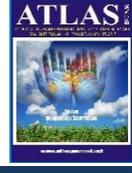




ATLAS INTERNATIONAL REFEREED JOURNAL ON SOCIAL SCIENCES

ISSN:2619-936X



Article Arrival Date:26.10.2018

Published Date:30.12.2018

2018 / December

Vol 4, Issue:15

Pp:1757-1770

Disciplines: Areas of Social Studies Sciences (Economics and Administration, Tourism and Tourism Management, History, Culture, Religion, Psychology, Sociology, Fine Arts, Engineering, Architecture, Language, Literature, Educational Sciences, Pedagogy & Other Disciplines in Social Sciences)

LAUGHING AT PEOPLE IN PAIN: DARK (BLACK) HUMOR IN HOWARD BARKER'S THE CASTLE

HOWARD BARKER'IN THE CASTLE ADLI OYUNUNDA ACI ÇEKEN İNSANLARA
GÜLMEK

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ABSTRACT

Since the second half of the twentieth century, writers and scientists in different fields have a great interest in the subject of Black Humor, which is used as a tool to survive. As we have seen in our study, Black Humor is seen as a means both to forget and to cause the others to forget the troubles following great disasters or wars. One of these writers, Howard Barker, in his play The Castle (1985), addresses the state of mankind through Black Humor and criticizes contemporary society with a story in Medieval Europe. The rigid hierarchies of the societies, the terrible massacres of wars, the loss of the united identity, or the shocking effects of modern society are seen ridiculed, acknowledging on the one hand the state of humanity as bleak and confirming the uniqueness of the individual on the other. We encounter one of the most beautiful examples of black humor when a landowner who returns to his home after taking part in a holy war to save to Jerusalem, the holy city of Christianity and Judaism, to see that his land was occupied by a new system of thinking and a new sense of life. The only thing that the reader and the audience can do in this situation is to laugh, because the only defense mechanism against the existing pains is the Black Humor.

Keywords: Black Humour, The Castle, Howard Barker, Crusades, Laughter

ÖZET

Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısından bu yana, yazarlar ve farklı alanlardaki bilim insanları, hayatta kalmak için bir araç olarak kullanılan Kara Mizah konusuna karşı büyük bir ilgi duymaktadırlar. Bizim çalışmamızda da görüldüğü gibi, Kara Mizah büyük felaketlerin ya da dehşet verici sonuçlar ortaya çıkaran savaşların ardından sıkıntıları unutmak ve unutturmak için bir araç olarak görülür. Bu yazarlardan biri olan Howard Barker, The Castle (1985) adlı oyununda Kara Mizah aracılığıyla insanlığın durumunu ele almakta ve çağdaş toplumu Ortaçağ Avrupa'sında geçen bir hikâyeyle eleştirmektedir. Topluların katı hiyerarşileri, savaşların korkunç katliamları, birleşik kimliğin kaybedilmesi veya modern toplumun şok edici etkilerinin hicvedildiği bu eser, bir taraftan insanlığın durumunun kasvetli olduğunu kabul ederken, diğer yandan ise bireyin eşsizliğini onaylar. Hristiyanlığın ve Yahudiliğin kutsal kenti olan Kudüs'ü kurtarmak için kutsal savaşa katılan bir toprak sahibinin eve geri döndüğünde kendi topraklarını yeni bir düşünce sistemi ve yaşam anlayışı tarafından işgal edilmiş olarak bulması Kara mizahın en güzel örneklerinden biri olarak karşımıza çıkar. Okuyucuya ve izleyiciye düşen ise, bu acı duruma gülmekten başka bir şey değildir, çünkü mevcut acılar karşısındaki tek savunma mekanizması Kara Mizah'tır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kara Mizah, The Castle, Howard Barker, Haçlı Seferleri, Gülme

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first part of our study, we will give the definition of the term Dark (Black) Humor with references to its history and the most important writers and playwrights who have been known for being the practitioners of it. As there is not a definition shared by all the practitioners and the theorists of it, various approaches will be given briefly to make the concept easier for the reader to understand.

In the second part of this study, we will analyze the Play, *The Castle* by Howard Barker to determine to what extent and how Barker uses Dark Humor in his play to reflect the situation of the modern men and women in a setting of the 12th century Europe. To make it easier to understand the events and the use of Dark Humor in the play which depends on the motives of the Crusades and the crusaders, we will give some specific information on the Crusades, who the crusaders were, and why they fought and how a war can be considered “holy”. Showing the struggle of male and female forces that wage a war to establish their order in the chaotic atmosphere they are in, we will try to express how Barker allows laughter in the face of the horrific offers to its readers as a form of liberty.

In the conclusion part, we will evaluate our study to see the results we have reached in the text we have studied and we will try to illustrate why and how we reached those results.

