

Dark Comedy in Contemporary English Literature : A Study After 2000 : A Case Study of Paul Beatty's The Sellout

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1.1 Summary

This paper discusses the evolution of the dark comedy genre in the Contemporary literature of the English language since the year 2000, especially in the case of The Sellout by Paul Beatty . Dark comedy, the genre that intermingles the sense of humor with moral and social commentary, has proved to be a potent literary genre through which writers have revealed contradictions, injustices, and absurdities of contemporary society. The novel created by Beatty is a provocative and postmodern reformulation of the satire that directly challenges the problem of racial inequality and the fantasy of progress in post-Civil Rights America. Through irony, parody, and absurdity, Beatty disrupts the usual story of racial harmony and unravels the uncomfortable realities that linger behind the scenes of contemporary culture. Based on the postmodernism theory of things, critical race theory, and humor theory, this paper explains that The Sellout is an example of how dark comedy can be more than entertainment and can be used as a political and philosophical discourse. The results emphasize the role of laughter as defiance and discovery- as an activity that breaks down power relations, undermining the social contradictions that characterize the twenty-first century (Beatty, 2015).

1.2 Introduction (Background)

The world has become complex with political instability, globalization, and cultural anxiety and this situation has been reflected in the development of literature since the onset of the twenty-first century (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 1). Dark comedy is one of the literary devices which have been adopted so well to capture the contradictions of the contemporary world. Dark comedy or black humor is contrasted with the tragic

and the comic but it makes the reader laugh at the same injustices that characterize the human condition. Writers employ humor, through irony, exaggeration, and satire, not to escape, but to view the unpleasant realities of race, identity and morality (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 12).

The modern-day English literary work particularly post 2000, shows a remarkable resurgence of dark comedy as a social commentary form. Such authors like Martin Amis, Zadie Smith and Paul Beatty have turned the comedy in the form of a culture resistance (Amis, 2000, p. 5; Smith, 2001, p. 7; Beatty, 2015, p. 9). Their works confuse the serious and the absurd, and the readers are provoked to wonder about not just the social structures but their involvement in the inequality systems as well. This revival of dark humor can be associated with a postmodern cynicism toward truth universality and an increasing loss of faith to conventional moralities (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 23).

1.3 Definition and Context

The contemporary literature can interpret dark comedy as a story-telling technique that transforms sufferings and injustices into comic situations. It brings out contradiction--laughter occurs just because the situation is not only morally disturbing but intellectually absurd. According to Simon, humor is an ethical challenge as it exposes human weaknesses, but it has a means to survive suffering, and this is that of self-understanding. This kind of humor has become, in English fiction written after 2000, more and more entangled with matters of race, gender and politics, as the world seeks new methods of telling truth to power (Critchley, 2002, p.12).

The *Sellout* (2015) by Paul Beatty is one of the most prominent examples of the contemporary dark comedy. The novel narrates about a black man who tries to bring back slavery and segregation in a satirical commentary on racial identity and hypocrisy of the system in the United States. The language games, absurdity, and self-reflexive humor of the writing style by Beatty compel the readers to acknowledge some unpleasant truths about race and justice, as they laugh at their hyperbolic exaggeration. Its global prominence and its challenge to mainstream morality and politics are marked by its international recognition of the book that

culminated in its 2016 Man Booker Prize nomination and, ultimately, its win (Beatty, 2015, p.1).

1.4 Problem Statement

Although the modern trends in satire are increasingly addressed by scholars, there are hardly any critical studies of how the discourse of the dark comedy functions as a postmodern and racial one in *The Sellout*. Most racial literature analysis is likely to dwell on realism and trauma as opposed to humor. This gap is filled in this paper where the paper explores how the dark humor applied by Beatty works as a coping mechanism and a weapon of intellectual subversion against racial essentialism and cultural hypocrisy.

