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The Play Of Black Humor: A Postmodern Study Of Cross Genre Texts

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ABSTRACT

This study utilizes "black humor," a modernist literary genre, as a tool for the postmodern cross-genre reading. The primary objective is to investigate how serious subjects such as death, world wars, sex, science, and religion are treated in a non-serious manner through the mask of black humor. The research examines how humor is used as a coping mechanism to deal with difficult issues and to allow individuals to exist in an absurd world. According to the Black Humor ideology, life after the World Wars is inevitably depressing, leading followers to perceive concepts like religion, power, violence, and death as meaningless. By laughing at the absurdity of the world, the individual can accept life's circumstances as useless, hopeless, and worthless, but also as trivial. This is supported by Sigmund Freud's theory that Black Comedy occurs when "the ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality". Furthermore, black humor, alongside irony and the concept of "play," is considered one of the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism. For this investigation, the researcher selected works from a variety of genres by postmodern authors, including Donald Barthelme, Angela Carter, Country Joe McDonald, and Kurt Vonnegut. The analysis is framed by demonstrating how writers attempted to subsume the atrocities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in black humor by fusing moral thoughts with slapstick comedy. The study concludes that black humor dissolves the funny features of traditional humor through absurd expression, generating new literature that is distinct from traditional tragedy and drama by employing laughter to express tragedy and absurdly describe the tragic plot.



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Introduction

In this study, "black humor," a modernist literary genre, is used as a tool for the postmodern cross-genre reading. This study investigates how serious subjects such as sex, death, world wars, science, and religion are treated in a non-serious manner through the mask of black humor. How humor is used as a coping mechanism to deal with difficult issues? For this study, researcher chose works by postmodern authors such as Donald Barthelme, Angela Carter, Country Joe McDonald, and Kurt Vonnegut from a variety of genres.

Black humor is primarily concerned with increased awareness of the absurd; the protagonists are typically antiheroes, innocent or insane characters. The two-dimensional characters journey through nightmare worlds filled with unpredictable events and fantastic coincidences, where images of disintegration, disease, and horror dominate consciousness. Black humor takes its name from an anthology of "dark humor" by American writer **Bruce J. Friedman**. In English, the word "black" connotes darkness, despair, and death. On the other hand, black humor denotes a departure from typical humor. It is not in a comfortable and pleasant mood, and it is the humor in a terrible position and under the gallows of western culture.

Following World War II, the United States became embroiled in the Vietnam War in the 1960s. This was an era of terror and fear in American life. As a result, people can only vent their frustration, fury, and worry for their incapacity to change the existing quo. The writers used existentialist concepts such as nothingness, alienation, and absurdity to create their creative works. Black humor writers, in contrast to traditional literary creation, expressed more negative and pessimistic viewpoints in their works. People can be perplexed when confronted with this strange phenomenon.

The only thing that can be said about modern life (life after World Wars 1 and 2) is that it is inevitably depressing. According to detractors, it is this despair that may eventually lead to the adoption of the Black Humor stance. What a follower of the Black Humor ideology perceives around him is devoid of reason and sense. He came to these conclusions as a result of daily encounters with stuff he doesn't comprehend. Religion, wealth, love, hate, power, violence, cruelty, and even death appear to him to be meaningless. Ambition is unimportant, and prestige is irrelevant. Life has no future, and death offers no promise of a better life. His attempts to figure out what life's ultimate significance is futile. He's stuck in limbo all the time, existing in a world he doesn't understand and believes he can't change.

The Black Humor fanatic must arm himself with some means of protection in order to exist with this perspective on life, so he turns to humor. He is able to laugh at the absurdity of the world because of his sense of humor. He is able to accept life's circumstances as useless, hopeless, and worthless, but also as trivial, by laughing at what is going on around him. He smiles instead of bemoaning the human state or attempting to persuade others of the reality he has discovered, both of which would be futile. The ludicrous behavior of others in his immediate vicinity amuses him. Their dramatic concern with things he knows to be absurd is funny. Even their quest for a nonexistent meaning in life is amusing. "Humor" denotes a unique form of defense that allows a Black Humor devotee to exist in his ludicrous world.