2. DARK HUMOR: DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Though there have been many attempts to define what Dark Humor is, there is not a certain definition which has a common acceptance (Pratt, 1993; Duckworth, 2006; Kayser, 1996; O’Neill 1993, Bloom, 2010). Thus, it is not very surprising that different critics, artists, playwrights or authors gave it different names such as *black humor*, *dark comedy*, *grim humor* or *gallows humor*. The reason lying behind is that Dark Humor manifests itself in any work of art by means of irony, whereby one says something meaning another and the vice versa is also possible (Bloom, 2010). Dark Humor does not have definite definitions and classification partially as a result of the diversity amongst the artists who are pronounced to be its masters. Performance artists, stand-up comics, caricaturists, satirists, playwrights and writers frequently make use of the techniques and highlights of dark humor. Richard Pryor, Kurt Vonnegut, Edward Albee, and Joseph Heller have all been accepted as the great practitioners of it (Walsh, 1984). Though their methods and field of art are different, they have similar visions and approaches. Every one of them sees the world and individuals’ place within it as ruthlessly adverse and unpredictable. S/he is observed as an "insensible object of manipulation" who is forever "rooted in a rootless world" (Barshay, 1977, p. 57).

It is nevertheless agreed by most that “it involves the grotesque, the morbid, the terrifying, or more generally the pain, fear, and disgust which those things cause” (O’Neill, 1993, p. 62). Another mostly shared view by the ones who study on dark humor is that the Anglo-Irish priest Jonathan Swift is consistently identified as the originator of the concept/term with his *A Modest Proposal* (1729), and his going off the point ceaselessly into bitter ironies in *Gulliver’s Travels* (Bloom & Hooby (Vol. ed.), 2010; O’Neill, 1993; Breton, 1972). “Of specifically dark humor Jonathan Swift is named the father of black humor by [Andre] Breton himself” (O’Neill, 1993, pp. 66-67).

Brom Weber (1973), in his essay “The Mode of Black Humor”, defines dark humor as: humor which detects motive for laughter in what has typically been considered as too serious for triviality: “the death of men, the disintegration of social institutions, mental and physical disease, deforming, suffering, anguish, privation, and terror” (p. 388). On the other hand, Columbia Encyclopedia (2013) describes the term as:

“In literature, drama, and film, grotesque or morbid humor used to express the absurdity, insensitivity, paradox, and cruelty of the modern world. Ordinary characters or situations are usually exaggerated far beyond the limits of normal satire or irony. Black humor uses devices often associated with tragedy and is sometimes equated with tragic farce.”

In his unpublished M.A. thesis entitled "Dark Humor in Imperial Latin Literature" (2015), Mitchell Reece Pentzer defines dark humor as “the humorous exploitation of taboos like sexual immorality, cannibalism, and especially death” and adds that it “appears across a

variety of genres of the era, from the “high” epic and tragedy, to prose historiography, to the “low” epigram” (p. iii).

Black humor is summed up by Janoff (1974) thoroughly as:

Black humor cannot be described as being pessimistic or simply lacking an affirmative moral voice. Rather, it lives outside these limits in a terrain of terrifying candor concerning the most extreme situations.’ (p. 303)

Interestingly, Harold Nicolson bases the roots of black humor (grim humor) on the British and refers to a black humor as a humorous approach to terrifying, or tragic events. For him: “This species of joke is peculiarly English, although incidentally one of the many elements which English and Scottish humor have in common” (1968, p. 44). However, it is generally agreed that in modern sense “Black Humor” is a derivative of “L’ humor noir”, a French phrase, ~~which was~~ created by Andre Breton, the frontrunner of French surrealism who asserted that “black humor is bounded by too many things, such as stupidity, skeptical irony, joking without seriousness, but it is pre-eminently the mortal enemy of sentimentality... which is presented too often as poetry.” (Pratt, 1993, p. 17) Hitherto, for the originator of the term, André Breton, dark humor was not a literary category but a manner or viewpoint that attacked sentimentality and conventions, both public and literary, in a world of absurd (O’Neill, 1993).

Dark humor is often associated with the very concerns of Modernism with its ambivalence, chaotic chronology, plots going nowhere, and a conflicting, or even unreliable, narrative stance as the general characteristics of the works with it. It deals with violent or shocking events and questions both the values and perceptions of its readers, and represents, at the same time, the disturbing and the humorous. “Like Modernism itself, dark humor defies any system that does not match with personal experience or intuition, whether that system is political, moral, sacred, or even narrative” (Colletta, 2003, p. 2). There is a comedic order on the one side and the chaos on the other. By means of the atmosphere of oppression in the text, the present ideologies and views in the world are refused: the strict hierarchies of the societies, the horrific slaughter of the wars, the loss of unified identity, or the shocking effects of modern technology (Colletta, 2003, p. 2)

Ziv & Zajdman (1993) claim that psychologists, after Freud, perceive such humor as a mental process within a suffering individual, a process in which "the ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality. [. . .] It insists that it cannot be compelled to suffer, that . . . traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure" (Freud, 1961, p. 162). It is expressed in an article by Paul Lewis, entitled “Three Jews and a Blindfold: The Politics of Gallows Humor” (1993) that the most confusing issue tormenting discussions of dark humor is both mental and political, rotating around the unconsidered hypothesis that this humor is therapeutic. Freud strongly asserts that dark humor frees us to the extent we allow ourselves to keep away from the pain. Oberdlik (1942), through the nine months he spent in Czechoslovakia occupied by the Nazis, asserts that this humor makes us free to the degree that it "bolsters the resistance of the victims and, at the same time... undermines the morale of the oppressors" (p. 713).