Nevertheless, even with the body of knowledge that exists on the topic of dark comedy and the philosophy, psyche, and sociocultural aspects of it, there is the discernible gap in the use of dark humor as a tool of addressing the race, identity, and postcolonial experience in contemporary English writing, especially since the year 2000. Much of the theoretical groundwork on humor made in the early or mid-twentieth century, including Freud (1905), Bergson (1911) and subsequent elaborations by Critchley (2002) and Morreall (2009), are of this nature. The theories can be of great help in conceptualizing laughter and ethics but fail to offer the sociopolitical contexts where humor is used in postmodern and postcolonial stories. Otherwise put, although the theory of humor has developed intellectually, it has not reached the point where it can be applied to racially charged satire in modern literature (Critchley 46).

Moreover, the literature that has studied this issue is inclined to consider Euro-American traditions. The presence of dark humor in British and American postmodernism has been examined by scholars such as Palmer, yet little has been done to examine how writers of color have reinvented the tradition to express the marginalized voices. Dark comedy can serve as an effective social protest as the examples of satirical work by African American writers Paul Beatty, Percival Everett, and Colson Whitehead show. However, the critical discourse has failed to look closely at the way these authors employ humor as not only a means to entertain but also to deconstruct systemic discourses regarding race, morality and citizenship. This

gap underscores the necessity to discover more intersectional and culturally situated studies of the dark humor in the 21st century (Palmer, 2004, 79).

The other important gap is ethical reception of dark comedy. Even though this does not deny the moral ambiguity of humor as outlined by such scholars as Critchley, very little empirical or reader-response research has been conducted to examine the audience interpreting darkly comic portrayals of racial trauma. Do the readers feel such humor liberating or uncomfortable or complicit? The emotional and moral reactions that such pieces as *The Sellout* provoke are not as thoroughly researched, which leaves a gap in the understanding of the communicative power of dark comedy in multicultural communities. This defeats the interpretation of dark comedy as a literary and social phenomenon (Critchley, 2002, 47).

Additionally, the changes since 2000 in technology and culture have changed the manner in which humor is transferred and consumed. Satire has now shifted to the digital and globalized platform and erased the line between literature, performance, and social media comment, to the point of disappearing. Modern writers use these new dynamics in their works, but such dark comedy of modern fiction has seldom been discussed by the critical study as to its reflection or critique of the irony of the digital age. The new modes of irony and parody in a hyperconnected world call out a new critical regard which places dark humor in the context of global post-2000 literature.

There has been a paucity of literature to systematic report on the comparison between dark comedies currently and those of the past in order to evaluate the changes in the ethical and political aspects of humor. The focus of postwar satire on existential absurdity is replaced with cultural hybridity, racialized power dynamics, and neoliberal contradictions in the line of the modern dark comedy, such as *The Sellout*. This move is not merely a style change, but an indication of a change in the ethical intent of humor itself. Lack of critical focus on these developments over the long term is the main research gap that the present study fills (Beatty, 2015, 18).

Thus, this study can be a contribution to the research since it presents a comprehensive examination of the way *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty challenges the roles of dark comedy in modern English literature. It addresses how the satire of

Beatty raises negotiation between laughs and moral uneasiness to recover humor as a form of resistance and self-criticism. By placing the novel in the context of the post-2000 literary discourse, the presented paper does not only address a critical gap in the existing body of literature by connecting the theoretical knowledge of traditional humor research with the sociopolitical urgency of racial satire of the present.

1.5 Aims of the study

- Consider how the methods of dark comedy apply to the *Sellout* and what effects these methods have on the reader in terms of their moral and emotional responses.
- Discover the way in which Beatty combines postmodern irony and racial satire to reveal the contradictions of the modern world.
- Explore how the element of dark comedy has expanded its purpose as a type of political and philosophical involvement in the English literature after 2000.

