (Davis, 2007: 60)

The example of the ironically delineated character is certainly Mrs. Jellyby. She is described as *"...a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects at various times..."* (Dickens, 2018: 30) and as *"...a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off."* (Dickens, 2018: 32) The description of handsome but wandering eyes refers to her "telescopic philanthropy", as the name of the chapter suggests itself, doing the charity work for an African tribe from her home, devoting herself completely to the cause. Ironically, while helping people in need, she does not help the people that need her the most: her family. This is seen the first time main protagonists Esther, Richard and Ada arrive at Jellyby house. Her reaction when one of her children, Peepy, falls down the stairs and hurts himself offers us that ironic aspect of neglect*." Mrs. Jellyby merely added, with the serene composure with which she said everything, "Go along, you naughty Peepy!" and fixed her fine eyes on Africa again."* (Dickens, 2018: 34)

The relationship between Mrs. Jellyby and Peepy ironically further accumulates in the fact, that while she finds ways to help the children in Niger have food and decent clothes, she dresses her own son in clothes that are *"…either too large for him or too small. Among his other contradictory decorations he had the hat of a bishop and the little gloves of a baby. His boots were, on a small scale, the boots of a ploughman, while his legs, so crossed and recrossed with scratches that they looked like maps, were bare below a very short pair of plaid drawers finished off with two frills of perfectly different patterns. The deficient buttons on his plaid frock had evidently been supplied from one of Mr. Jellyby's coats, they were so extremely brazen and so much too large. Most extraordinary specimens of needlework appeared on several parts of his dress, where it had been hastily mended,…"* (Dickens, 2018: 157)

The play on names continues in *Great Expectations*. Although Pip goes to London to educate himself in order to become a gentleman, striving to gratify his great expectations by surrounding himself with people from higher walks of life, the dramatic irony of his pursuit is ultimately divulged. Endeavoring to climb up the social ladder only weighed him down and made him doubt himself. Only after distancing from those aspirations, was he able to see his purpose and fulfill his prospects in his own right. Here Dickens perfectly offers the use of situational irony. The character and the reader are taken on a journey where they simultaneously discover new information throughout the novel. This is best corroborated by the revealing of Pip's benefactor. For the majority of the book, protagonist, along with reader, is guided to believe that Pip's benefactor is Miss Havisham, an elderly wealthy woman, only for it to be ironically revealed that the benefactor is Abel Magwitch, the escaped convict from the beginning of the novel. By lulling the reader into a sense that they are aware of how the story will go, Dickens expertly uses irony and rewrites the story. Another example of such artistry is the character of Matthew Pocket. A tutor to Pip, cousin of Miss Havisham and father to Herbert, he is described as *"…a younglooking man, in spite of his perplexities and his very grey hair, and his manner seemed quite natural. I use the word natural, in the sense of its being unaffected; there was something comic in his distraught way, as though it would have been downright ludicrous but for his own perception that it was very near being so."* (Dickens, 2009: 264) It is revealed that he has been writing manuals on parenting, although ironically having problems maintaining a relationship with his son.

In literary world, irony still remains a powerful tool whether describing the characters and pointing out their flaws or flogging the socio-political iniquities. In the case of Dickens,

irony was used to draw attention to the endlessness of the legal cases and ineptness of the British judiciary system in *Bleak House*, the lives of the lower classes in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, the selfishness and the conniving of the high classes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and so on. All in all, irony for Dickens was a *"...figurative tool that allows him to give satirical expressions towards the social life."* (Trisnawati, Sarair and Rahmi, 2006: 103)

3.2. GROTESQUE

A somewhat unusual comic instrument that makes its way into Dickens's comedic style is grotesque. Even though the name itself suggests something fantastic, unpleasant, hideous containing distorted imagery, this literary genre over time became an apparatus for invoking comedic effect. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin connects grotesque with realism stating that *"...essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."* (Bakhtin, 1984: 19/20) Lowering it to a material level, grotesque became corporeal and widely attainable to the masses, transforming itself into a part of folk humor. Folk humor appertains to the carnival side of celebration while also denoting the way lower classes engaged in festivities.

By analyzing grotesque on the example of *Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin outlines the imagery of the two giants and their adventure in material and corporeal dimensions, putting the accent on the body itself. *"Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body - all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body."* (Bakhtin, 1984: 317) Although the picture of grotesque body is exaggerated in Rabelais, Bakhtin argues that such an overdrawn representation of reality is meant to connect with the reader and provoke laughter. To an extended degree, Dickens himself uses the element of grotesque to stir the reader's spirits.

In *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens plays with the grotesque by pointing out a physical novelty: fat bodies. As many of the characters in the novel are fat, including the main protagonist Samuel Pickwick, Esquire, this allowed Dickens to transpose the said physical

feature into a comedic situation. An example that perfectly highlights such use comes while the Pickwickians are staying at Mr. Wardle's Manor Farm. In a dialogue, Pickwick, Snodgrass, Tupman and Mr.Wardle discuss the best places in Kent.

""There an't a better spot o' ground in all Kent," said the hard-headed man again, after a pause.

" 'Cept Mullins's Meadows," observed the fat man solemnly.