There are also some critics who are more optimistic about the function of dark humor. They regard dark humor as a resistance or surviving mechanism, which provides one sort of liberation or another from the despotic or fatalistic circumstances that the audience or characters within a narrative encounter. It is the means of distancing the self from problems or wresting a small victory in freedom away from defeat (Pratt, 1993; Duckworth, 2006; Kayser, 1996). It is not easy for most of the people to accept the presence of any type of humor in the representation of the Holocaust. However, Christopher (2015) indicates that no matter how disturbing it may be, humor in the Holocaust exists. He also cites that “this is illustrated

extremely well in a study by Ostrower (1998) who, on interviewing a Holocaust survivor, was told:”

‘When I was interviewed for Spielberg and they asked me, what I thought was the reason I survived, they probably expected me to answer good fortune or other things. I said that I thought it was laughter or humor.’ (Christopher, An introduction to black humour as a coping mechanism for student paramedics, 2015, p. 611):

It can be argued that that the use of humor during the representation of the Holocaust did not in any way diminish the objective horrors. The representation was rather subjective, so made it easier to deal with those horrors. (Ostrower, 2015). As stated by many survivors Ostrower interviewed (2015), humor functioned as a stress reducer and was one of the strategies individuals created to adapt to it. Humor assisted the troubled and ill-treated people to endure their suffering and face the reality of their situation without going crazy (Morreall, 1997). Kuhlman (1980) supports this view stating that humor “proposes an illogical, even psychotic, response to irresolvable dilemmas and offers a way of being sane in an insane place” (p. 1085)

Blake Hobby (2010) expresses that all humor contains negations, absurdities, and dark realities about our lives, containing our powerlessness to overthrow death and the disputed way we tackle this darkest of all dark truths (p. 57). For the people who feel powerless and alone in the face of all these difficulties, humor also has a cohesive function, generating unity in those laughing together at the persecutors (Morreall, 1997). Thus, Absurd black humor tends to provide characters who seem to belong to the world of comedy. They are dishonorable victims with insignificant troubles, limited responses, and little mental intensity. Such characters do not increase inside the direction of a piece; they are their personal dilemma and will all the time be so. In most comedies, they will be the exceptions to an otherwise wholesome and functioning society, however in absurd dark humor there is not a different kind of man or woman. Without the assessment of 'ordinary' characters, we cannot be positive that the individuals we see are aberrations, and so now we do not recognize what to anticipate or recognize a way to judge (Barshay, 1977, p. 57).

Winston (1978) claims that the achievement of dark humor lies in its potential to disorient the audience; the spectator's perspective and distance from the work need to persistently be shifted: Frequently we are made to laugh at a character and then abruptly to make out that we share his dilemma and thus have been laughing at ourselves all along. As Pentzer (2015) explains, humor works to restore or maintain a potential damage of self-respect and helps victims of violence tolerate the inexplicable. Pentzer similarly states that Humor also assists in reversing established structures of power, which set accepted notions of truth into place: “It is dark humor which can convey simultaneously the pathetic and bathetic, the horrible and the hilarious” (p. 16).

After giving the foremost definitions and characteristics of the concept of ‘Dark (Black) Humor, in the next part of our study we will focus on dark humor in Howard Barker’s *The Castle*; that is, specifically, the exploitation of human subjects including death, the restoration of the order by force, obscenity, oppression, sex, and other taboos for humorous effect.

3. DARK (BLACK) HUMOR IN *THE CASTLE* BY HOWARD BARKER

As Williams (2002) asserts, everything initiated in the Middle Ages when human beings were under the peril of being killed by merciless invaders who might attack anybody at any minute, diseases or the famine. Life most of the people were forced to experience was so hard that an afterlife filled with the blessings of God was incomprehensibly attractive; furthermore, the church guaranteed its devotees that they would be in heaven when they died for the sake of

the doctrines of the Christian Church and was much stronger than most of the modern religions today. In the play, *The Castle*, Stucley is a knight who returns from the Crusades to his domain after seven years he spent fighting with the Muslims in Jerusalem. It can be understood easily that he is not one of the people who were forced to take part in the Crusades that Williams (2002) mentioned. As he is a feudal lord who owns a domain, his motives for taking part in the Crusades cannot be limited to the poor crusaders who dream seeing the paradise in which they will be given everything they imagine. His motive must be either to prove that he is a real believer who is ready to risk everything that he has for the sake of his religion or, as a knight, he may be in pursuit of leaving an *enduring fame* behind to be remembered even after his death.

