



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A MAVERICK PRANKSTER

*Kavya, M. and Dr. Ann Thomas

Department of English, Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai, India

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to show Christopher Moore as a new entrant on the horizon of black humor. He has written more than a dozen novels sprinkled with a dose of black humor and other tools of satire especially pastiche. His literary tenor is queer, shocking and out of the ordinary. 'A Dirty Job' and 'Fool' are two of his explosively funny novels. In 'A Dirty Job' Christopher Moore uses pastiche to the extreme. He laughs at 'death' and treats it with a pedestrian disdain. There is nothing hoary about death. It would seem that 'death' were common day to day affair; in a cunning way Christopher Moore attempts to describe this. There is no continuity or pattern in his novels. He highlights the fragmentation in our society. This article is about how Christopher Moore nonchalantly describes hierarchical systems and puts the high and the low, employer and the employee, man and divine side by side. This article tries to explain that Christopher Moore is a changeling. He is evaporating as a postmodern scribe and condensing back into something new. He challenges in fact the futility and the concept of postmodern philosophy. It would appear that Christopher Moore is constantly trying to escape from the cocoon of postmodernism and expand into a brilliant butterfly of hope and faith. May be he is experimenting with a new mode of literary thought.

INTRODUCTION

My association with Christopher Moore is of a short duration. My quest for a glimpse into the heart of writers who pen black humor brought me to men like Christopher Moore. Here is a rebel who conforms to no rigid literary models. His nature is to revolt and revile against all chaste and predictable writing. He is totally against all normal ways of presenting a thought. He is comfortable with stating the opposite of an accepted view. His novels are examples of putting down what to society is normally unacceptable. He is an upstart to state it a bit strongly. Most of his novels are inter-textual. For example 'Fool' is a brilliant parody of King Lear. The whole plot is bent out of proportion and form. All restraint is thrown away. He indulges in a virulent and brilliant deforming of a decent way of putting forth a thought. Sexuality, death and social problems are all stripped of false modesty and presented stark naked in all its lewd opulence. If you are a prude you cannot even finish a paragraph of his novels. They are steeped in lurid and explicit sexuality which is but the best of truth as far as I am concerned. There is no mincing of words or emotions. They shock you out of your safe seclusion of stupid mores and morals of our society. You need to disown all your constricted and constipated views before you can walk with him. If you ask me if he is brilliant like Mark Twain and Bernard Shaw I cannot answer your question. But he is a totally different species of writer. He is a postmodern marvel. He is in a state of transition to a newer genre of writing.

*Corresponding author: Kavya, M.,

Department of English, Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai, India.

I struggled to understand him and to categorize him and it seems a difficult job indeed. I call him a liberated being. He is a free soul wanting to explode into a different dimension of postmodernism. There is no hostility in his heart. He welcomes one and all to join his new religion. Christopher Moore is the master craftsman of Black humor. All his novels are odysseys into the black world of Zombie humor. He leaves no stone unturned. With a caustic contumely, he bulldozes all sense of false propriety. Nothing is sacred to him. Devils, gods and men are equally ridiculed. There is always an undercurrent of sadness in all his novels. Under the veneer of uproarious ribaldry you see glimpses of abiding humaneness at once touching and breath-taking. You savour the spirit of helplessness and futility of all human endeavors. His is a concerted attack on hypocrisy. All vain actions are pricked and burst like balloons. All his protagonists are egoless and protoplasmic in character- constantly changing and laughing and goading. He seems never to remain serious even for an instant; but it is only a masquerade. The human soul is embroiled in a soup of sadness, as it would seem, and he is a medieval knight to save the lost souls by the piercing lance of black humor. All would seem lost, but the smooth blade of comedy will put to shame all sham tricksters of our cruel world. His obscene expletives are only a shield against prigs and puritans. This scatological humor seems pure and serene in the midst of all the human Machiavellian designs. Nothing is abstruse or complicated but is utterly simple and down to earth in all his writings. His religious tenacity in outlining the sanctimonious humbug of the society knows no equal. His diction and idiom are shocking like a plunge in ice cold water but you come out refreshed and enlivened. One is totally