" Mullins's Meadows ! " ejaculated the other, with profound contempt.

" Ah, Mullins's Meadows," repeated the fat man.

" Reg'lar good land that," interposed another fat man.

" And so it is, surely," said a third fat man.

" Everybody knows that," said the corpulent host." (Dickens, 1905: 66)

As evident from the dialogue, there are four fat men appertaining to the conversation. The comic aspect finds itself in the fact that the reader does not know who says what line as Dickens describes Mr. Wardle, Tracy Tupman, Augustus Snodgrass and Samuel Pickwick as fat. According to Miyamaru, Dickens seems to equate the fat bodies by constructing *"...the dialogue here such that it still make sense regardless of the order of the unnamed fat men's lines."* (Miyamaru, 2002: 277) further emphasizing the comedic reaction it triggers in the reader. Another character prone to the comedic reaction is Mr. Wardle's servant Joe, also nicknamed 'the fat boy'.

""Now, Joe, the fowls. Damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again. Joe ! Joe ! " (Sundry taps on the head with a stick, and the fat boy, with some difficulty, roused from his lethargy.

" Come, hand in the eatables.

" There was something in the sound of the last word which roused the unctuous boy. He jumped up; and the leaden eyes, which twinkled behind his mountainous cheeks, leered horribly upon the food as he unpacked it from the basket." (Dickens, 1905: 51)

In this passage, Joe is described as 'unctuous' *"...a concrete epithet more often associated with fatty substances such as whale blubber than with obese human bodies."* (Miyamaru, 2002: 276) Dickens further emphasizes the corpulence of Joe by accompanying it

with sleepiness, dullness, insensitivity and insatiable appetite for food, thus provoking a humorous reaction in the reader. A similar aspect is created with Samuel Pickwick. By making him want to become a typical picaresque hero, much like Cervantes's Don Quixote, Dickens creates a rift in the character. While his sense of justice is applicable to the picaresque hero, his body, unfortunately is not. This creates one of many character's blunders-inability to connect with the world in a competent manner, making that a Victorian literature parody of the typical picaresque hero. With such blunders, Dickens tries to evoke sympathy of the reader to the character but also to comment on the comportment of the society. *"Pickwick's rotundity is the weapon Dickens uses to satirize the foibles abuses of society."* (Miyamaru, 2002: 275)

While Pickwick's delineation of a fat body aligns itself with the premonition of Rabelais' view of grotesque, the description of Mr Squeers aligns itself with the grotesque realism:

"He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had, was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental: being of a greenish grey, and in shape resembling the fanlight of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of scholastic black; but his coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable." (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 28)

Such an ogreish description offers a parodic expectative contradiction of the person in charge of Dotheboys Hall judging from the newspaper article to the reality seen and experienced by Nicholas Nickleby. In a similar manner, Dickens describes young Fanny Squeers, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Squeers. *"And, in this place, it may be as well to apprise the reader, that Miss Fanny Squeers was in her threeandtwentieth year. If there be any one grace or loveliness inseparable from that particular period of life, Miss Squeers may be presumed to have been possessed of it, as there is no reason to suppose that she was a solitary exception to an universal rule. She was not tall like her mother, but short like her*

father; from the former she inherited a voice of harsh quality; from the latter a remarkable expression of the right eye, something akin to having none at all." (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 89)

The comedic effect is retained as qualities gained from her parents are not necessarily the ones desired. Character description is not the only point in the novel where Dickens resorts to the instrument of grotesque to convey comedy. Through Nicholas's perspective, Dickens employs grotesque to describe the Dotheboys Hall. *"By degrees, however, the place resolved itself into a bare and dirty room, with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copybooks and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked, and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms; a detached desk for Squeers; and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported, like that of a barn, by crossbeams and rafters; and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash."* (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 79) The reader also gets a pertinent description of the boys living in this institution:

"Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the harelip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were viciousfaced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness." (Dickens, Vol. I, 2014: 80) Once again, Dickens not only expertly disguises the criticism of such institutions in Victorian England, but also envelops it in a contradictive parallel to the newspaper article read by Ralph Nickleby.

Grotesque realism is also fervently present in *Oliver Twist*. Most notably, Dickens employs it to criticize the institutions harboring underage children to do hard physical work, the unfortunate harsh reality of the Victorian England. He ostentatiously describes the conditions boys like Oliver live in. *"The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone*

hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides." (Dickens, 2014: 11) By being direct in the descriptions and using vivid and strong adjectives, Dickens wanted to truly bring forth the hypocrisies of institutions. He goes further into the description of children's eating habits. *"The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon."* (Dickens, 2014: 11)

The excerpts harshly criticize the system and the notion of child labor by employing unpleasant imagery that resonates with the reader. Grotesque also makes part of Fagin's description, central figure of the novel but also the main antagonist. *"The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad."* (Dickens, 2014: 124) *"…the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal."* (Dickens, 2014: 124) More humorous grotesque description of Fagin is given by William Sikes, Nancy's husband, on one of the many occasions Fagin came to their house. As Fagin's accomplice, he is well aware of the character Fagin is. The familiarity allows for Dickens, through Sikes, to jokingly dehumanize Fagin by comparing him to an old decomposing body and a ghost. *It's enough to turn a man ill, to see his lean old carcase shivering in that way, like a ugly ghost just rose from the grave.'"* (Dickens, 2014: 125) The ghoulish-like figure and demeanor bring forward the realistic perspective on Dickens's view of poorer side of London and the types of people inhabiting it.