Literature Review



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Prior scholarship has extensively examined black humor from multiple perspectives:

Postmodernist Literary Movement: A Comprehensive Study of Technique in Vonnegut's Novels article discusses a comprehensive analysis of the literary devices used by Kurt Vonnegut, positioning him as an integral part of the postmodernist literary movement and a master of satire, gallows humor, and science fiction. The analysis explores Vonnegut's technical accomplishments and modal diversity across his works. It details his use of various techniques, including science fiction, comic science fiction, black humor, dark humor, morbid humor, gallows humor, meta-fiction, and satire. The essay notes that Vonnegut uses these strategies to draw attention to social defects, the atrocities of war, and the sorrows of modern man, imagining a society free of societal ills.. The piece emphasizes that Vonnegut's pessimism is ultimately redeemed by humor, which acts as an analgesic for the temporary relief of existential sorrow, pain and anguish. The document extensively analyzes how Vonnegut utilizes irony and black humor to cope with painful subjects, such as the Dresden bombing in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and how Vonnegut's style generally maintains a thematic linkage using different narrative techniques in his novels. While this work focuses almost exclusively on one author (Kurt Vonnegut) and primarily analyzes the novel form, my study, "THE PLAY OF BLACK HUMOR: A POSTMODERN STUDY OF CROSS GENRE TEXTS," distinguishes itself by offering a cross-genre reading of black humor. My research applies black humor as a tool across texts by multiple postmodern authors chosen from a variety of genres (short story, song, and novel). Specifically, while Vonnegut's novels are discussed in both studies, my analysis includes non-novelistic forms. By investigating how black humor plays with serious subjects across these diverse texts, my work expands the application of black humor beyond the comprehensive, single-author study presented in the reference material.

"The Matrices of Black Humor and Death" article explores the concepts of black humor and death through the lens of cultural significance and the social unconscious. It proposes that black humor function as a defense mechanism, used to repress, deny, mock, or dissociate from death, and to express socio-political criticism. It highlights that the cruel nature of humor evolved following the World Wars. Furthermore, the article connects black humor to broader cultural shifts, such as the move from public to private death rituals, and discusses how contemporary art forms like the Gothic Aesthetic combine grotesque black humor with fixation on violent death, which is seen as contributing to the modern cult of death. The paper extensively uses war literature (especially Holocaust literature), film, and music as case studies to argue that black humor helps people remain sane and voice the terror associated with death. This article centers primarily on the matrix of death and death anxiety as the core serious subject addressed by black humor. In contrast, my research takes a broader thematic approach by investigating how black humor acts as a coping mechanism across a wider range of serious and painful subjects, including sex, world wars, science, and religion. For example, my study analyzes how Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* uses humor to critique science and religion, and how Angela Carter's work treats sexuality and violence. This article uses black humor to provide insight into how contemporary societies address death, my study uses black humor as a postmodern cross-genre reading tool to demonstrate the atrocities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and how writers sought to subsume these specific atrocities in humor.

"METAMODERN SATIRE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND TELEVISION" proposes metamodern satire as a hybrid mode that negotiates between



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the conflicting objectives of modernist satire (which sought correction of folly and vice) and postmodern satire (which sought destabilization of metanarratives). The reference traces the evolution of black humor, noting that the term fell out of fashion and was often replaced by "postmodernism". It defines postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarratives", characterized by irony and detachment, while black humor highlighted the absurdity and horror of everyday life. The work argues that metamodern satire follows a sequence: it must first destabilize a social metanarrative (often through irony and cynicism), and then shift to sincere expression to provide a corrective solution—a movement the author terms "daybreak humor". It highlights that black humorists generally rejected the traditional satirist's faith in correction, focusing instead on the humanizing value of laughter. While this work focuses on defining and applying the concept of "metamodern satire" and the emergent "daybreak humor" to contemporary (2000s and 2010s) American literature and television. My work, however, specifically grounds itself in analyzing black humor as a modernist literary genre that is utilized as a postmodern cross-genre reading tool. While this work is concerned with the evolution of humor *beyond* postmodernism (into metamodernism) and the shift from "black humor" to "daybreak humor", my study investigates black humor's role *within* the core postmodern moment, noting that black humor, along with irony and "play," are recognizable aspects of postmodernism. My research centers on how black humor functions to express negative and pessimistic viewpoints reflecting the incapacity to change the status quo, viewing it as a coping mechanism to exist in an absurd world. Thus, my work focuses on the application and function of black humor during its established period of prevalence (post-WWII/postmodernism), rather than defining its proposed successor, thereby offering a foundational textual analysis of the mechanism itself.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study, is based on using "black humor," a modernist literary genre, as a tool for the postmodern cross-genre reading. The methodology involves a close textual analysis of selected works by postmodern authors. Specifically, the research aims to investigate how serious and painful subjects such as sex, death, world wars, science, and religion are treated in a non-serious manner through the mask of black humor. The core objective is to demonstrate how humor functions as a coping mechanism to reduce the seriousness of these difficult and taboo issues, allowing individuals to exist in an absurd world. To achieve this postmodern cross-genre reading, the researcher selected works from a variety of genres by postmodern authors: Donald Barthelme's short story *The School*, Angela Carter's short story *Puss in the Boot*, Country Joe McDonald's song *I feel like I'm fixin to die Rag*, and Kurt Vonnegut's novel *CAT'S CRADLE*. The analysis for each text focuses on identifying how moral thoughts fused with the most interesting forms of slapstick comedy to subsume the atrocities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This approach aims to illustrate that black humor, characterized by its focus on the absurd, generates a new literature distinct from traditional tragedy by employing laughter to express tragedy and absurdly describe the tragic plot.