1.6 Thesis Statement

The paper argues that *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty recreates the definition of dark comedy in the twenty-first century by combining racial satire with the postmodern self-awareness. Beatty is able to turn humor into a subversive element through irony, absurdity and linguistic play, and this makes it expose the moral hypocrisy of race and identity in modern society. His work illustrates that dark comedy in contemporary English literature is not merely an issue of entertainment but a very insightful commentary on moral, cultural and political insecurity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of Dark Comedy in Literature

Dark comedy has always taken up a special position in the literary history as the genre that unites humor with the tragedy, irony with the despair, and laughter with ethical criticism. Contrary to the traditional comedy where the main goal is conflict resolution and restoration of harmony, the dark comedy transcends contradiction- it elicits laughter in a situation where least expected. It is paradoxical and, in this way, able to deal with taboo topics, like death, injustice, and moral corruption. Dark humor has been used as a means of resistance throughout the literary history,

revealing the absurdity of the human behavior and the unreasonableness of social order. The history of dark comedy is dated to classical and early modern satire. Irony and exaggeration were employed in ancient Greek and Roman works by such authors as Aristophanes and Juvenal to mock corruption in politics and human stupidity. Nevertheless, it was Enlightenment that changed dark comedy into a more severe tool of moral and social satire. A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift is among the oldest and the most prominent representatives of the genre. The fact that Swift implies that the Irish poor sell children to serve as food to the rich reveals the inhumanity and blindness of British colonialism. His comedy is not intended to amuse but to bother, to make the readers face the hideous reasoning of exploitation. Through this, the dark comedy emerged as one of the literary techniques that transforms the moral outrage into ironic humor (Swift, 1729, p12).

The twentieth century was the new period of development of dark comedy when authors started to address existential and political crises of modernity with the help of this genre. The works by Franz Kafka, George Orwell and Samuel Beckett were full of absurdity and despair, as the authors showed the worlds where people can fight against dehumanizing bureaucracies or meaninglessness. The Trial by Kafka is the absurdity of a person who is being stalled in the legal system that cannot be understood, whereas the Animal Farm (1945) by Orwell is a satirical allegory about the hypocrisy of politics and totalitarian manipulation. They both demonstrate the way laughter may be an expression of awareness of their own powerlessness against systems of oppression (Kafka, 1925, p 45) .

In the post-World War II age, dark comedy emerged as the requisite form of dealing with the post-war trauma and disillusionment of life in the modern world. Black humor was popularized by writers such as Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut in order to react to the stupidity of war and of bureaucracy. We see the absurdity of military existence in the logic of Catch-22 by Heller (1961) and the horrors of war are changed by Vonnegut in Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) to become a kind of black irony. Palmer (2004, p 78) states that such works allow seeing how the logic of absurdity turns into the logic of survival, as humor proves to be a psychological tool

of survival in traumatic situations. These authors provided the groundwork of the dark comedy being both an existential and ethical reaction to the suffering.

Towards the end of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the genre of dark comedy was absorbed into postmodernism as a metafictional play and cultural criticism. Postmodern authors used irony, parody to challenge authority and undermine historical accounts and blur the boundaries between tragedy and farce. Another example is Martin Amis, whose grotesque humor is evident in *Money* (1984) and *Yellow Dog* (2003) to condemn consumerism and moral corruption in the late capitalist society. Likewise, post-2000 British and American authors have rewritten dark comedy to respond to the issues of globalization, identity politics and racial disparities. The role played by the genre has changed as it is not as much about expressing existential anxiety as it is about questioning the collective ethics and cultural identity in the fragmented world.

As Palmer (2004) and Critchley (2002) remark, the reason why dark comedy prevails is that it is possible to simultaneously perceive pain and laugh at the same time. It leaves the contradictions unresolved thus plunging the readers into a moral contemplation. This duality renders dark comedy especially topical in the literary environment after 2000 when humor is the tool of both criticism and survival. This is a tradition that *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty places itself in, a twenty-first century masterpiece that builds upon the tradition of dark comedy that stretches back to Swift and his biting satire, progressive toward Vonnegut and his absurdism, and radical in its commentary on race, identity, and power in the 21st century.

2.2 Dark Comedy in Contemporary English Literature After 2000

The beginning of the twenty first century marked the turning point in the development of English literature, which was marked by globalization, culture and growing political disenchantment. It is in this environment that dark comedy reasserted itself as a dominant narrative mode and was able to reflect the contradictions and anxieties of the postmodern world. The dark comedy works by, in contrast to traditional satire, which often aimed at a moral solution. It recognizes the inaccessibility of truth and it reveals that identity, morality, and history are unsteady in a discontinuous society. The twenty-first century dark comedy simply does not

provide a sense of redemption through its laughter; it transforms laughter into the moral uncomfortable experience (Critchley 45).