Even though Dickens mostly attributed grotesque features to its male characters, there are instances of female characters assuming similar delineation. One such character is Sarah Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. A nurse who, throughout the novel takes care of Anthony Chuzzlewit, old Chuffey and Lewsome, walks the line between life and death. Dickens used that prompt to effectively reflect her looks as if though she is stuck between the two worlds:

"She was a fat old woman, this Mrs Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. In these dilapidated articles of dress she had, on principle, arrayed herself, time out of mind, on such occasions as the present... The face of Mrs Gamp – the nose in particular – was somewhat red and swoln, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits." (Dickens, 2000: 303) Possibly one of the funniest characters in the novel, Dickens enhances her comical valence by having her speak in a vague Cockney accent, speech full of malapropisms and anecdotes. Borderlining on life and death makes the character of Mrs. Gamp prone to mixed allusion, specifically when referring to one of her patients as she was *"...walking away from the bed, 'he'd make a lovely corpse!'"* (Dickens, 2000: 393)

Unlike grotesque character delineation in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House* employs the element of grotesque to provide realism in the descriptions of the London scenery, most prominently at the beginning of the novel:

"Smoke lowering down from chimneypots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest." (Dickens, 2018: 2)

Furthermore, Dickens describes the presence of the fog, a weather anomaly that was ever-present at that time period due to its mixing with smoke coming from houses and factories, straining the life in the city. *"Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by*

the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds." (Dickens, 2018: 2)

The inceptive images of fog-clad and mud-soaked London, with emphatic repetitions, create an almost surreal setting, thus providing for an acrid commentary of Victorian England and the Industrial Revolution. In the same manner, the delineation of the lower-class citizens oust Mr. Bucket and Esther visit offers the much expected commentary on the conditions they had to endure:

"The room, though two or three feet higher than the door, is so low that the head of the tallest of the visitors would touch the blackened ceiling if he stood upright. It is offensive to every sense; even the gross candle burns pale and sickly in the polluted air. There are a couple of benches and a higher bench by way of table. The men lie asleep where they stumbled down, but the women sit by the candle." (Dickens, 2018: 268)

Another example of grotesque manifests itself in the description of the kitchen in the home of Mrs. Jellyby. *"But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened—bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinnermats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas—that he looked frightened, and left off again. But he came regularly every evening and sat without his coat, with his head against the wall, as though he would have helped us if he had known how."* (Dickens, 2018: 362) This catalogue of objects not only gives a humorous perspective but it further ironizes Mrs. Jellyby and her need to involve herself with a distant African tribe more than her own family. On a similar note, Dickens also provides a vivid but displeasing description of Mr. Vholes's office as though intending to humorously personify it with Mr. Vholes's position as a small solicitor in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit:

"Mr. Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep blending with the smell of must and dust is

referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or whitewashed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, and the dull cracked windows in their heavy frames have but one piece of character in them, which is a determination to be always dirty and always shut unless coerced. This accounts for the phenomenon of the weaker of the two usually having a bundle of firewood thrust between its jaws in hot weather." (Dickens, 2018: 471)

Even Mr. Vholes's descriptions go in hand with the grotesque realism. *"…a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner and a slow, fixed way he had of looking at Richard."* (Dickens, 2018: 459), *"quiet and unmoved, as a man of so much respectability ought to be, takes off his close black gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his tight hat as if he were scalping himself, and sits down at his desk."* (Dickens, 2018: 473)

With *Great Expectations*, Dickens found himself at a precipice of mastering the descriptions of grotesque realism. Such particular mastery is seen when Pip and Miss Havisham enter one of many rooms in her house. *"From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up, and the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air—like our own marsh mist. Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimneypiece faintly lighted the chamber: or, it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness. It was spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together. An epergne or centrepiece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow, like a black fungus, I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, as if some circumstances of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community. I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels, as if the*

same occurrence were important to their interests. But, the blackbeetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth in a ponderous elderly way, as if they were shortsighted and hard of hearing, and not on terms with one another." (Dickens, 2009: 117-118)

What brings out the humorous aspect is the fact that, while Pip is perplexed by the look and the condition of the room, Miss Havisham is completely unfazed, demanding they walk around the table in the center of the room. The calmness through which she expresses that the table will be her final resting place and that the untouched, cobweb-covered artifact is her wedding cake is indicative of the satire of a solitary middle-class woman living in a dark atmospheric house. This example can also attest to the gothic element present in Victorian literature. Victorian literature moves away from the typical tropes found in Gothic fiction- dilapidated castles, powerless female characters and villains - and retains the notion of gloomy atmosphere and constant melodrama incorporating them into a modern setting. With a description of the room, Dickens offers more veracity to the narrative itself.

