

ROWAN ATKINSON AS MR. BEAN: A STRANGE FACE OF BRILLIANT HUMOR

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Mr. Bean is a comedy of unusual drama of senses, it turns odd into even, it weaves meaning in strangeness, and it is a comedy of reasons. Yet, it is a pity, a pity because it is not a text for students, especially for English language and literature students. Our academics is so much saturated with Shakespeare's fools, Dryden, Pope, Jonathan Swift's satire that we fail to progress towards embracing visual texts such as *Mr. Bean* in our pedagogy. A fool is a fool who fails to fool others in his best attempt to fool; but he fools himself and becomes the subject of amusement for others. Mr. Bean is a protagonist, a true protagonist of a comedy show in England, as everything moves around him; he handles his issues as he wishes or endeavors. Mr. Bean makes no attempt to fool others but plays mischievous tricks, he simply tries to live a normal life by his own ways in his own world of crowded others. He is a loner, taking pleasure in the company of his toy teddy; he is happy and amused with himself and participates in the daily chores of busy English life. He cooks, drives, goes shopping, laundering, swimming, restaurants, attends school, wedding, funeral, and so on. But he lives strangely. Strange is not always opposite of common, it is something unusual on its own, something peculiar in itself. All these become an intense comedy, a situational physical humor with very less talk, some musical effect and sound of laughing audience.

Rowan Atkinson plays this character of Bean who he created while making faces in the mirror. In his documentary he says that it was then that "a surreal, non-speaking character evolved." Mr. Bean practices a range of gestures, motions and facial expressions to convey his feelings, reactions, and actions, these constitute his body language. He talks deliberately and murmurs his words. His funny faces have been a celebration of Bean's identification. Bean is an intelligent character who is perceived by the mind of the actor to be a boy of nine years age and a confirmed anarchist. He obeys the rules of his society as long as they happen to suit him. His appearance is strange; he behaves in an unusual way and has odd ways to problems. He needs no company of relatives or friends; he is a self-contained character closely akin to the actor's natural self. His performance is almost perfectly visual and mime. *Mr. Bean* series started in 1990 and ever since it has made history of the Britain's most notorious character. For the duration of its five year run the *Mr. Beans* series was immensely prevalent in the United Kingdom's; and the series has been honored with a number of international awards, together with the Rose d'Or. The series has been traded in regions worldwide, and has inspired two feature films and an animated cartoon.

Some of the best comedies are the hilarious wedding episode, when he is at library struggling with his odd tactics to save himself, when at restaurant dealing hard with the unavoidable situation, at funeral trying to learn to fit into the demanding situation and many more. The question is, is he representing the British man on world stage or showing the struggle of a man with acute sensibilities who happens to look alien to his own sophisticated people? Is he archetypal English? Yes, he is very much an English man. He is closely associated with his own culture more than his fellow countrymen. He is unapologetically childlike imprisoned in a man's body. His conversation is restricted to grumbles and groans and he is outright muddled by the complexities of his contemporary modern time. He is outdated and old school, his home and his car are wonderful examples. He is always in his appropriate English attire, a suit. Mr. Bean is not people's person. He misunderstands every person he comes across, is acutely self-conscious, and appears to find conversation embarrassingly uncomfortable. However, there is one characteristic of the English men that Bean predominantly personifies; it is the distinct incapability to converse with women, when he tries he becomes miserable and even more annoying to his female counterpart. Bean is a silent worker. He does not express himself in anger; his treatment is silent. One of the significant pointers of passive aggressiveness is silence, the trait English men are often recognized with. His logic seem to be lesser and ineffective to people but his resourcefulness is incredible. He causes his own new problems and solves them with his gifted imagination and matchless inventions. He is regarded as a decidedly accomplished artist, a comedian with a vision; problem solving assertiveness in solving innumerable problems existing in daily errands, often causing chaos in the practice.