To see the dark humor that the play consists, it is very necessary to discuss what started the Crusades, who the crusaders were, and why they fought and how any war can be considered “holy” (Williams, 2002, p. Foreword). The road going to the Crusades begins when Pope Urban II summoned all the French nobles to a Church council in a field at Clermont on November 27, 1095. In the field which was crowded with thousands of lords, knights, vassals, princes from France and Germany, Pope Urban begins as follows:

O race of Franks, race most beloved and chosen by God! From the confines of Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople a horrible tale has gone forth and very frequently has been brought to our ears that a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, has invaded the lands of Christians and has depopulated them by the sword, pillage, and fire (Williams, 2002, p. 26).

The Pope continues asserting that their altars are persistently being defiled and destroyed by the horrible infidels who circumcise the Christians, “and the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font” (Williams, 2002, p. 26). Pope remarks that all the true Christian believers in Jerusalem including lords, knights and vessels have been tortured and slaughtered, just like animals in the slaughterhouses. The level of agitation rises when Pope says that the Christian women are being raped abominably by the heathen unbelievers.

The pope sees that the audience are all in the palm of his holy hand, and he goes on:

On whom, then, rests the labour of avenging these wrongs, and of recovering this territory, if not upon you—you upon whom, above all others, God has conferred remarkable glory in arms, great bravery, and strength to humble the heads of those who resist you? Let the deeds of your ancestors encourage you—the glory and grandeur of Charlemagne—and your other monarchs. Let the Holy Sepulcher of our Lord and Savior, now held by unclean nations, arouse you, and the holy places that are now stained with pollution. (Durant, 1950, p. 587)

Pope declares all the people that Jerusalem is a land fruitful above all others, a paradise of delights, situated at the center of the earth, and beseeches them to go to her aid. Embarking on this expedition eagerly means, adds Pope, the remission of their sins, and the guarantee of the never-ending glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is therefore possible to say that more than 60.000 ordinary people and 6.000 knights (France J. , 1994, pp. 122-42), willingly decided to fight against the enemy called infidels by the Pope have different motives.

Stucley, the major character of the play *The Castle*, is one of the knights who returns to his domain after years of fighting in the Holy Land. All his followers lose their lives either during the fight or fell during the wayside. There are only two persons, who safely return home with him, one retainer named Batter and a captive Arab engineer, Krak. It can be understood clearly from their responses that none of them imagined much to have transformed while they were not at home. Nevertheless, they are shocked or even horrified to realize just what the

women did during their absence, most remarkably the closing down of the church and the lack of social status. They do not seem ready to accept a new society in which everyone is equal in the way that the women now are. “The crusaders were called to liberate God’s land, Jerusalem, from the infidel, upon whom they should wreak God’s vengeance” (France J., 1999, p. 204) but when they return to their home, they encounter the fact that their own homes have been transformed and liberated in their absence, in a way they have never imagined or desired. The people, who fought for the recapture of the Holy Land for years and lost almost everything they had for this purpose, could have never predicted that their lands would be captured by a new enemy while they were fighting for the Holy Land.

It is shocking that the women have developed a different way of life which is mostly feminist, communal and non-exploitative of human or natural powers when they were away. Most shockingly, “Stucley’s wife, Ann, is involved in this on the level of a personal as well as political commitment in so far as she is the lover of Skinner, a ploughman’s widow, whose feminism is both militant and profoundly ideological” (Lamb, 2005, p. 94). The feudal lord, Stucley who goes to rescue the Christian women from being raped by the infidels in the Holy land as Pope suggests, has to face the fact that her wife has a heart-to-heart relationship with another woman. Though Stucley is offended by what appears to him to be the breaking of the holy order in the society or the Great Chain of Being, his chief main concern is to find her wife, Ann, and to maintain their relationship which he carries like the Holy Grail in this heart during all these military expeditions. The knight who went to recapture the Holy Land is now obliged not only to reestablish the social order in his domain but also to give the fight to recapture the heart of his beloved against not a man but Skinner, a woman of low status.

