

THEME OF BLACK HUMOUR AND RESTRUCTURE JOHN BARTH'S THE FLOATING OPERA

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Abstract

Black Humor is essentially a theme in American literature which developed after the Second World War. But Black Humor fiction has its roots in early American Tradition and several major American novelists of the past have combined grimness and humor in their works. The trace of the root of the term records that "Black Humor" was first used by the surrealist writer Andre Breton in 1939 when he interpreted his "Anthologies de le humor noir". John Barth is essentially an academic-oriented literary figure. He is endowed with the accurate awareness of the psychosomatic complexities and the emotional problems modern man. In fact of all the eminent American Post Modernists like William Gass, John Hawkes, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Stanley Elekin, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., John Barth alone could be identified as the one who has been instrumented for elaborating a second renaissance in the history of the Twentieth Century American Fiction. Barth's career as a versatile postmodern American novelist of phenomenal virtuosity began in early January of 1955 when he started to write his major work, The Floating Opera (1956). at this point, it ought to be noted that the present critical endeavor on Barth's The Floating Opera, The End of the Road, and Lost in the Funhouse explore and extract the elements of existentialism and black humor. In this novel, Todd Andrews is a protagonist. He is a fifty years old Maryland Lawyer who is writing in 1954 about the day in 1937 when he decided to commit suicide because there was no final reason for living.

Keywords: Black Humour, Existentialism, Postmodernism, Restructure

John Barth is the most important an academic-oriented literary character. He is provided with the serious consciousness of the psychosomatic convolutions and the emotional dilemmas modern man. Indeed, all the famous postmodern writers like John Hawkes, William Gass, Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, Stanley Elkin, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., John Barth alone could be found as the one who has been influential for expanding a second renaissance in the history of the Twentieth Century American Fiction.

Creation Of The Floating Opera

Barth's first novel, *The Floating Opera*, is fairly express about the theoretical problem he is fascinated with so as to construct it the theme of the inquiry by his central character, Todd Andrews. The narrator asks the question is what Albert Camus called "the fundamental question of philosophy" in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that is, man has lost his faith in God in the world. The book itself is seemingly an attempt by the narrator to explicate the process and the effect of his "Inquiry" about the problem of suicide, forced to one day in June seventeen years ago. In the face of the murky subject matter, Todd's remembrance is full of a comic performance of life. The answer Todd come back with at the end of the novel is naturally Barthian, which is in two minds and ambiguous; "There's no final cause for existing or for suicide." (23)

Black Humour And Restructure

The Floating Opera is an excellent introduction to John Barth's career as a black humor novelist and as a parodist. Restored to its original ending in the revised edition of 1967, the novel firmly establishes Barth as a black humorist. The novel's title is from the name of showboat that used to travel around the Virginia and Maryland tidewater areas with the banner reading "Adam's Original and Unparalleled Floating Opera". Todd Andrews the narrator, the hero of the novel gives the following reason for choosing the part of the name of the showboat as the title of the book in page number seven. Once it was tied up at Long Wharf, this is changed his mind in 1937. That is the root cause to choose it as a title *The Floating Opera*.

However, *The Floating Opera* is symbolic of life itself. Todd explains that how much of life functions; our friends drift past; we become evolved them; they drift on gossip or lose trace of them wholly. This way of life has collapsed and containing a series of broken anecdotes, lacking any logical meaning and unable to understand and discipline is obviously a great aspect one. Discussing the meaning of the title of the novel Jac Tharpe asserts thus the universe is depended on nothing important that can be discovered. It nearly moves, spins, dips, and escapes in the very large ocean universe. Since we cannot identify what reality is, we shall plainly make one to serve. Generally, the effect of this process was either belief or myth. In Barth's point of view, it is to make a word of fiction, not an artifice world. (36)

This dark and miserable view of life imbues the whole view of a novel which is very comedy. The most famous of black humor novelists are immersed with the idea of life. The idea of death is a major asset for the dark view in their novels. While other present writers dealing with death in a dark way as the seriousness of the matter, the black humor writers employ the fear of death from an ironic and comic view. They analyze that death is the great absurdity which rejects all meaning from human existence. If all the sort of human beings direct to nowhere else but death besides which there is nothing, then all human acts get contradicted. As a result, the black humor writer shows a very dark and somber view of a human end. He believes that death is an absolute reality.

The main attitude moves through almost all black humor novels. The heroes of the novels are always visited by the fear of death; they also form strategies for survival. Thus Le Clair notes: Laughter does not remove the death, but it does make for the reader a literary circumstance in which death can be shown. (84)

The black humor in *The Floating Opera* rises extremely for the dominance of death and suicidal despair. The main character of Todd Andrews signifies death. He asserts that Todd Andrews is his name. We can pronounce it with one or two ds. In German Tod is signified for death. Here Todd is almost Tod that is almost dead. (FO, 3-4). We are not able to reject the physical truth of death either by connecting with others, giving life logically or by transforming it into religious faith; Todd Andrews turns fictional characters and leads to acting as his assistant. The great role is that of fiction. *The Floating Opera* takes as Todd's fiction. The book is a story of Todd's decision to commit suicide himself in June 1937 and his later invert of that decision. Attempting to contribute an exploration of his decision as unstable decision, Todd tells his life story as the inquiry into the account of human activity itself. Todd agonizes due to a horrible heartache called Myocardial infarction which becomes a very fact of his life. So he is agitated by the fear of death from the childhood stage of his life. Frank D. Mc Connell states him as, "A man who exists with that deep consciousness of personal death which the existentialists commended a proper understanding of human activity. (123)