In recent English novels, dark comedy has been used to address the world crises, such as terrorism, racial injustice, consumerism, and the limitless depletion of empathy in digital society. Irony and absurdity are employed by writers like Martin Amis, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan and Hanif Kureishi to deconstruct the strains of multiculturalism and postcolonial identity. *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith (2000) uses humor to show generation conflict and absurdity of cultural assimilation in London whereas *Yellow Dog* by Amis (2003) makes use of grotesque humor as a criticism of corruption in the moral and media sphere. In the same vein, the unease of the Western middle class in the world that is dominated by war and surveillance is ironically revealed through ironic detachment in *Saturday* (2005) by McEwan. These authors demonstrate that the dynamics of the post-2000 dark comedy is both a form of aesthetic policy and ethical criticism that show that modern life is absurd, and its moral crisis cannot be separated (Smith 27; Amis 112; McEwan 34).

The clue to this literary movement is a transition between individual desperation to group criticism. The twenty-first century Dark comedy is no longer an individual alienation as it was in the past works of modernism; it faces the social contradictions globally, the satire of today has shifted its focus, no longer on the absurdity of the human condition but on the absurdity of the institutions of the human life. This change is a result of the increasing power of the postmodernism and critical theory, in which an irony is a protest but not cynicism. Laughter exposes systemic hypocrisy whether political, racial, or cultural and makes the reader realize that he or she has played a part in perpetuating it (Palmer 78).

The Sellout is the embodiment of this change. The novel is set in a fictional suburb of Los Angeles, and it is written using the racial satire to address the hypocrisies of the so-called post-racial America. Beatty presents the protagonist, an African-American man who is trying to restore slavery and segregation, and who represents all the absurd extremes of racial rhetoric. His moves, though unbelievable, are reflective of the hypocrisy of a society which claims to be keeping equality but perpetuates inequality. The linguistic experimentation, fragmentation, and self-

reflexivity of Beatty are all narratively techniques of postmodernism that mark the dark comedy of today. His comedy is not political, it is existential and it requires the readers to laugh at moral decay when they are addressing the reasons behind it (Beatty, 2015, 15).

Dark comedy is another transnational form that has developed in the post-2000 period. With the erosion of culture due to globalization, authors have been incorporating humor as a method of expression to create a hybrid identity and address colonial discourse. The White Tiger (2008) by Aravind Adiga offers an example of a macabre humor style where corruption and class stratification are challenged in modern India, and How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia (2013) by Mohsin Hamid is an example of the style that uses a rather sarcastic approach to mock the capitalist dream. The two novels show that dark comedy defies cultural boundaries, as it is a language of criticism worldwide. The work by Beatty is engaged in this cosmopolitan conversation and the American racial experience is used by the author to comment upon the questions of power, memory, and moral absurdity.

Contemporary English post 2000 dark comedy is a reflection and rebellion. It is an expression of a post-truth world that is in revolt against the apathy of moral complacency. The genre has changed to provide catharsis to generate critical unease. Smith, Amis and Beatty are examples of how humor transforms into an act of defiance, a form of destabilization of the regimes of authority and the irrationality of the modern order. In this respect, The Sellout by Beatty is a historic masterpiece rebranding dark comedy in the twenty-first century that combines the racial scathe with the irony that is postmodern to show that the laughter in the modern literature is not a relief but a revelation (Beatty 18).

2.3 Scholarly Perspectives on Dark Humor and Ethics

Literary theorists and philosophers have given a lot of attention to the subject of the dark comedy because the humor was not only a psychological response, but also a moral and intellectual action. In this discussion, humor is observed as a tool of exposing ethical contradictions, defying authority, and trauma coping. Experts of differing schools of thought, existentialist, psychoanalytic, and cultural, all concur

that dark comedy is both in a paradox between the laugh and the discomfort, between the moral insight and the moral ambiguity (Critchley 45).