This device, black humor, is employed by black humorists as a coping mechanism in order to exist in an absurd world. Sigmund Freud in 1927 in his essay "humor" (*Der Humor*), puts forth the following theory of Black Comedy: "the ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that



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such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure.” Freud is not alone in his valuation of comedy as one of humankind's most important coping devices. Speculators of the comic from Kant, Schiller and Nietzsche to Baudelaire, Breton and Bakhtin have all argued that the comic experience is important because it suggests the truth about basic antinomies of existence, offering a way out, the possibility of understanding and then living with the anxiety of the human predicament. Though much of 20th century comic theory depends upon Freud jokes and their relations to the unconscious, as does much of it later psychoanalytic theory, the work is very often dealt with superficially in studies of comic literature.

Whereas, Linda Hutcheon in “A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction” claims that “postmodern fiction as a whole can be characterized by the ironic quote marks, that much of it can be taken as tongue-in-cheek”. ...This irony, along with black humor and the general concept of the “play” are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism” (Hutcheon 1988).

The first American anthology devoted to the conception of black humor as a literary genre is “Black Humor” by Bruce Jay Friedman. In his study, he included different writers and works, arguing that they shared the same literary genre. Among many figures, we can mention Edward Albee, Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, and Kurt Vonnegut. Therefore, black humorists wrote novels, plays, poems and songs in which profound or horrific events were portrayed in a comic manner. Some popular themes of the genre were murder, suicide, depression, abuse, war, barbarism, drug abuse, terminal, domestic violence, sex, insanity, crime, etc.

This research endeavors to answer the following questions:

How is black humor used as a coping mechanism in these cross-genre texts?

How does black humor treat serious subjects like sex, death, and war in a non-serious manner?

How does the study use black humor as a tool for postmodern cross-genre reading?

Data Analysis

Death provides the stomping ground to black humorists to treat this serious and painful subject in the comic way. People are so estranged and removed from life as a result of the tragedies and destruction of World War 2. Death becomes a subject of discussion for them after witnessing so many deaths and destruction in conflicts. To lighten the mood, surrounding such a solemn subject, they began to address death with humor. Many postmodernists believe that death is what gives life meaning because death is unavoidable, so living was not as serious to them as death. As a result, their lives become meaningless and purposeless.

We notice a lot of connections between death and sex in postmodern times. For them sex is more important than death and dead bodies. This can be seen in the short stories of Donald Barthelme and the sanctuary by William Faulkner. The school by Donald Barthelme perfectly exemplifies the irony and black humor in the postmodern times as the story is about the ironic death of plants, animals and people connected to the children in one class but the repetition of death again and again treated only as a joke. Deaths were happening so much in numbers that the people started taking it as a normal thing. Narrator attitude is the same towards the death of plants as well as towards the death of an orphan student. The short story school



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starts with the death of plants but as the story is moving its intensity is also increasing with the death rates because now the deaths were not limited to the death of the plants, animals, salamanders, herbs, mice but now death start playing with the lives of the students of school, their parents and their grandparents. They stop feeling shocked about death and expecting death to happen every day. "Of course we expected the tropical fish to die, which was no surprise. Those numbers, you look at them crooked and they're belly-up on the surface. There was nothing we could do, it happens every year; you just have to hurry past it" (Barthelme 94).