The only person who has reached a state of sexual freedom is not Stucley’s wife Ann; in fact, almost all the female characters in the play are sexually free. When Cant, a woman from the lower class sees her lord, Stucley, she expresses her inner feelings about her (whom) openly stating: “I would kiss you if you’d let me, or in the bush there something better-” (p. 13). Every word that comes out of her mouth pushes Stucley into a little more confusion. She goes on making him more confused saying: “Oh, come on, we’ve had old men here, who only move by memory, not great stallion bits like yours, all -” (p. 13). Stucley is gradually able to understand that something has already changed in his land and he desperately tries to understand what has happened. Cant’s next move is enough to drive Stucley almost crazy:

CANT. My man’s not come back so you do his business for him – here

– [*She goes to lift her skirts. Stucley knocks her aside with a staggering blow.*]

STUCLEY. I won’t be fouled by you, mad bitch, what’s happened here, what! I slash your artery for you! [*He draws a knife*] Down you, in the muck and nettle! [*She screams*] MY TERRITORY! [*He straddles her.*]

In this case, the person who makes the first diagnosis and suggests solution is Krak but he, as a stranger, is not almost aware of to what extent the people and their view of life might have changed: “The only requirement is the restoration of a little order, the rudiments of organization established, and so on”. However, like all the other women who do not want their husbands to return and to restore the order, Ann clearly states she does not want Stucley and the values he represents in their new feministic order:

ANN: My husband has turned skinny and beautiful. Was a fat puppy when he left. Why was he not slaughtered like the others? Stood around him, did they, taking arrows meant for him? The sole survivor of some mincing scrap? NO ONE REQUIRED YOU BACK, TELL HIM.

Skinner, Ann’s lover and the old widow of the ploughman, expresses how deep the level of the change is:

First there was the bailiff, and we broke the bailiff. And then there was God, and we broke God. And lastly there was cock, and we broke that too. Freed the ground, freed religion, freed the body. And went up this hill, standing together naked like the old female pack, growing to eat and not to market, friends to cattle whom we milked but never slaughtered, joining the strips and dancing in the commons, the three days labour that we gave to priests gave instead to the hungry, turned the tithe barn into a hospital and FOUND CUNT BEAUTIFUL that we had hidden and suffered shame for, its lovely shapelessness, its color all miraculous, what they had made dirty or worshipped out of ignorance. . . . (pp. 16-17).

The change can be felt in every field of life. It begins first in the structure of the society and the method of governance and then there comes the change in the structure and the doctrines of the religion and the last and the most important change makes itself felt in the social structure of the community depending on the dominance of the men. All of these lead to the transformation of the people's lifestyles and freedom. They begin to stand together naked and natural as animals living according to the rules of nature not those of traditions, conventions, or human-made laws. They use every source of the nature to survive, but they never abuse or use them for materialistic purposes. As they are not obliged to give their three days' labor to the priests as it used to be, they are now able to support the people in need. The church in which Stucley and Ann married was turned into a building on the point of collapse in which "pigeons shittin' up the belfry" (p. 16) .

All of these make Stucley almost crazy, and in a visually uncontrollable anger, he orders the enslaved Arab engineer Krak to build a huge castle and cut ties between the people in the castle and the ones beyond the walls of it so that he can restore the order. Krak, a stranger cut off from any positive ties with the land wherein he is forced to live and therefore, disgusting his captors, "plans the castle as a motor of destruction pointed as much at its owners as their potential enemies" (Lamb, 2005, p. 95). It is an attempt to reorganize the system to its original form but it is useless. Colletta (2003) claims in her book *Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel: Triumph of Narcissism* that the writers using dark humor in their works focus on the upper class to suggest that if people who have financial power and status are unable to successfully negotiate the chaotic and threatening forces of change in any time, it is in vain to try to reorganize the system so that it can address the requests of the individuals functioning within it (p. 4).

It is very interesting that the only character who proves to be the rationalist is Krak, the captured Arab, "espousing the scientific perspective of a universe ordered by inexorable laws". Stucley who spent seven years with Arabs, whom the Pope Urban II calls the accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God or the infidels, needs Krak to establish the castle that will reestablish the order. Though Krak and his people are humiliated for using arrows to kill the Christian nights as the bow and arrow are regarded to be the weapons of the serfs by Pope Urban II in his speech on November 27, 1095, now they are desperately in need of those infidels' help and intellect. However, Stucley is not aware of the fact that letting Krak construct the castle means losing the control of the community he has.

Much as Ann reacts, in the beginning, Krak in a hostile way and irrational way, when she sees him looking at the hills that he plans to build the castle, she is attracted to his seduction in the course of the time. Lamb (2005) associates Krak's gaze at the hill with "visual 'rape' of the hill" and claims that this is "a far more effective form of violence than Stucley's botched assault on Cant. It penetrates analytically – the limestone, and imposes geometrical form – the arc" (p. 100). Stucley is on the verge of losing not only his control over his land but also his wife and the only lover.

In a desperate mood, Stucley tries to save their relationship and marriage by calling her attention to their wedding night and tries to agitate her describing how he has carried her image like a shrine in his heart through all the terror and humiliations of the years he spent fighting for the Holy Land.

STUCLEY. . . . what we did in Hungary I would not horrify you with – they got more barmy by the hour. Not me, though. I thought she'll take my bleeding feet in her warm place, she'll lay me down in clean sheets and work warm oils into my skin and food, we'll spend whole days at – but everything is contrary, must be, mustn't it, I who jumped in every pond of murder kept this one thing pure in my head, pictured you half-naked on an English night, your skin which was translucent from one angle and deep-furrowed from another, your odour even which I caught once in the middle of a scrap, do you believe that, even smells are stored. I'm sorry I chucked your loom out of the window, amazing strength comes out of temper, it's half a ton that thing if it's – trust me, what does that mean?