With every following novel, Dickens became braver and bolder in using grotesque to play with the characters and provoke reactions or to point out the absurdity of the situations. The realism, with which the grotesque was able to permeate the descriptions of characters and scenery, greatly enhanced the understanding of capabilities and propensities in Victorian England. Vila Cabanes in her analysis of Dickens's works proposes that *"...Dickens's grotesque is, above all, the result of hypertrophic imagination that blurs, at times, the boundaries between the ordinary and the fantastic."* (Lennartz and Koch, 2014: 111) Cabanes also explains that, even though it is sometimes exaggerated, the images themselves combine equal parts disgust, humor and criticism in order to *"...discredit the absurdity of contemporary political and economic theories."* (Lennartz and Koch, 2014: 112)

3.3. COMEDY OF CHARACTER

Comedy of character is usually understood as comedy that bases itself on one or more exaggerated characters. Its rise in popularity could be seen in the 17th century with French writer Molière and his comic plays where a protagonist would have an overly exaggerated

fault which caused comic problems with family and friends. Such examples could be found in his plays *The Miser (L'Avare)* and *The Imaginary Invalid (Le malade imaginaire)*. With the rise in popularity of this style of writing, so arose its many variations. In his novels, Dickens was no stranger to exploring the comedy of character.

In his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens toys with the idea of comedy of character through peregrinating Pickwickians. In the beginning as we are getting introduced to the members of the Pickwick club - Samuel Pickwick, Augustus Snodgrass, Tracy Tupman and Nathaniel Winkle, each of them is deemed as a highly distinguished gentleman. As such, each of them prides itself on being good at certain ability that by itself becomes their dominating obsession. Snodgrass is interested in poetry, Tupman in love, Winkle in sports while Pickwick can be seen as an amateur scientist:

" *Mr. Pickwick observed (says the Secretary) that fame was dear to the heart of every man. Poetic fame was dear to the heart of his friend Snodgrass; the fame of conquest was equally dear to his friend Tupman; and the desire of earning fame in the sports of the field, the air, and the water, was uppermost in the breast of his friend Winkle. He (Mr. Pickwick) would not deny that he was influenced by human passions, and human feelings (cheers)—possibly by human weaknesses—(loud cries of ' No '); but this he would say, that if ever the fire of self- importance broke out in his bosom, the desire to benefit the human race in preference effectually quenched it."* (Dickens, 1905: 3)

With such a wide array of abilities, deeming themselves the definition of gentlemen, they set out in the world to help reinvigorate the sense of justice missing from it. The comedy of character is realized throughout the novel by the inability to fully realize those dominating obsessions. *"Winkle proves to know nothing about hunting, Snodgrass never writes a poem, Tupman loses Rachael Wardle to Jingle, and Pickwick—even with his spectacles on—is stumped by Bill Stump's stone."* (Davis, 2007: 326) To a certain extent, by comically exaggerating their capabilities only to lessen them towards the end, Dickens inadvertently creates a typical character model, thus effecting how the role of a gentleman in Victorian England will be perceived by the reader.

In *Nicholas Nickleby*, comedy of character could be easily attributed to the entire Squeers family. Right from the first time author introduces these characters they are portrayed with flaws. Mr. Squeers has an ogreish appearance; Mrs. Squeers is the matriarch of the house who takes her anger out on children; daughter Fanny is in desperate need of a husband to the

point that she becomes vindictive after Nicholas rejects her; son Wackford who acts as a well-fed, well-dressed mascot for the school just waiting to punish the boys just like his father. All by itself comically flawed, Dickens makes sure that by the end they get a taste of their own medicine, in particular Mrs. Squeers and son Wackford. Towards the end, when older Wackford ends in jail and is transported, the institution is in the process of shutting down.

After Mrs. Squeers, Fanny and young Wackford arrive back to the house, this causes a revolt by all the boys. They restrain Mrs. Squeers and force her to eat combination of brimstone and treacle. Understanding this revolt demands a little explanation. Throughout the book, Mrs. Squeers gives this concoction to the kids. Brimstone, also known as a sulphur ore was given in Victorian England as a remedy to a lot of conditions, among which was to stop the feeling of hunger. Treacle, on the other hand, is a molasses-like substance that was given out as food. This combination thus caused the children to be full with just a spoonfull of the mixture, thus the Squeers did not have to waste money on real food. Hence, why the children fed Mrs. Squeers her own medicine. They were feeding the mixture after dipping young Wackford head in it. This is comical by itself and ironic to a certain extent since this mixture diminishes hunger and Wackford was rather plump. The boys also wanted to retaliate against Fanny, but were interrupted and set free by John Browdie:

"Before that estimable lady could recover herself, or offer the slightest retaliation, she was forced into a kneeling posture by a crowd of shouting tormentors, and compelled to swallow a spoonful of the odious mixture, rendered more than usually savoury by the immersion in the bowl of Master Wackford's head, whose ducking was intrusted to another rebel. The success of this first achievement prompted the malicious crowd, whose faces were clustered together in every variety of lank and halfstarved ugliness, to further acts of outrage. The leader was insisting upon Mrs Squeers repeating her dose, Master Squeers was undergoing another dip in the treacle, and a violent assault had been commenced on Miss Squeers, when John Browdie, bursting open the door with a vigorous kick, rushed to the rescue." (Dickens, Vol. III, 2014: 220-221)