The way deaths were occurring in the school, it appeared to be more of a morgue than a place to learn. The school had accepted an orphaned Korean child as a student. The cause of his death was unknown. The teacher's perspective on a child's death was that the school would adopt a new child in his place, demonstrating that the youngster's death had little impact on him. He finds no difference between the death of plants and the little kid. This also reflects Americans' attitudes about people from other countries. Despite the fact that they had adopted the youngster, his death was nothing out of the ordinary for them. The kid's name was Kim and maybe we adopted him too late or something. The cause of death was not stated in the letter we got, they suggested we adopt another child instead (Barthelme 94).

The children were repeatedly faced with death, and ultimately started thinking that either there is something wrong with the school. They raised this philosophical question is that death which defines life? Their encounter with such numbers of death makes them mature even in their childhood and it also emphasizes from the story that as if they left with no other school to attend which is teaching them the meaning of death, from what they cannot escape. That's the mortality, they cannot escape from.

"Is death that which gives meaning to life? And I said no, life is that which gives meaning to life. Then they said, but isn't death, considered as a fundamental datum, the means by which the taken-for-granted mundanity of the everyday may be transcended in the direction of ..." (Barthelme 95).

Finally, the students' request that their professor, make love to the teaching assistant appears to be a search for the antithesis of death, an attempt to discover something that gives life meaning. Because the children no longer want to be rescued from death, they don't want to be rescued from its polar opposite, as if they were looking for a balance. Finally, the professor and teacher's embrace exemplifies a sensitive human connection. Despite the reality that all living beings are bound to die, this act of tenderness demonstrates that life goes on. Despite the fact that the act of embrace appears to lighten the serious theme of the story, the irony is that individuals find meaning in things like sexual pleasures. But such is how life is for postmodernists, who have lost the meaning of existence as a result of the repercussions of global wars. They become so used to death that they find no difference between the death of animals and humans. This short story is humorous as well as absurd. This story shows that how we use sex as a way to escape from the horrors of death. Death is present but we always distract ourselves from mortality.

Another humorous scene of death found in the comic funeral of character **Red** in the novel **Sanctuary** by **William Faulkner**. Red is a character of the novel who was murdered by the Popey. This scene highlights the attitude of the underworld class towards the dead body and their attempts to have a funeral solemn and acceptable enough for high-class propriety. From the first confused discussion on what music to play, Red's funeral continuously becomes more and more humorous."Let them play



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jazz," the second man said. "Never nobody liked dancing better than Red." "No, no," the proprietor said. "Time Gene gets them all ginned up on free whiskey, they'll start dancing. It'll look bad." "How about Blue Danube," the leader said. "No, no, don't play no blues, I tell you," the proprietor said. "There's a dead man in that bier." "That's not blues," the leader said. "What is it?" the second man said. "A waltz. Strauss."

"A wop?" the second man said. "Like hell. Red was an American.

You may not be, but he was. Don't you know anything American? Play I Can't Give You Anything But Love. He always liked that." "And get them all to dancing?" the proprietor said. He glanced back at the tables where the

women were beginning to talk a little shrilly. "You better start off with Nearer, My God, To Thee," he said, "and sober them up some."

"Red wouldn't like it solemn," the second man said. "And you know it."

The orchestra played Nearer, My God, To Thee" (Faulkner 257-58).