For Colletta (2005), this kind of overstated admiration of woman, within the principally feudal setting of the play, is intensely in accordance with the chivalric code of 'courtly love', the secular counterpart of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Stucley claims that he has struggled to remain 'pure' by means of his courtly love during all his sufferings, however, according to Juddon (2003), the ~~concept~~ of courtly love ends frequently with adultery and cannot stay pure (p. 165). It is also interesting that his 'Courtly Love' may have "probably [been] influenced by Arabic love poetry" (Baldick, 2001, p. 53)

In accordance with the general characteristics of dark humor, everything in the play seems so absurd and incomprehensible that there is nothing to do for the readers but to laugh. One can regard this reaction as a resigned one, but ~~in fact~~, it is both an assertive and an aggressive reaction. Indeed, it asserts that all the pain and suffering that people experienced or observed cannot overwhelm and destroy them. As Colletta (2003) indicates, humor, which is once used to give moral lessons or to criticize, turns out to be a means of defense and weapon and a hold on life. "In Modernist dark humor, social arrangements have become too fractured to offer the necessary conformity from which social generalizations can be extracted, and Modernist social satires abandon any hope of understanding the world." (Colletta, 2003, p. 6).

The play reflects the desperate struggle of the people to get on the social environment that they are trying to fit in. However, none of the characters accomplishes to have a place in the society, but the order they have given importance or longed for is different for each. This makes it impossible to create harmony and union as their understandings, desires, and dreams are different. The new order or the system which was established by Skinner and Ann means disorder for Stucley and for the others that (have) returned from the Holy War. This means that it is not possible to have a really shared experiment in a group or society. This leads people to break apart and alienate each other in the society. Hence, there is a close relationship between the disappointment that people feel and the use of dark humor to mirror it. As Colletta (2003) explains, modernist black humor, in fact, points out that it is both destructive and somewhat traumatic that believing in the existence of just and established disorder and the expectation of any order in the world is vain and that there is not any order (p. 8). This situation is the illustration of the view that "Black or gallows humor has long been recognized as having therapeutic value, particularly when used by individuals dealing with traumatic incident" (Christopher, 2015).

Stucley has somehow been unable to revive his relationship with Ann, and her refusal to sleep with him damages his self-esteem. He tries, in Act I, Scene Four, to regain his self-esteem by reorganizing his concept of religion, which insists on a male dominance. He is of the opinion that Christ was also a man and he descended among people with the aim of having sexual

relations with women. Stucley believes that reflecting Jesus Christ as a man without worldly desires and pleasure is a mistake. The man who spent seven years for the sake of his belief is now on the verge of disbelieving the present Christian doctrines and the description of Christ in the Bible as a castrated man. He expresses his suspicions about the Christ in the Bible saying: "... what agonized me I assure you, was not the absence of face but His castration, this Christ who never suffered for the woman, who never felt the feeling which MAKES NO SENSE" (p. 41). 'The power to erect' is the symbol of male dominance and authority over both the female society and the land man govern. For that reason, Stucley thinks that Christ must have been filled with worldly love and desires against women. As a result, he decides to establish his own church which he himself calls "Christ the Lover".

... Because in the body of the Magdalena He found the single place in which the madness of his father's world might be subdued. Unforgivable transgression the Lunatic could not forgive... (*Pause. STUCLEY is moved by his own perceptions.*)

You see, how once Christ is restored to cock, all contradictions are resolved... (p. 43)

To restore the order, he feels obliged to erect the castle in a very short period of time for he associates the erection with both his erection and male dominance on females and the land. In an allegorical sense, it is seen that the land on which the castle is being built is the equivalent of the female body and whoever controls the female body controls the society. Before the men returned to the land, it was a female society in which love and human tenderness were being revitalized by the women lead by Skinner. The reappearance of the men means a re-emergence of death and destruction, of a society without love where people mow meadow and cunt again and fucking will be equal to fertility as it was in the past.

STUCLEY. . . . No, I mean invoke Christ the lover around the estate. I mean increase the yield of the demesne and plant more a Plough the woods. I want a further hour off them, with Christ's encouragement, say Friday nights – (p.44)

As Gallant (1997) indicates, though the return of the men is not welcome, it stimulates some now unfamiliar inborn desires in Ann. These desires capture her and she once again accepts the male-dominated society and has a sexual intercourse with Krak, she gets pregnant afterwards. Though she has been married to Stucley for years, she did not conceive before. Paradoxically, Ann is fertilized by an Arab who has been regarded as an infidel, in a way which may be interpreted as the fertilization of Western culture by Arab culture during the Crusades.