I personally like comedies where the comedian at work is often serious, totally unconscious of his own act; he should not laugh at his own joke or at himself with his audience. He should be innocent in his action and behavior. In Bean's case we may sometimes find his crude sadist actions. In order to achieve his goal he likes to clear his way off people, exploits them, for example when he is in a queue at hospital or at dinner hall, he becomes very mean at times and continues to annoy others. He is neither a caricaturist nor a clown. He uses the humorous technique called Recovery, where he applies a combination of blunder and wit, makes an error, and then saves himself with a fast correction. But his correction is again an enormous error. It all becomes a situational humor which is based on a humorous situation that Bean experiences. It is also slapstick humor, where he collides with the wall, slips on the floor and so on. Comedy is a comedy not because it is not a tragedy. Comedy is not contrast to tragedy. We do not say after watching a comedy, "thank God! No one died" or "it is so funny, we did not have to cry." Everything has its own distinct quality; it cannot be perceived in a comparative mode of study. Unlike other comedies, the character of Mr. Bean does not irritate, instead he engages his viewers. We are so engrossed in the comedy we watch that we have no time for anything else but to laugh and be amused. We long to see more of him and every time we find something entirely new in his approach, thoughts, and actions. Every episode is unique in its aspect, idea, and presentation. He is always a problem solving agent, albeit in his own odd way.

Mr. Bean's physical humor is like that of the chase of Tom and Jerry. But he has no opponent; it is the demand of the situation that makes him chase the world around. He lives a life of a responsible and respectable citizen of his great country, England. He is versatile but very sensitive to the respectable criterion and norms of his conscious society. He has to fulfill his duty and so he works hard to get things right but in his own unusual manner. In his attempt to fix things right, he upsets the set and continues to upset until the very end. He draws a circle of set, upset, more upset, total disaster and finally runs away to escape the demanding explanation or

punishment and embarrassment when he knows about the intensity of trouble he has caused. It is a sitcom, a humorous drama built on situations that might arise in commonplace daily ordinary life. His special vocal uncover his voice to be as publically obnoxious and hilarious as his manner. He lives in peace with his teddy efficiently communicating with him and making him appear real with his puppet tactics. He remains insensitive to his female friend. Other persons he comes across, he has a habit to swiftly worry them with his bizarre conduct.

Mr. Bean's three principal methods behind visual comedy are for an object or person to behave in an unusual way, be in an unusual place, and be of the wrong size. In a central part of the documentary *Funny Business*, Atkinson stresses upon the essentiality to deliver the comedy with a cautiously fashioned assertiveness. The link between the character of the comedy and the applied techniques is powerful enough to be in intimate association for the appropriate delivery of the message in the comedy. Atkinson regrets that Charlie Chaplin who once happened to be the greatest of comedians fails to make his new generation audience laugh. It is so because of his character has now obsolete; it fails to establish connection with his viewers in this new century. An author of humorous books for teenagers, David Lubar, discloses his opinion in an interview that as humor fits into utmost parts of art and entertainment, it very well fits into literature where it carries pleasure, eases human pain and suffering, and makes the world a better place to live in. Humor becomes an inevitable element of human understanding, art, culture and amusement.

The history of wit and humor has been through the ages, without doubt, an old and illustrious one. Apart from its brilliant role in social and cultural life as tension-easing and problem-solving, it has enriched and exalted art and literature into a tremendous tool of perceiving mysteries of creations, interpreting life's ups and downs, and discovering man's master role in it.

This creative role of wit and humor, thus, could hardly be undermined, especially when it comes to down to earth observing and evaluating cultural, moral, social roles affecting the society or the individual, whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, king or clown. The Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, addressing the king as 'fool,'

Lear: Dost thou call me "fool," boy?

Fool: All thy other titles thou hast given away. That thou wast born with.

(*King Lear*, Act 1, Sc. 4.)

Disappears as soon as his job to awake the king's inner conscience comes to an end. Mr. Bean's role, like the Fool's in *Lear*, may serve to help us appreciate his remarkable contribution to the world of today's culture and civilization through his ingenious art of mimicry and wit and humor. Mr. Bean's art is indeed a weapon of love through which the whole armory of social-moral wits could be defecated.

References:

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