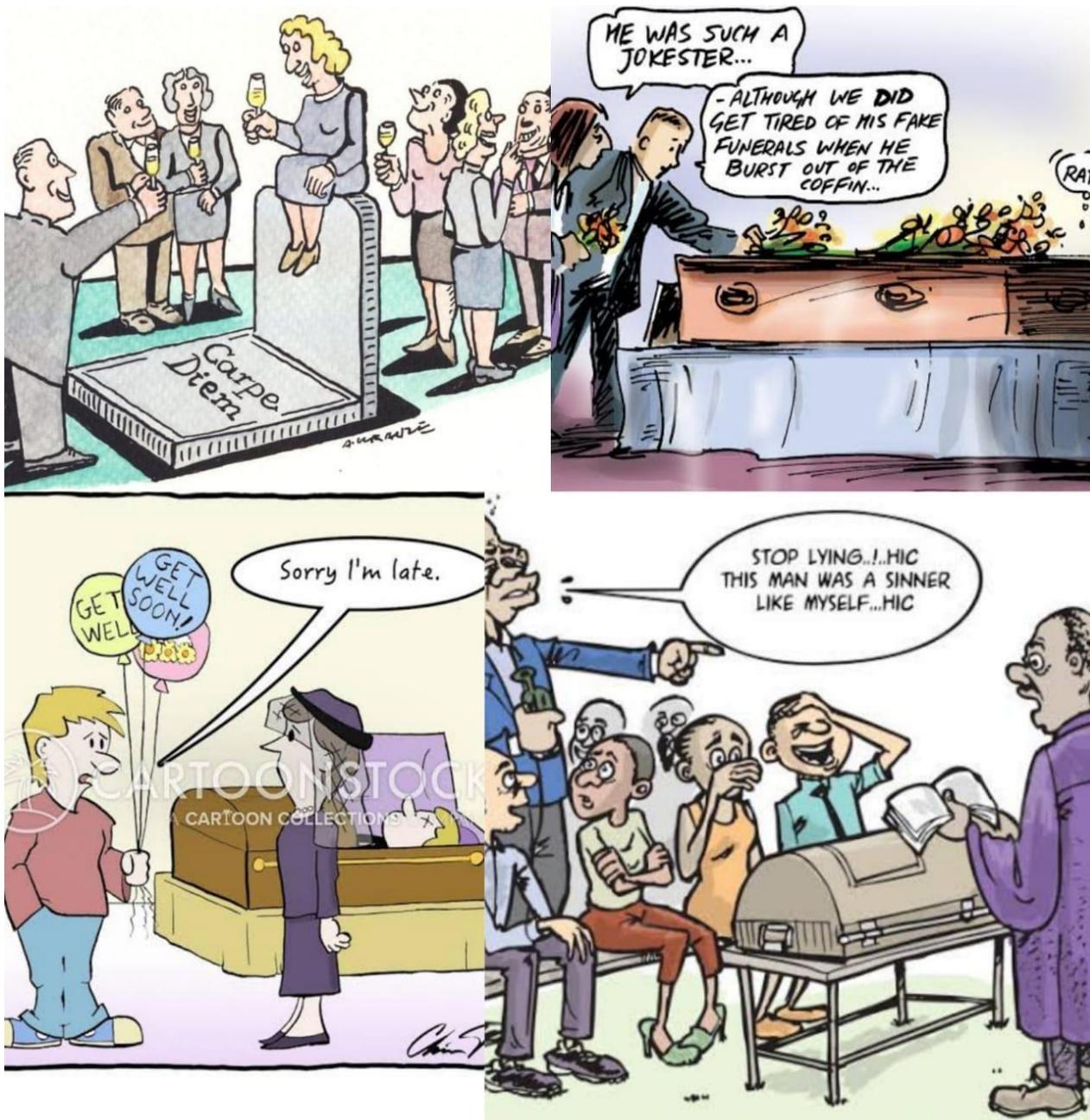
Humor arises from the choice of song for red funereal and funnier is that Red always liked "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" considering he has been functioning as a stud for Temple. And to finally choose "Nearer My God To Thee" is outrageously irreverent as the underworld lacks true respect and consideration for religion.

The crowd soon ejects into a free-for-all celebration, with free whiskey until a woman who wants the body out of the place to liven the party up even more. A man tried to hold her; she turned upon him with a burst of filthy language. The proprietor rushed toward her, followed by the bouncer. The proprietor stopped the woman as she lifted another floral piece. The man who had tried to hold her intervened, the woman cursed loudly and struck both of them equally with the wreath. They didn't care about the dead body while the fight was going on, and they all crashed into the bier and bore down.

The floral offerings flew; the coffin tottered. "Catch it!" a voice shouted. They sprang forward, but the coffin crashed heavily to the floor, corning open. The corpse collapsed and sedately came out and came to rest with its face in the center of a wreath. "Play something!" the proprietor bawled, waving his arms; "play! Play!"