In *Oliver Twist*, comedic delineation adheres to a prominent character in the novel, Mr. Bumble. As beadle of the workhouse Oliver is born at the beginning of the novel, he is described as self-important as he had *"...a great idea of his oratorical powers and his importance. "* (Dickens, 2014: 6) Throughout the novel, Dickens plays with this character by making him *"...the butt of [...] satire of self-important bureaucrats who wield their petty*

power arbitrarily and who indulge in all the perquisites of office." (Davis, 2007: 282) The notion of self-importance seemed to be the main character flaw of people in charge of the workhouses that made their money from working class of underage children. The comedic attribution to the character came when he married Mrs. Corney, the matron of the workhouse with the intention of *"...a joining of hearts and housekeepings!'"* (Dickens, 2014: 180) Dickens expertly camouflaged the hidden intention of Bumble being in charge of the house, but is convinced otherwise when Mrs. Corney takes charge and makes him the victim of her marital tyranny. Laughter is triggered in reader when the bureaucrat who thought he could govern and have it all falls prey to the stronger, more demanding feminine hand.

Not exclusively focusing on individual characters, Dickens goes one step further in comically portraying the crowd as a collective character. The best example is shown during Oliver's first pickpocket run for Fagin. After being confused as the real perpetrator of the stealing by an older gentleman, a chase through the streets of London begins:

"Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a magic in the sound. The tradesman leaves his counter, and the car-man his waggon; the butcher throws down his tray; the baker his basket; the milkman his pail; the errand-boy his parcels; the school-boy his marbles; the paviour his pickaxe; the child his battledore. Away they run, pell-mell, helter-skelter, slap-dash: tearing, yelling, screaming, knocking down the passengers as they turn the corners, rousing up the dogs, and astonishing the fowls: and streets, squares, and courts, re-echo with the sound." "'Stop thief! Stop thief!' The cry is taken up by a hundred voices, and the crowd accumulate at every turning. Away they fly, splashing through the mud, and rattling along the pavements: up go the windows, out run the people, onward bear the mob, a whole audience desert Punch in the very thickest of the plot, and, joining the rushing throng, swell the shout, and lend fresh vigour to the cry, 'Stop thief! Stop thief!'" "'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a passion FOR hunting something deeply implanted in the human breast. One wretched breathless child, panting with exhaustion; terror in his looks; agony in his eyes; large drops of perspiration streaming down his face; strains every nerve to make head upon his pursuers; and as they follow on his track, and gain upon him every instant, they hail his decreasing strength with joy. 'Stop thief!' Ay, stop him for God's sake, were it only in mercy!" (Dickens, 2014: 61)

Even though one could deem the chase to be the characteristic of people trying to help, it is considered comical as it turns out to be a race for bringing justice. With the possibility of minding their jobs and continuing their work, the chase becomes an intricate

play of innocent Oliver running through the streets trying to evade them and the mob chasing after him while passersby shouted in their support. After finally catching him, people try to play the role of justice. Here Dickens in a brief instance brings forth the comedic value of the police as *"...a police officer (who is generally the last person to arrive in such cases) at that moment made his way through the crowd, and seized Oliver by the collar."* (Dickens, 2014: 62) In such a passage, Dickens simultaneously criticizes society for trying executing justice and the law enforcement for being unable to ascertain dominance and be the first to apprehend a potential suspect.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens once again takes up the chance of incorporating the comedy of character but this time focusing it on a whole nation as a collective character. In fifteenth chapter of the novel, young Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley go to America in search of new life and business possibilities. Almost instantly, before even disembarking the ship Martin and Mark are bombarded by news-boys trying to sell their newspapers:

"'Here's this morning's New York Sewer!' cried one. 'Here's this morning's New York Stabber! Here's the New York Family Spy! Here's the New York Private Listener! Here's the New York Peeper! Here's the New York Plunderer! Here's the New York Keyhole Reporter! Here's the New York Rowdy Journal! Here's all the New York papers!" (Dickens, 2000: 249)

Cataloguing the range of subjects various newspapers seem to sensationalize, Dickens comically expresses how commercial Americans have become. *"Here's some of the twelfth thousand of to-day's Sewer, with the best accounts of the markets, and all the shipping news, and four whole columns of country correspondence, and a full account of the Ball at Mrs White's last night, where all the beauty and fashion of New York was assembled, with the Sewer's own particulars of the private lives of all the ladies that was there!" "Here's the Sewer's exposure of the Wall Street Gang, and the Sewer's exposure of the Washington Gang, and the Sewer's exclusive account of a flagrant act of dishonesty committed by the Secretary of State when he was eight years old; now communicated, at a great expense, by his own nurse."* (Dickens, 2000: 249-250) After meeting with Colonel Diver, the chief editor of Rowdy's Journal and Jefferson Brick, journal's war correspondent in the office of the newspaper, Martin is given a fresh number of the newspapers to read. Through a masterly dialogue Dickens here bespeaks the duality of the Americans:

"'Why, it's horribly personal,' said Martin.

The colonel seemed much flattered by this remark; and said he hoped it was.

'We are independent here, sir,' said Mr Jefferson Brick. 'We do as we like.'

