

Literary Precursors and the Development of Absurdist Humor Throughout the Ages

Student's Name and Surname

Course

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## Literary Precursors and the Development of Absurdist Humor Throughout the Ages

The subjects of literary precursors and absurdist humor have long been the matters of heated debates and controversies—especially considering their transformative character and unusual forms. Literary precursors are defined as processes that precede a previous legacy regarding the evolution of certain literary aspects. As for the advancement in absurdist humor throughout history, it is apparent that this phenomenon has continually progressed—especially considering the alteration of its definition, its striking characteristics, and its applicability in literary works. Although it is often supposed that the essence of absurdity was constant and immutable, the long path ranging from Ancient Greece to the Renaissance period, and from the Southern Gothics to modern interpretations have taken place, indicating the necessity to consider each of these epochs separately.

### **Ancient Greece and the Renaissance**

If taking into consideration the origins of absurdity, it would be improper to deny the contribution of Ancient Greece. In some sense, absurd humor was born in both rhetoric and the literary works of ancient philosophers, indicating the awareness of the subject in old times. More precisely, the absurd was initially used as the incorporation of things that are naturally cannot be combined—leading to inconsistency and illogicalness to occur. Following this notion, it is worth highlighting that Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle perceived absurd humor as something that lacks validity and logical reasoning, indicating merely the negative character of the term.<sup>1</sup> If taking into account the controversial perception of absurd humor, the linguistic element was not examined thoroughly.

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<sup>1</sup>Jose Angel Garcia Landa, "Platos Poetics," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1986, , doi:10.2139/ssrn.2414535.

Subsequently, the Renaissance period was more of a follow-up on the ridiculous development of absurdist humor, which was explained for the first time. Starting from this epoch of development, the role of Thomas Hobbes—who contributed to the explanation of theoretical understanding of “absurd”—must be considered. In particular, Hobbes was the first philosopher who explained the theory of absurdity, at the same time, drawing his own assumptions and possible extensions of the definition—which is the most visible piece of evidence of literary precursors. According to Hobbes, the linguistic development of absurdist humor prevails, which in turn contributed to the fragmentation of humor from errors in literary forms. Consequently, both absurdity and absurdist humor were continually progressing in its types and concealed meaning. In addition, "Table of Absurdity" has pushed the contemplative component in heated debates over absurdity (table).<sup>2</sup> However, the vast majority of breakthroughs within absurdist humor during the Renaissance period were connected with the character of Hobbes. Thus, further observations of absurdist humor in later epochs is required.

### **Southern Gothics and Modernity**

Another crucial point in the development of absurdist humor throughout the ages was the emergence of the Southern Gothics. In general, the names of Faulkner, O’Connor, and Covington are the best illustrations of the characteristics of this literary movement. The authors have incorporated an unusual nature of characters and often destructive settings with absurdist humor. The most significant element of this humor in the period was the purpose, which was the portrayal of numerous social issues, constructs, and controversies. Subsequently, absurdist humor changed its target under the scope of the American South, which added unique characteristics

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<sup>2</sup>S. Morris Engel, "Hobbes "Table of Absurdity", " *The Philosophical Review* 70, no. 4 (1961): , doi:10.2307/2183612.

and traits to the essence of absurdity.<sup>3</sup> The constant transformation of absurdity should be perceived as an integral part of this phenomenon. In some sense, it would be reasonable to claim that absurdity is the reflection of today's world in a unique form, indicating the flexibility and adaptability of absurdity in various contexts and interpretations. Modern realities have long been using absurdist humor, whereas the initial goal and sense has been transformed to fit contemporary challenges. As a whole, modern society is pushing absurdist humor in the digital dimension in the form of "memes," which are constructed in an utterly illogical and absurd design.<sup>4</sup> However, it would be difficult to deny its concealed sense of this type of humor. Subsequently, the modern interpretation of such humor is the incorporation of an exceptionally odd form with deep meanings and insights. By doing so, modern society is pushing the viewer to reassess and reevaluate the absurd that is firmly fitting within the ordinary state of affairs of everyday life.

### **Conclusion**

While considering the above-mentioned epochs, the brief introduction to specific characteristics has proved that absurdist humor is more of a transforming pattern rather than a static rhetorical device. Since it originated from the philosophers of Ancient Greece, further followed in the Renaissance, developed in such branches as the Southern Gothics, it still represents the odd and bizarre nature of contemporary realities. While the form of absurdist humor has not changed much—except through the measures of Hobbes—the purpose and the actuality of absurdist humor has been continually transforming what it is incorporated with. In

<sup>3</sup> Flora, Joseph M., Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Louise Matsakis, "Surreal Memes Are the Last Escape the Internet Has," Motherboard, July 01, 2017, , accessed July 13, 2018, [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/xwz833/surreal-memes-are-the-last-escape-the-internet-has](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/xwz833/surreal-memes-are-the-last-escape-the-internet-has).

such a sense, absurdist humor, with its constantly developing and shaping nature, is an example of a literary precursor.

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