Corpse wore a cap which, falling off, exposed a small blue hole in the center of his forehead. It had been neatly plugged with wax and was painted, but the wax had been jarred out

and lost. The fact that Red has had the hole in his head, made to look like he hadn't been killed at all, attacks upon a pompous ritual of preparing the dead for the grave. This funeral of Red, full of disrespect lacking the highly-valued seriousness that polite society would recognize. We find black humor directed at the desire of the proprietor desperately shouting for the orchestra to play, the choice of song to play at the funeral keeping in mind the likes of the red. How the whole funeral scene turned into a fight shows the cold heartedness of the people towards the dead person.



Some comic funereal scenes

Sexual taboos abound in black comedy novels. Sex is a very real and absurd part of the real world, according to black humor. Because direct descriptions of sexual acts are considered taboo in traditional novels, the word love is used to mask the seriousness of the subject. However, "love" has no meaning in Black Humor novels, and sex is an act performed solely for physical satisfaction or personal gain. Seduction is regarded as a comic aspect of an absurd world. Sex is simply presented as a fact of life in Black Humor novels.

Angela Carter, an American writer, her collection of short stories "**The Bloody Chamber**" is full of dark humor and light hearted comedy even terrifying elements of black comedy also exists in her works. One such incident where Carter infuses dark



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elements of comedy through the use of bold sexuality can be seen in one of her short stories **Puss in the boot**. Carter's, puss in the boot exposes a coarse, egotistical humor from the perspective of bigoted 'con Man' cat "Figaro" to express insolence and controversially sexiest ideas means such ideas are not taken extremely seriously. Carter use of irony and scornful humor to devalue the serious gothic interpretation and through the use of comedy stories made less terrifying in nature yet propose an ironic self mockery.

Figaro, the mischievous and cunning cat, devised a plan to reunite his master and her beloved. The young lady in love with Figaro's master was guarded by her servant and his wealthy old husband. Figaro and the young man are both very intelligent and masterminds; they collaborate to cheat at dice and seduce the women by murdering her old husband.

Both violence and sexual humor are at the heart of the story. The young woman's bedroom was the bloody chamber of the story where she loses her virginity by Figaro's master because her husband was impotent. Violence is pretty evident from the acts of Figaro and his master, how they planned to trap young lady husband Signor Pantaloon to death bed and threatened the guardian of the young lady by a number of rats. Both Figaro (puss in the boot) and his master did all this just for uniting young lady and master as both fell in love with each other and the irony of the story was that they were so insensitive that the young lady did not care that her husband died rather she prefer to satisfy her sexual pleasures and loses her virginity and discovers love for the first time while her husband body was lying next to them in the bloody chamber.

The use of disguise, after master and puss succeed in planning to kill signor, afterwards master transformed himself into signor panteleone by applying false mustaches to deceive the guardian and entered lady's bedchamber "...my master must pose as a rat-catcher and I, his ambulant marmalade rat-trap.", enhances elements of absurdity; Puss' "Master" will go to such extremes for 'love' and sexual desire: "...makes himself another sign that announces, with all due snobbishness, how he is Ill Famed Dottore", in order to "access her bedchamber" once more.

Furthermore, the use of an animal's perspective (Figaro's character) is immediately humorous, in the sense that we are confronted with an unconventional view of 'cats'; how they feel, think and act, and fundamentally, how they view the world and how the cat helped his master to fulfill his aim, and enjoyed it while both were making love.. The combination of Puss and an extreme sexuality is also comical. That's how Figaro's commented on his master victory. "She pecks my master prettily thank-you on the cheek, wets the gum on his false mustache with the tip of her strawberry tongue and sticks it back on his upper lip for him"(carter 53).

This conversation between Figaro's and his master shows the lust for sex. To fulfill that lust both planned masterly and enjoyed the pleasure of sex at the rate of death-death of the rats and the death of the signor panteleone."I must and will have her forever,' he exclaims. I see my plan has come to nothing. Satisfaction has not satisfied him; that soul they both saw in one another's bodies have such insatiable hunger no single meal could ever appease it. I fall to the toilette of my hinder parts, my favorite stance when contemplating the ways of the world. 'How can I live without her?' You did so for twenty-seven years, sir, and never missed her for a moment. 'I'm burning with the fever of love!' Then we're spared the expense of fires.



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'I shall steal her away from her husband to live with me.' 'What do you propose to live on, sir?' 'Kisses,' he said distractedly. 'Embraces' (Carter 54).