'If I may judge from this specimen,' returned Martin, 'there must be a few thousands here rather the reverse of independent, who do as they don't like.'

'Well! They yield to the mighty mind of the Popular Instructor, sir,' said the colonel. 'They rile up,[…] sometimes; but in general we have a hold upon our citizens both in public and in private life, which is as much one of the ennobling institutions of our happy country as – '

*'As n***** slavery itself,' suggested Mr Brick.*

'En–tirely so,' remarked the colonel." (Dickens, 2000: 256)

The duality itself bases on the fact that while they consider themselves to be liberal and the remarkable representations of humans, they were still relying heavily on the aspect of slavery. Through Martin, Dickens expresses the mistreatment and the idea of slavery itself. The abolition of slavery in United Kingdom came in 1833, whilst in America it came in 1865. Knowing that this novel was published in 1844, it is obvious that slaves were still being used. Another jab Martin pokes at this duality is when all three of them arrive at Pawkins's Boarding House:

"'Is the major in-doors?' inquired the colonel, as he entered.

'Is it the master, sir?' returned the girl, with a hesitation which seemed to imply that they were rather flush of majors in that establishment.

'The master!' said Colonel Diver, stopping short and looking round at his war correspondent.

'Oh! The depressing institutions of that British empire, colonel!' said Jefferson Brick. 'Master!' 'What's the matter with the word?' asked Martin.

'I should hope it was never heard in our country, sir: that's all,' said Jefferson Brick: 'except when it is used by some degraded Help,[…] as new to the blessings of our form of government, as this Help is. There are no masters here.'

'All ''owners'', are they?' said Martin." (Dickens, 2000: 259)

This short dialogue also divulges their obsession with titles, something that Dickens also finds back home in the character of Mrs. Pocket in *Great Expectations*. During his time spent at Pawkins's house, Martin comically express his views of the hosts. During dinner, *"…very few words were spoken; and everybody seemed to eat his utmost in self-defence, as if a famine were expected to set in before breakfast time to-morrow morning, and it had become high time to assert the first law of nature."* (Dickens, 2000: 263) To express how same-minded they all are, Dickens humorously through the character of Martin wonders if their minds were to be switched, anybody would notice the difference. *"…the rest were strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other, and nobody would have found it out."* (Dickens, 2000: 265) As Americans appear to be profit-prone, Dickens in a subtly comic manner explains that it could be *"…summed up in one word– dollars. All their cares, hopes, joys, affections, virtues, and associations, seemed to be melted down into dollars. Whatever the chance contributions that fell into the slow cauldron of their talk, they made the gruel thick and slab […] with dollars. Men were weighed by their dollars,[…] measures gauged by their dollars; life was auctioneered, appraised, put up, and knocked down for its dollars."* (Dickens, 2000: 266)

It is clear that Dickens, by means of his protagonist Martin Chuzzlewit, stereotypes the American society based solely on these few characters. It could also be deduced that these were probably Dickens's own reflections the first time he came to visit the United States. Many critics of that time attacked this type of stereotyping with Dickens himself apologizing to Americans next time he came to the United States after the publication of the novel.

Even though the comedy of American character was compacted into few characters, the comedy of the British character, better known to him, was much broader and heavily ridiculed in *Bleak House*. It is only logical to see the instances from general to individual. At the beginning of the book, while providing the introduction into Lord and Lady Dedlock, Dickens also comically interjects about the British judicial system being long and tedious. *"Sir Leicester has no objection to an interminable Chancery suit. It is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing."* (Dickens, 2018: 11)

When describing of the English society in general in Chapter 40, Dickens strongly alludes that while the government is failing at sustaining itself, people do not seem to care and much rather enjoy themselves in earthly pleasures:

“Still England has been some weeks in the dismal strait of having no pilot (as was well observed by Sir Leicester Dedlock) to weather the storm; and the marvellous part of the matter is that England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as the old world did in the days before the flood.” (Dickens, 2018: 484)

Dickens also ascribes London with a disposition of jocosity seen when one of the solicitors from Kenge and Carboy’s helps Esther Summerson from the coach.

“He was very obliging, and as he handed me into a fly after superintending the removal of my boxes, I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.

"Oh, dear no, miss," he said. "This is a London particular."

I had never heard of such a thing.

"A fog, miss," said the young gentleman.

"Oh, indeed!" said I.” (Dickens, 2018: 25)

People are so used to the fog being present that it could be interpreted jokingly that it has become a part of their everyday life. Dickens does not shy away from characterizing comically the social classes themselves. In this case the high class, with particular instance being when Mr. Tulkinghorn visits Lord and Lady Dedlock and pleasantries are exchanged. The interposition of the author offers the reader a humorous reaction:

“Mr. Tulkinghorn is quite well. Sir Leicester is quite well. My Lady is quite well. All highly satisfactory. The lawyer, with his hands behind him, walks at Sir Leicester's side along the terrace. My Lady walks upon the other side.” (Dickens, 2018: 139) The author follows the next piece of dialogue using the same vestige. *“"We expected you before," says Sir Leicester. A gracious observation. As much as to say, "Mr. Tulkinghorn, we remember your existence when you are not here to remind us of it by your presence. We bestow a fragment of our minds upon you, sir, you see!"”* (Dickens, 2018: 139)

