

Dear Darling,

Sometimes I like to take old jokes that are in bad taste in their original form, blonde jokes for example, and change them so they're about specific politicians rather than picking on generalized groups. Is this problematic?

From,

T. Peaches Wilkerson

Hello there, my sweet summer peach, and thank you for your question!

I must say, my love for a juicy joke, a tart and sweet slice of satire, knows no bounds. Humor holds such power, and those who wield it well have the ability to change the world with the same tender ease one might bite into a perfectly ripe Georgia peach. However, humor can be so fickle, and when employed inappropriately, can cause one to choke as if swallowing the pit of a rotten stonefruit. The question, then, is what discerns a good joke from a bad one?

In this humble writer's opinion, this is frequently a question of who or what is the butt of said joke. I find that many of the jokes I heard throughout my youth, such as the blonde jokes that you mentioned, tend to target an entire group of people with the intention of cutting them down, as one might nefariously bulldoze a bountiful grove of fruit trees. This often leads to harm, both seen and unseen, as members of these groups find themselves stigmatized, ostracized, and alienated within their communities. That's not a very delicious feeling, if I may say so myself.

The other bit that bears consideration is where the power

lies. Are we trying to tear down the fences that protect miles of monocropped orchards, or are we going after those who steal a paltry basketful of plums to feed their family? There is such potent energy in humor, and this energy needs to be harnessed responsibly. This is the whole “punching up vs. punching down” argument that you’ve maybe heard before. Imagine you’re standing at the top of an orchard ladder, picking the ripest and yummiest peaches, and there’s only room for you atop this skinny ladder. If you choose to punch down, towards those who are holding it steady for you, *everybody gets hurt* and you might end up toppling down and breaking your back on a wheelbarrow or something. Serves you right. Now imagine you’re at the bottom, holding this ladder stable for those who are hoarding access to the fruit and getting all the rotten ones thrown down on top of you. Punching up from this position might free up access to the sweet bounty of the tree for a larger swath of the population to share and enjoy. As you might find, there is more than enough to go around.

OK, maybe that last analogy was as precarious as the aforementioned orchard ladder on an uneven slope. So, I’ll cut right to the core of what I’m saying here: I think it’s a fantastic idea to rewrite jokes in the manner you’re suggesting. Replacing the targets of your punchlines with people who hold power over others (or with the systems that allow this to happen in the first place) is such a succulent endeavor that more of us should try a bite! I grew up in the era of “dead baby” jokes and found such delight in changing them to “dead cop” jokes. May we all join in the work of rewriting the rules and narratives to serve the people and may we all enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Deliciously yours,

Darling Tonia