On humor by Simon is one of the most powerful philosophical works on the topic. Critchley claims that humor is an ethical reflex: it shows how weak human rationality is, how absurd moral hypocrisy is. To Critchley, laughter takes place when the person is aware of the difference between ideal values and grotesque undress of reality. It is this moral incompatibility that makes humor turn into a philosophical act of submission instead of domination. This awareness is heightened in the dark comedy where the audience does not laugh because they are happy but rather, they laugh because they understand that they are all in the same position. The opinion held by Critchley assigns humor as an exercise of moral thinking, in which laughing turns out to be a critique and a consolation (Critchley, 2002, 45).

To fit in with this philosophical approach, psychoanalytic methods, originating with Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, by Sigmund Freud, describe humor as a form of release of repressed emotion. Laughter can be disclosed by Freud as a psychological process which releases tension in particular conditions of pain, fear or social restriction through the theory of relief which he has described as the way to get rid of any tension. Applying the Freud theory to the dark comedy, it means that laughter is used as a coping tool that enables people to indirectly confront the trauma. The ugly hyperbolism used in the dark humor allows the viewers to digest otherwise inadmissible facts. Such psychological aspect facilitates the persistence of the popularity of such authors as Kurt Vonnegut and Paul Beatty, the laughter of whom is based on moral indignation turned into comic absurdity (Freud, 1905, 67).

John is another major perspective and considers humor to be an ethical detachment. Morreall believes that laughter temporarily halts judgment and this gives people an opportunity to witness moral failure at a distance. Though it is possible that this is an amoral detachment, it allows the observer to see the irrationality of human actions. The concept by Morreall can be applied to the dark comedy because it makes sense to laugh at events that are morally disturbing, but not to support them. Such laughter created by The Sellout, e.g., makes no contribution to the triviality of racism but

shows the absurdity of the racial logic as such. Moral distancing in Beatty is an act of critical response which is transformed into a laughter (Morreall, 2009, 112).

Culturally speaking, the use of humor as a reaction to social trauma is highlighted by such scholars as Palmer (2004). Black humor is an ethical approach toward dealing with pain by making it ironical. Within this context, laughter is a resilient behavior as opposed to a denial behavior. On the same note, he claims that the role of a dark comedy is the moral conscience of postmodernity, as it shocks the audience with the unpleasant presence of laughter and hopelessness. Taken altogether, these theories tend to indicate that the moral worth of dark humor is its lack of providing comfort; on the contrary, it is the challenge to think about the cruelty and absurdity of human nature (Palmer, 2004, 78).

These theoretical insights have been developed in the recent critical work to include discourses of race and power. The humor used by Paul Beatty as a radical kind of social criticism, the dark comedy by Beatty is an attempt to weaponize laughter to turn humor into an instrument of opposing the hypocrisy of liberal tolerance and racial privilege. In the same vein, the satire of Beatty crashes the moral hierarchies because both the oppressor and the oppressed become objects of ridicule. This perversion of moral justice makes the reader engage in the absurd of the text and thus makes him or her involved in the ethical strains. The uneasiness caused by laughing at taboo topics of race, slavery and segregation creates a moral crisis, which reflects the ethical perplexity of the contemporary society (Beatty 15).

Collectively these academic schools of thought can indicate that dark humor is not merely an aesthetic tool but rather an ethical mode of inquiry. It challenges the reader to laugh with impunity, to be emotionally involved with doubt. This is the paradox of *The Sellout* by Beatty: he makes people laugh not to avoid conflict, but to direct it. The novel shows that, in the modern English literature, dark comedy is a philosophical and moral discourse that makes a reader think about the limits between the humor, responsibility, and truth (Critchley 46; Morreall 114; Palmer 79; Beatty 18).

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents theoretical views that guide the interpretation of *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty, highlighting three main frameworks, namely, Postmodernism and Satire, Critical Race Theory, and Humor Theory. The combination of these strategies gives the analytic background to the concept of how the dark comedy of Beatty works as a narrative experimentation, as well as a socio-political commentary.