The titles and hierarchies ironized in the American setting in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, become the means of prestige and influence in England. Dickens talks about this particular

character of English society when Esther Summerson, talking to Miss Flite, brings up the fact that in order to get the title one must participate monetarily:

"I said it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful services, however good and great, unless occasionally when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money." (Dickens, 2018: 432)

Miss Flite's response offers that jovial but oblivious knowledge of the subject, making her comment part of her character comedy slightly humorous:

""Why, good gracious," said Miss Flite, "how can you say that? Surely you know, my dear, that all the greatest ornaments of England in knowledge, imagination, active humanity, and improvement of every sort are added to its nobility! Look round you, my dear, and consider. YOU must be rambling a little now, I think, if you don't know that this is the great reason why titles will always last in the land!"" (Dickens, 2018: 432)

As far as comedy of individual characters, Lady Dedlock's humor is interpreted through her need to be in tune with fashion trends. At the beginning of the book, Lady Dedlock has arrived to Lincolnshire to rest for a few days before going to Paris. *"The fashionable intelligence says so for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise were to be unfashionable."* (Dickens, 2018: 7) Dickens here jokingly plays with the idea that since Lady Dedlock is quite famous in the social circles, her every move is prone to scrutiny, displaying it through the concept of fashionable intelligence or simply put a rumor mill of fashionable people whose task is to know other people's business. Thus, the character supposedly has to be in touch with latest styles in order to sustain highly influential position.

Comedy of character in *Great Expectations* revolves around two female characters, Mrs. Joe Gargery and Belinda Pocket. Mrs. Joe Gargery, Pip's sister, is comically portrayed as a possible reverse stereotype. It was common to describe the male characters as tough, demanding and rulers of the house while female characters were more timid and subdued characters. Much like Mrs. Corney in *Oliver Twist*, Mrs. Joe Gargery is the matriarch in charge of the house. From Pip's description of her sister, reader's laughter is prompted when stated that she brought Pip and her husband 'by hand'. *"My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out for*

myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand." (Dickens, 2009: 10)

Dickens also captures a comic description of her character when Joe and Pip's late return from Miss Havisham causes anger in Mrs. Joe that, instead of relaxing, she takes up cleaning the house:

"When she had exhausted a torrent of such inquiries, she threw a candlestick at Joe, burst into a loud sobbing, got out the dustpan—which was always a very bad sign—put on her coarse apron, and began cleaning up to a terrible extent." (Dickens, 2009: 137)

On the other hand, much like Colonel Diver and few other characters in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Belinda Pocket, a daughter of a knight *"…had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless."* (Dickens, 2009: 265) Dickens humorously hyperbolizes her obsession with titles and social position in that *"…she pays no attention to housekeeping or to her young children Alick, Jane, Charlotte, Fanny, Joe, and an unnamed baby, who "tumble" in the care of two neglectful nursemaids."* (Davis, 2007: 158)

As seen from this small chapter, comedy of character as a comedic instrument is not really straightforward and not always detectable. For it to take effect, characters are prone to having one or more exaggerated feature that come into play almost immediately, to the point of stereotyping. However, this comedic device cannot be interchanged with stereotype, as stereotype implies *"…to believe unfairly that all people or things with a particular characteristic are the same."*[2] Dickens did not make that mistake as his characters' exaggerations largely differed and could not make a parallel. The parallel these characters made where with the reader instead, wanting to prompt laughter as a reaction. Understanding the assignment, he went one step forward, at times taking the comedy of character and amplifying it into to a larger unit of social classes, cities and even entire nations. Attributing a comedic instance allowed for a more subtle jab at the characters and more widespread reaction in the reader.

[2] www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype (Date accessed: 1st December 2021)

3.3. INVECTIVE

One of the highly unlikely comedic devices mentioned in this thesis is certainly invective. Although it is definable as harsh insulting language, it actually suggests a greater verbal and rhetorical skill.[3] Dickens uses invective but still adds jocosity to it not only to inveigh Victorian reality but to truly accentuate the existing aspect of savage comedy.

The most prominent use of invective can be seen in *Bleak House*. At the beginning of the novel, the author interposes to deliver a harsh message about the current judicial status quo of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce wishing for it burn in a great pyre so the people involved in the suit could be freed of that enormous pressure. *"If all the injustice it has committed and all the misery it has caused could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre— why so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!"* (Dickens, 2018: 7)

In a similar fashion, Dickens attacks Chancery Court oust through the character of Mr. Boythorn, humorously stating that the only way the reform of the court could happen if it was blown up, suggesting people would be better off without it:

"'There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery on the face of the earth!' said Mr. Boythorn. "Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it in the least!'" (Dickens, 2018: 101)

The same vituperation from Mr. Boythorn came later in the novel when he describes judges and people of similar occupation as stupid wondering why it takes so long to finish the legal case in question:

"As to corporations, parishes, vestry-boards, and similar gatherings of jolter-headed clods who assemble to exchange such speeches that, by heaven, they ought to be worked in quicksilver mines for the short remainder of their miserable existence, if it were only to