Skinner, Ann's female lover, is the only one fighting against the occupation and is eventually punished for murder being condemned as a witch and forcibly chained to the corpse of one of her supposed victims. (p. 408). As a grotesque parody of her pregnancy, the decayed body of HOLIDAY, the construction officer whom she kills to prevent the construction of the castle, is strapped to her front (p.63). The male society re-establishes and restores religion, family, and justice, all of which depend on the savagery and sexuality of the world. The male-dominated society once again destroys love and compassion. Weber (1973) claims that Dark humor disturbs since it is not necessarily nor at all times light-hearted, comic, funny, and laughter-arousing. Moreover, dark humor gives the impression of having little or no respect "for the standards and forms of thought, feeling, and behavior that have kept Anglo-American culture stable and effective, have provided a basis of equilibrium for society and the individual". (p. 388). Dark humor disrupts holy and secular taboos similarly without limitation or reluctance, discovering the source for laughter in what has generally been viewed as too severe for triviality: the death of men, the breakdown of public institutions, mental and physical disease, abnormality, sorrow, suffering, deprivation and terror (p. 362). Cant expresses the feeling of terror they are in very clearly in Act Two, Scene five saying:

“We birth’em, and you kill’em. Can’t be right we deliver for your slaughter. Cow mothers. Not an opinion” (p.72). Lust like Cant, Howard Barker explains the role of pain for humanity in his book, *Death, The One, and the Art of Theater* (2015) with the following statements:

It is impossible – now, at this point in the long journey of human culture – to avoid the sense that pain is necessity; that it is neither accident, nor malformation, nor malice, nor misunderstanding, that it is integral to the human character both in its inflicting and in its suffering, this terrible sense Tragedy alone has articulated, and will continue to articulate, and in so doing, make beautiful... (p. 105)

Abnormality, sorrow, suffering, deprivation, and terror can never lead to the desired effect for neither Stucley nor the others and thus the number of the walls that cover the castle grows bigger and bigger. The castle which was/is thought to be the only means for the restoration of the order becomes the biggest threat to it. That’s why Stucley persistently orders Krak both to build new walls to protect the others and to increase the height of the towers. “A fifth wall I predict will be necessary, and a sixth essential, to protect the fifth, necessitating the erection of twelve flanking towers. The castle is by definition, not definitive...” (p.53).

The more the castle erects, the more desperate the women are and, as a result of this, Ann and the other women, almost all of whom are pregnant and do not have any hope for the future of their next generations, start to commit suicide by throwing themselves out of the castle walls. One of the soldiers describes this scene as “raining women”. It can be said that people without psychological protection and pleasurable experience are a major theme in dark humor because the people in the modern period are aware of impotence and the oppression of authority and this may give rise to death.

4. CONCLUSION

The concept of dark humor is nowadays a popular area among not only literary circles but also the men of medicine. The term is used by various writers use it to reflect the grotesque, the melancholic, the disturbing, or more generally the pain, fear, and disgust caused by different social interactions and events. One of the playwrights who show interest in this concept is Howard Barker, who is famous for his ‘The Theatre of catastrophe’. In the Theatre of Catastrophe, Barker aims at expecting a collective response from the audience and forces them to make their own comments on the play individually although his plays do not contain a clear, single and direct subject matter. Sexuality sexual freedom and desire, ecstasy, free will, criminality, violence and terror, oppression, and death are among his major themes. According to (Matsuo, 2013), “he often writes about some of the most grim historical events and shows them in a manner that is open and yet, provocative.” The play *the castle* is one of his provocative plays in which he uses his special brand of dark humor to shake her readers awake and keep them alert. The purpose of his dark humor, however, is explicitly to make us think about our desperate position in our chaotic world in disorder.

As the play is set in the aftermath of the first Crusade, it is very necessary to emphasize that the Crusades changed almost everything in the Western world. It became the major source of the rise in nationalism and national interests, causing the collapse of feudalism and the upsurge of capitalism as reflected in *the Castle*. As Williams (2002) states it was the beginning point for the emergence of a new social class which is called the Middle Class. The Crusades led all Christians to come together under the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church and strengthened the power of the Pope in every field of the life. However, after the Crusades, the seeds of the Reformation were also constituted. On the other hand, there were/have been also the opponents like Barker who were/are against the motives of the Crusades and the Latin Church (p. xxi).

The Castle begins with the scene in which Stucley, a feudal lord, returns to his homeland with one of his retainers and a captured Arab engineer, leaving all his soldiers behind. Stucley who went to the Crusades because of the religious sentiment that had increased enormously from about the year 1000 onwards, the cult of saints and pilgrimage, especially to Jerusalem, are all the evidence of his religious motives. “The men and women who were painfully aware of their own sinfulness and its terrible consequences, and deeply anxious to escape from them,” says France (1999). He continues empathizing that when the Pope Urban offered to the leading groups in European society an opportunity to get rid of their sins by a praiseworthy act of war and have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, they did not have any change but to accept. It must have seemed like a window of opportunity, a moment in which to escape from the burden of sin that weighed men down hitherto beyond all hope of escape (p. 205), and it was also a chance to increase their social status by rescuing the people in Jerusalem and restoring the order in it to its pure Christian form.