In the particular story puss in boots, humor derives from the animal and human combination. Carter attributes human qualities and feelings onto Puss, this personification creates a comical effect in the story though the issues raised in the story were ironical such as lust, loss of virginity, male dominated society and violence.

The postmodernist attitude of taking serious subjects humorously was not limited only to subjects like death, violence, and sexuality, but also to other serious issues such as war, religion, and science. Because of the problematization of problems, they stopped searching for the meaning of life and trying to address such serious subjects, humorously that which are painful to discuss. They use tools such as dark humor to ultimately laugh at their folly.

Country Joe McDonald song **I feel like I'm fixin to die Rag** is a satire on the attitude of the US Government towards the Vietnam War. Through GI humor this song addresses the horrors of going to war with a dark sarcastic humor. This song is a sarcastic comment on the politicians, US military and the industry who is making money from the war. Moreover it's an ironic remark on conscription, a system that selected young people and forced them to join the military and war.

The only other choice was jail or an attempt to "dodge the draft" for religious, physical or mental reasons. Cold attitude and making fun of serious subjects are the characteristics of postmodernism.

This song Moreover, it highlights the possible total humankind nuclear destruction.

well c'mon on Wall Street don't be slow why
this is war a-go-go there's plenty good money
to be made by supplin' the Army with the
tools of the trade
just hope and pray that if we drop the bomb
they drop it on-the Vietcong (McDonald 29-
34)

These lyrics are an ironic commentary on the US government's lack of seriousness regarding the war, and rather than praying that they do not drop bombs, they suggest a good location for the bombing. This song addresses the serious issue of war prior to actually mocking it. Even though it is conveyed through irony and dark humor, McDonald's song has a direct message. Aside from being criticizing, this song also demonstrates people's insensitivity to war and their lack of desire to participate in it. McDonald even stated in the song about himself:

And it's one, two, three What
are we fighting for?

Don't ask me, I don't give a damn Next
stop is Vietnam

And it's five, six, seven Open
up the pearly gates

Well there ain't no time to wonder why Whoopee!
we're all gonna die (McDonald 35-42)



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Firstly they have no serious concerns towards war. Secondly, they said that they cannot escape mortality then why to think and fear about death? As their ultimate end is death then what's the point of living a purposeful life. Instead of taking war as a serious subject they saw war as some play area where they can go and chill out.

So put down your books and pick up a gun

We're gonna have a whole lotta fun (McDonald 5-6)

This song also mocked American patriotism by telling parents that they can be among the first in society to receive their son in a casket. How seeing their young children in the casket bring them joy? There was no concept of surviving a war, so the country here mocks the horrors

of war and humorously asks parents to be proud that they will be the first to be known as the parents of martyrs..

Come on mothers throughout the land Pack
your boys off to Vietnam

Come on fathers, and don't hesitate

To send your sons off before it's too late And
you can be the first ones in your block

To have your boy come home in a box (McDonald 43-48) This song is a clear cut anti Vietnam War song. Postmodernists don't see purpose in anything, not even in war. They don't give a damn to the horrors of the wars and death.

Although industrialization and scientific advancement provided millions of people with a higher standard of living, they also caused human suffering on a variety of levels. Vonnegut uses humor in his novel CAT'S CRADLE to persuade his readers to question their culture's "sacred cows," which include science, religion, nation, and family, to name a few. Underlying Vonnegut's witty wit is an examination of the dangers inherent in the combination of human stupidity and indifference with humanity's technological capacity for mass destruction. He paints a picture of the end of the world in this novel. The story is narrated by John, who invites us to call him Jonah. In searching the children of the atomic bomb inventor, he arrives at the island of San Lorenzo. There he discovers a new religion, which is called Bokononism. This new religion is in fact like any other, with its own prophets, with the books of Bokonon, which says the origin and "its commandments".

But, the whole story mingles some kinds of humoristic elements. The first thing Vonnegut satirizes and at the same time criticizes religion. He is not rebelling against religion, but what he tries to say is that people have lost their faith in these religions, so they need to find new ones. That is why he created this new religion. It was so simple for them to switch religions if they didn't like the first one for whatever reason. That's how lightly they treat such a serious subject as religion. This is in fact a mockery to religion itself.

He says that "People don't come to church for preachments, of course, but to daydream about God" (Palm Sunday 330).

Vonnegut himself claimed that his books "are essentially mosaics made up of a whole bunch of tiny little chips... and each chip is a joke."