[3] www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/invective (Date accessed: 1st December 2021)

prevent their detestable English from contaminating a language spoken in the presence of the sun—as to those fellows, who meanly take advantage of the ardour of gentlemen in the pursuit of knowledge to recompense the inestimable services of the best years of their lives, their long study, and their expensive education with pittances too small for the acceptance of clerks, I would have the necks of every one of them wrung and their skulls arranged in Surgeons' Hall for the contemplation of the whole profession in order that its younger members might understand from actual measurement, in early life, HOW thick skulls may become!"” (Dickens, 2018: 144)

One of the most pervasive invectives in the novel comes from Dickens when Lord Boodle arrives to Sir Leicester Dedlock and they discuss politics:

“Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even a Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment that supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can't provide for Noodle!” “On the other hand, the Right Honourable William Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else that the shipwreck of the country—about which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question—is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into alliance with Fuffy, you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy, you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy, you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy, and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business habits of Muffy. All this,

instead of being as you now are, dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!" (Dickens, 2018: 137)

Dickens use this exhausting catalogue to savagely attack and satirize the existence of *"…the do-nothing aristocrats and politicians who maintain the political and social status quo."* (Davis, 2007: 46) The same catalogue is surreptitiously repeated again to further cement the comedy of the situation but also the inability of a functioning government:

"England has been in a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no government. It is a mercy that the hostile meeting between those two great men, which at one time seemed inevitable, did not come off, because if both pistols had taken effect, and Coodle and Doodle had killed each other, it is to be presumed that England must have waited to be governed until young Coodle and young Doodle, now in frocks and long stockings, were grown up. This stupendous national calamity, however, was averted by Lord Coodle's making the timely discovery that if in the heat of debate he had said that he scorned and despised the whole ignoble career of Sir Thomas Doodle, he had merely meant to say that party differences should never induce him to withhold from it the tribute of his warmest admiration; while it as opportunely turned out, on the other hand, that Sir Thomas Doodle had in his own bosom expressly booked Lord Coodle to go down to posterity as the mirror of virtue and honour." (Dickens, 2018: 483-484)

Although only largely represented in *Bleak House*, invective as a literary tool offered Dickens to reflect on and lash the absurdity of the governmental and judiciary system in the Victorian-era England. While most invectives boast themselves on harsh, denunciatory speech or writing, the author adds humorous elements to the vicious speeches not only to further satirize but also to hyperbolize the incongruence of both institutions, simultaneously hoping to incite a reaction within reader.

CONCLUSION

Exploring his literary prowess, Dickens bases itself on describing the Victorian-era England, by focusing on small constituencies such as social classes, judiciary and government systems and more. These components are corroborated by real-life reflections that the author himself experienced during his life. Through the prism of realism, not only does he as an author proliferate in bringing forth certain situations and characters, but the reader too benefits from it as she/he opens to connect to the certain elements in the novel. Among many literary devices used to realistically portray the society of that time, Dickens uses comedy to point out to the problems of the British society.

But what really is comedy? This question could be harder to answer since different people would provide different definitions. To give a general overview, comedy is a method of connecting to certain situations and people by pointing out their flaws encased in a bubble of amusement. Dickens cleverly incorporates comedy into the characters simultaneously aiming to accentuate their flaws. Such technique works on two fronts. One focuses on amusing the reader, by offering such rich protagonists and antagonists interpolated with meticulously drawn out plot. The second front offers commentary on the issues troubling the Victorian England, with child labor and inept justice system being the most recognizable ones.

How does comedy elicit laughter and humor? In its root it has to have an element that will cause a jocose reaction and that will make the reader connect to the character. For Dickens, the elements to trigger a reader's response were literary devices of irony, grotesque, comedy of manner and invective. Irony provided for a distinctive look into socio-political quagmires and their absurdities. Grotesque implemented itself in the novels as a realistic trait. However exaggerated it may seem, combining it with humor served Dickens to disrepute the social conundrums. Comedy of character intensified the meticulous characterization and their placement into social circles by adding the comedic element, thus rousing a reaction. Invective offered Dickens true power of taking the comedy to a savage level heavily criticizing the inner workings of Victorian England.

With such variety of literary devices, could it be possible that Dickens understood comedy differently from his predecessors and could it be that we understand comedy differently from Dickens or perhaps ancient Greeks? The answer to the first part of the

question lies with the possibility that Dickens understood comedy differently from Defoe and Fielding. In its core, Dickens drew inspirations from his literary paragons, but he made the novels his own. His works are elevated because they not only tell the story but also are the story. Their narration not only produced comedic reactions but also helped to approach the heavier and more complex themes: the judicial system in *Bleak House*, the growing up of character as seen in *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, finding the inner purpose in *Pickwick Papers* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The second part of the question contains a more somber answer. Comedy as a genre is malleable. The comedy of Dickens or Aristophanes will not carry the same gravitas as the modern comedy nor will it be understood as it was intended.

Whatever the story of comedy is, such works of Aristophanes, Rabelais, Defoe, Fielding and Dickens allow us to follow the story of comedy as it takes many forms and as it perseveres to be a compelling and purveying medium for provoking humorous reactions and a challenge to cultural and literary criticism.

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