With regard to contrary this dreadful fast of life, Todd initiates taking different attitudes guessing that he could identify the answer to his chaos. The rigid reality of attempting death at any time is comically expressed by Todd in the following attitude. Indeed, the humor is black and depressing the fact that he started to write this book, he may not exist to write its conclusion. And other incidents such as having the drink, he may not live to taste it, or that it may give a living man's mouth to burn dead man's stomach. Taking sleep he may not wake or have got up may again living to sleep this for thirty-five years of his life. There is a tremendous question arising from his mind. This is difficult in which has reasoned it twice before without correcting it. Todd said himself as he had woken up one day morning with the

answer to freely like that. This quest is the reality of his life, the reality of his book as well answered the question but not yet be explained all. (49-50)

Alike death, war is also important to which black humor writers inspired generally. War also shapes the backdrop of Barth's *The Floating Opera*. Todd assigns in the army and undermines the terrifying experience of defeating a German soldier. Though he takes part in the war, he is neither alert of the reasons for the war nor is he a nationalist baffling to protect the honor and territorial boundaries of his country. Todd Andrews analyses that he was not a patriot, he had no feelings at all about the matters, if there were any fact to identify that. (61)

The remedy of sex has prescribed the black humor novel its reputation. The black humor writers have broken all restraints about sex in their works. One of the attitudes adopted by the black humor novelists for distracting the reader is to collapse them. With regard to obtain this effect, they always take up such extreme measures. All sorts of sexual abnormality are discussed in the novels to disturb the readers. Barth's novel makes an appeal that Barth does not mock much value to sex as a value of satisfaction. For him, sex is no inspiring act which helps man attains the anxious situation in which he is placed. Todd's affair with Jane, the wife of his friend, is largely sexual.

It does not assist him to conquer his dread of death. Jacob Horner's false relationship with Rennie Morgan at *The End of the Road* also has a terrible act. It not only depicts Jacob Horner act less but runs Rennie to the horrible death. Barth hardly mocks at the animalistic urges of human sexual activities. Todd has his first sexual affair with his girlfriend Betty Jane on his birthday of seventeen years. The absurdity of human and animal is a strong piece of humor at *The End of the Road*. Todd giggles at "mating animals" and "Doublecross" because they repeat him of his first effort to create love for Betty Jane as a youth. While having sex with her, he sees a mirror and starts laughing excitedly. What he looks in the mirror is expressed by Todd. Then Betty Jane's face hidden in the pillow, her skinny small cheeks thrust upwards, his infertility as an overcomer and barking like an ass. Todd sounds with funny and reeled with the comedian. (123)

Indeed a famous black humorist John Barth horribly funs at the fallacy of sex and illustrates his points it through Todd. Thus he said that nothing is constantly, deeply, comically in the act of "mating animals." According to Readers point of view if you are young you fall in love; if the extreme of sex act you sense that you and your lover are examples for a Greek sculptor Phidias, For a mirror can show what it looks, and what it looks is absurd. (124)

The burlesque juxtaposition between the life and death entire novel, *The Floating Opera* fulfills for the much of the black humor voice of the novel. Similarly, William Faulkner in *The Sound and The Fury*, Barth in *The Floating Opera* affects a subtle combination of sex and death when he satirizes the animal mating on one side while the coffin is being seated on

the other side. In the manner, one strongly credits like William Faulkner, Nabokov and Cummings, John Barth initiates sex and death as superior attitudes. Old men on the point of death sentence of love and life. The public enjoys life in the showboat on the ship, thus Todd starts to move it. When he opened the door and the lamenters had come out with the coffin. Their way was arrested by the dogs. The dog moved the balcony, her lover still half mind of her, and took up a place near the casket. The couple then came back their romances in the shining sun, to the awkward situation of the company, who denied not informing them while the coffin's door was opened and the hearse lightly loaded on the ship.

Todd expects the perfect breasts' of Jane and at the same time her 'burned legs'. However, Barth technically expresses the "life in the face of death" dimension to curve the fact of human life in black and then he mocks it off. Yet another aspect of humor in the novel, The Floating Opera, is the satire of ancient romantic comedy. In a sort of comedy, a young couple is often attacked by a blocking character who is either one of the parents or a villain. In The Floating Opera, the young lovers are Jane and Mack Harrison and the blocking human being is Todd Andrews. However, unfair the common romantic comedy Todd is committed to becoming a blocking man by the pair of lovers themselves. After seducing him at Todd notes Jane, wife of Mack Harrison, analyses the circumstance to Todd. Jane talked about her husband's love affair and his thoughts about love in this world. Then Todd replied and accepted her concept of the love affair.

Barth has been involved in beautiful themes right from the starting of his profession as a novelist. They make one of the links between his first two novels and the others, with regard to perceiving the theme of art in The Floating Opera; one must detach Todd Andrews from Barth. The creator is the existentialist and absurdist and the latter has 'art' as an answer to man's dilemma. Barth creatively connects the order of art and the meaninglessness of life in the climactic act on the showboat. While Todd thinks for suicide, a performer performed Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide in a group of passive listeners. Todd does not understand that the change of it is valid even when its expression is quite sad and his reasons for rejecting suicide have nobody to do with a strange involvement to aesthetic issues. The Floating Opera, Barth's maturity of the different art starts with a picture, namely, the boat. The captain illustrates at length on the treatment and skill of its creators. The allusion which Todd does not design is that any well-made thing examines itself. This cliché is also related to the showboat that makes rude entertainment.

Conclusion

As a result, he becomes conscious of the fact that his character as the author by itself creates his life meaningful. Finally, the research tries to demonstrate the antithetical relationship between the sense of reality and absurdity in the writings of John Barth.

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