reborn. One's outlook is completely changed. One can only laugh at one's falsities and prejudices. He wouldn't stop at just pulling legs but would go the extra mile to point out the unfairness of the situation and put up a startling solution which will be at once scathing and downright scandalous, all the time sticking by righteousness. He would not mind talking about the stupid mores and morals of the so called advanced society. He constantly points out the chinks in our self-righteous armour. He has his last laugh every time in every nerve wracking situation. Nothing seems to rattle him. His never failing weapon is black humor. In all its multitudinous forms it strikes a deep wound, in a strange way healing a rankling and festering carbuncle of the ills of our society. His protagonists are not classical heroes but soft and absent minded 'beta males.' His villains are fools and ludicrously non-threatening. His novels never end in a shattering climax, are not sagas of adventure neither are they stern tragedies. Every page is a rollicking journey into a world of gallows humor; though black they never fail to leave you laughing helplessly. While Jerome K Jerome, Max Beerbohm and Wodehouse weave woolly headed and light hearted comedies, his are compendia of sardonic tales as funny as a 'nut sack' as he is wont to say often. His novels are full of seeming nonsense but only to spring upon you the stark reality of crude and dissolute human action. Goons and buffoons fill his pages, all with a mission to rivet the ugly truth of our make-believe world into our guileless heads. He favours tomfoolery to serious discourse as a mode to impart his philosophy. His characters are kaleidoscopic- colourful, funny, serious, roughish, clownish, outlandish and esoteric. A pageantry of unrivalled impish and mischievous characters thrills us into a merry mood and it is very fulfilling. Moore is one of a kind, seriously and assiduously revolting against the moral dogmas of our society, laying bare the inadequacies and fallacies of our system. He is a man with a purpose. I presume that his vitriolic attack against our pseudo puritanism will continue unabated in all his future novels.

His vivid imagery elicits a weird impulse in us to throw aside our false pretensions and get on his wild literary omnibus to ride into the blissful oblivion of his humor world filled by out of the world motely characters. He is consistent in his volatile jibes and innuendoes like a brilliant flash of light in the dark woods. He surprises not only with gallows humor but with touches of fine intricate and serious philosophy, not missing a step, not in any way funny. From periods of petty bawdy humor he explodes like thunder into peals of touching sentiments that leave us gasping. Of all the authors I have read this man is uncanny with his unending dark witticisms sometimes merging on madness but he always leaves you greatly affected and we marvel at his twisted muse and idiom. He shocks you with his profanity that never leaves a bad taste in your mouth. You fall in line with his thoughts all the time. He is one of the rare wits of modern times utilizing black humor to good effect. I love his novels and feel that they have changed my life in a way that no other author has done. It is like a trek into freezing heights of the Himalayas tingling and tantalizing, making us beg for a respite but yet thirsting again for the maddening experience. I wonder at the transmutation of human wit from simple courtly jests to the mystic esoteric of black humor. Christopher Moore wields this weapon like a champion. Christopher Moore is mischievous to the core. He has such biting humor that it is like a viper's sting horribly painful but strangle euphoric and like an aphrodisiac; but it can kill. He is an inveterate postmodern thinker. He has scant respect for the high and the mighty, the divine and man's much

extolled virtues like chivalry and patriotism. He brushes aside all these social constructs not batting an eyelid with a villainous snicker on his face. In all his novels intertextuality is his forte. He uses William Shakespeare's novels as bases for rollicking literary rides laughing at everything. It is not as if to mock at Shakespeare but to present the drama in an almost twentieth century setting. He spares not the most sacred of characters like 'King Lear' for one. His characters use American slang and idiom in 'Fool.' Losing of continuity of storyline, jumping from, one period to other, restructuring and decentralizing is his way of penning his novels and all the while he proves his mettle as a postmodern thinker. He brings to the fore the absurdity of social mores, morals and stigmas. Nothing is taboo, it is a freewheeling, and all nonsense exposed roller coaster ride into a world of explicit, sexual innuendos and what appears as smut literature changes into an eye opener- looks deep into our miserable cynicism hypocrisy and our pretensions to chastity of thought and action. Christopher Moore employs pastiche and tools of satire to the full. The high and low in society have truck. They party together to such hilarious extremes that it leaves you cursing and breathless in painful laughter. He never fails to traduce our ill begotten social customs. Nothing is sacrosanct.

He effectively uses black humor to sally back and forth between humor and horror juxtaposing and leaving the reader in a conundrum- whether to laugh or freeze in terror. We are left to explain the ontological uncertainty of modern times. The free play and the indeterminacy of his plots militating against order and design leads us to firmly believe his postmodern philosophy in his novels 'A Dirty Job' and the 'Fool.' His debate of the discontinuity of human existence which moves on in fits and starts clearly explains his stand of decentralizing and deconstructing issues. We feel as if we are co-authors in his creations. When the protagonist in 'A Dirty Job' hurtles down to a twisted comic-horror climax we whisper that he be saved. To allay our fears Christopher Moore reincarnates the protagonist as one of the squirrel people with his soul vessel that we smile in relief. He is a new phenomenon. Not much critical literature and research have been written or done on his works. His speeches during 'the passage of his books' are witty and batty. He doesn't seem to take his writing seriously as if to disown them; that is where the readers take possession of the text and can elaborate according to their whims and fancies. Christopher Moore is slowly exploring a new mode of literary thought to express his disbelief and discontent about life. It appears not like 'the postmodern alienation and inescapability of man's' concept but his character writhe and struggle to show their disquiet and in no confusing terms are ready for a dirty 'no holds barred' fight against life's cruel designs. Christopher Moore's characters are willing to kick below the belt and then say sorry with a smirk on their faces- a carnivalesque jaunt. Such freshness and fervor in a postmodern American wit is quite satisfying. He is verily a maverick and a prankster to the last letter.

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