This novel humorously mocks Science as seen by humans as 'truth' in the world and people relate that truth with goodness. In Fact science is eventually destroying the world in the cat's cradle. Science is not such a great thing to be obsessed with but people consider science as a powerful source which can take away all their problems. One such incident can be seen in the novel cat's cradle.



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This novel represents a free use of technology where humanity is harmed rather than helped. When Vonnegut was growing up, technology was discovered to help humanity. But the atomic bomb or the ice - nine has just one purpose in Vonnegut's eyes: that is just to kill.

In chapter 66 of the novel, the leader in San Lorenzo, Papa suffers from an unknown disease and on his deathbed he says: "You,' he said to Frank hoarsely, 'you - Franklin Hoenikker - you will be the next President of San Lorenzo. Science - you have science. Science is the strongest thing there is.' 'Science' said 'Papa' 'Ice'" (Vonnegut 146).

He elects to make Frank Hoenikker the new president of San Lorenzo after him as he got to know his death is approaching him. He chooses Frank because he knows of his possession of Ice-Nine (which happens to be the greatest and newest scientific discovery of mankind in the novel). The satire is this: Papa assumes that Frank is the best person to elect as president of the town because he has power to change the world to make the land utopic because he is having ICE- nine. However, later in the novel, the reader gets to know that Ice-Nine brings about the end of the world. Vonnegut's satire reflects the postmodern concept that pursuing a utopia through science is a foolish quest because the further mankind dives into scientific discovery, the more destructive society becomes.

"When it fell, it would freeze into hard little hobnails of ice-nine—and that would be the end of the world! And the end of the interview, too! Good-bye!

So this novel is the perfect example of how science brought destruction to humans, through the characters of Papa, Angela Hoenikker and even Felix Hoenikker who made Ice – Nine died because of that deadly scientific discovery.

In this novel, he gives us an image of the end of the world. The story is narrated by John, who invites us to call him Jonah. In searching the children of the atomic bomb inventor, he arrives at the island of San Lorenzo. There he discovers a new religion, which is called Bokononism. This new religion is in fact like any other, with its own prophets, with the books of Bokonon, which says the origin and "its commandments".

Vonnegut uses a religion he created for the novel called Bokononism to convey society's misconceptions about the usefulness of truth. Bokononism is a religion that identifies with its own falseness. It rejoices in accepting that its ideals are not true. In *The Books of Bokonon* (the bokononist equivalent of the Christian bible) it states to "Live by the foma (harmless untruths) that make you brave and kind and happy and healthy." Bokononists see that a religion does not have to be true to be useful.

In the novel Vonnegut uses the island of San Lorenzo to portray how lies can help mankind more than truth. The island is extremely poverty stricken and they have no means of building the island's economy or natural resources to make it an island worth living on. So instead of attempting to do so, the citizens confide in the hope which their religion can bring them, regardless of whether it's true or not. It can bring them hope and happiness nonetheless.

"Well, when it became evident that no governmental or economic reform was going to make the people much less miserable, religion became the one real instrument of hope. Truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible" (Vonnegut 172).



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This is a postmodern theme because it shows how gaining all truth does not really better society in all cases.

The presence of black humor in American literature creates a new atmosphere in the literature's emotional patterns. Black humor dissolves the funny features of traditional humor through the absurd form of expression. Its absurdity effectively dissolved the depression and seriousness found in traditional tragedies. The characters' tragic smiles and brave struggles replace the sense of pain that tragedy brings. Black humor employs laughter to express tragedy and tragic fate, and absurdly describes the tragic plot. It generates new literature that is distinct from the traditional tragedy and drama literature forms.

Conclusion

The entire study is framed by how the term Black humor plays with serious subjects such as war, religion, sex, death, violence, science, and technology in the works of Donald Barthelme, Angela Carter, Kurt Vonnegut, and McDonald. To live a normal life, humor is used as a coping mechanism to reduce the seriousness of such taboo and painful subjects. The current study attempted to demonstrate atrocities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as how writers attempted to subsume such atrocities in black humor. Researchers highlight how moral thoughts fused with the most interesting forms of slapstick comedy in works such as *Cat's Cradle*, the *Bloody Chamber* (short story collection), *I Feel Like I'm Fixin to Die Rag* (song), and others in the current study.

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