Stucley, who expects to be welcomed as a victorious leader or a courtly knight, is welcomed as the representative of an unwanted old order and an invading force. When he returns home, he sees that the women they left behind have transformed everything. The men, who took part in the expeditions to rescue the Christian women, as Pope says, being raped abominably by the heathen unbelievers, have to face the reality that all the women they left behind get pregnant by an old man who conceives every woman just like a stud ram in a herd. Further, his wife Ann has taken her sexual freedom one step further and got a female lover who is from the lower class. The knight, who joined the war of the crusaders to acquire land, earn glory, and support the Catholic Church, not only loses his control over his own soil, but also his wife.

The knight, who regards himself as the savior of the Holy Land, is now obliged both to reestablish the social order in his domain and to give the fight to recapture the heart of his beloved against not a man but Skinner, a woman of low status. Stucley is offended by what appears to him to be the breaking of the holy order in the society or the Great Chain of Being, and orders the captured Arab engineer, Krak, to build a castle on the hills of the land which represent the female body and female society in the play. He believes that the only way to restore order is the use of oppression and the violence. The Castle they build represent the erection of both Stucley and the restoration of the previous order. It is a good example to the writers and playwrights who use dark humor in their works focusing on the upper class to suggest that if people with the power of money and prestige are unable to successfully negotiate the chaotic and threatening forces of change in any time, it is in vain to try to reorganize the system in order to address the needs of the individuals functioning within it. As Stucley decides to build the castle without negotiating anyone in the society, he eventually fails and the Castle becomes the symbol of the fear, chaos, and disorder in the society. That’s why he is never satisfied with both the number of the walls covering the castle and their height. He orders Krak to build a second wall to protect the first and increase the height of it, and a third one for the second, and a fourth one for the third, and it goes on.

As Colletta (2003) states, though people with the power of money and prestige are the ones who are supposed to protect or restore the order, the only active attempt to prevent the castle from being built is Skinner, a ploughman’s widow. She kills the construction officer, Holiday, and thus is severely punished and sentenced to carry his corpse strapped to her front. There is no important difference between them and so-called infidels, the Arabs. Stucley and all the people taking part in the Crusades regard the Arabs as savages with any sense of intellect, but, Krak, the Arab engineer, is the only one who has rationality that is necessary to build the castle. He is the only one who conceived Ann, the childless wife of Stucley. This shows, as an

image on the mirror, that Arabs that the Christians regarded to be the savages are the ones who rationalize and bring the roots of modern science to them.

As the castle erects and the hope of the women begins to vanish, Ann, proposes Krak to go somewhere else together to be free from all this chaotic situation, but, eventually, she accepts that to change the place is not the solution to the problem because it will happen any everywhere:

ANN: The ease of making children. The facility of numerousness. Plague, yes, but after the plague, the endless copulation of the immune. All these children, children everywhere and I thought, this one matters, alone of them this one matters because it came from love. But I thought wrongly. I thought wrongly. [Pause. She looks at Krak]

There is nowhere except where you are. Correct. Thank you. If it happens somewhere it will happen everywhere. There is nowhere except where you are. Thank you for truth. [Pause. She kneels, pulls out a knife.] Bring it down. All this. [She threatens her belly. Pause.]

Bring it down. All this. (She threatens her belly. Pause)

STUCLEY: You won't, (Pause)

You won't because you cannot. Your mind wants to, but you cannot, and you won't... (p. 70)

Ann proves that she is sincere when she threatens her belly, which symbolizes the death of the child in his belly, and she throws herself from the walls of the castle and commits suicide. After her, all the pregnant women throw themselves down the walls of the castle like the rain falling from the sky. This is the end of the battle that accurately describes the challenge of forces in Barker's feminist drama: male and female visions of social order. The final scenes do not have the quality of explanation that we might expect of denouement, because in the dark humor we do not have a resolution for the chaotic atmosphere in which we are forced to live. Thomas (1992) asserts that they are not steady and nevertheless curiously expectable: they arise from, deepen, and close events but they are not the solution to the problems raised in the preceding action. When the reader finishes reading it, or the audience completes watching the play, they are forced to focus on the situation rather than the outcome.

The darkness of Barker's humor relies on the tension present in the juxtaposition of opposing forces that he creates which accommodate no absolute principles, no certain ideologies, no formulas to solve the chaos, and no structures. It is instead totally ambiguous. While acknowledging the bleakness of the human condition, Barker still confirms the matchlessness of the individual. Humor such as Barker's which allows laughter in the face of the horrific offers to the readers is reflected as a form of liberty. 'Humor' in general and 'dark humor' in particular are the means of overcoming the "tragedy of existence", at least momentarily.

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