3.1 Postmodernism and Satire

Postmodernism as a literary and philosophical movement challenges the truth, meaning and representation. Postmodernism, in the case of the dark comedy, takes the form of irony, parody, fragmentation, and self-reflexivity, which seek to provoke the audience to doubt traditional moral and historical narration. The idea of historiographic metafiction developed by Linda Hutcheon is very much applicable to *The Sellout*. As Hutcheon argues, postmodern fiction is a rescripted and a renegotiating of history by self-parodying it and revealing the construction of truths and powers and not their discovery (Hutcheon, 1988, 45).

The story by Beatty is an illustration of this tendency of postmodernism because it is satirical in historical context, and in the same way it is metafictional in humor. The fact that the protagonist tries to reinstitute slavery and segregation to a fictionalized Los Angeles suburb is a heinous, but extraordinarily thought-provoking critique of the hypocrisies that constitute the race relations of the present day. Beatty undermines the power of historical discourse by means of parody and absurd exaggeration and satirizes the social conventions that proclaim their support to the equality, but perpetrate inequality. Postmodernism parody is not a simple form of mockery as Hutcheon argues but a critical engagement that not only exploits the past but also abuses it. The dark satire of Beatty is exactly created in this gap - it is some reflection of the grotesque reasoning of racism to reveal its ridiculous nature (Hutcheon, 1988, 46).

In this respect, *The Sellout* can be viewed as not only a postmodern text but also a meta-satirical commentary of how America has become obsessed with the idea of racial reconciliation and political correctness. The form of the novel, full of digressions, intertextual allusions and narrative irony, can be seen as one that

concurr with Hutcheon in her perceptions of postmodernism as a complicit critique where humor is deeply engaged in the dominant ideologies and at the same time deconstructs them. The self-reflexive tone of Beatty challenges the readers to wonder how they are also complicit in the mechanisms the text parodies by framing laughter in a context of moral discomfort.

3.2 Critical Race Theory

Another key lens that can be used to analyze the work by Beatty is the Critical Race Theory (CRT). Curtained out of the legal works of Bell (1992) and subsequently elaborated by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT highlights the fact that racism has not been the work of a single individual prejudice, but rather an institutional, cultural, and legal form of racism. Its major aim is to oppose racial essentialism which is the perception that racial groupings carry a sense meaning and to demonstrate how these constructs reproduce social hierarchies.

The Sellout by Beatty confronts the tenets of the CRT in a thorough manner by relying on the irony, inversion and satire. The main character of the novel, an African American man who tries to restore the segregation, is ridiculous and reflects the extremities of racial logic to the point of absurdity. Beatty puts the racial discourse to the extreme in order to reveal the hypocrisy of the so-called post-racial society that still requires the racial categorization to maintain the social and political order. Through this, the satire of Beatty is a reflection of that by Bell (1992), who argues that racial progress in America is usually made only in a manner that it satisfies the interests of the dominant group (Bell 23).

Point to one of the primary CRT approaches, namely counter storytelling, in which the subordinate experience is described, refuting the mainstream narrative. The narrative structure used by Beatty fulfills this role with a parody, which expresses the pain of race with laughter. His jokes do not belittle the Black experience but, instead, turn it into a weapon of criticism that disrupts the anticipations of the reader toward race and justice. The outrageous premise of the novel compels the readers to grapple with the contradictions of the liberal tolerance, where equality is usually talked about rhetorically and weakened structurally. The Sellout presents a kind of radical investigation through the prism of CRT at the way in which race is socially

constructed and politically exploited. Beatty is turning irony into the decolonial approach by making fun of the idea of essentialism concerning racial identity and by redefining Black subjectivity beyond the victimhood (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 45).

3.3 Humor Theory

In order to address the ethical and psychological aspects of laughter in the Sellout, this work also uses classical theories of humor, especially Freudian theory of relief and the theory of incongruity proposed by Bergson. The concept of humor as a discharge of psychic tension is conceptualized in Freud Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. Laughter enables the repressed feelings which are usually associated with pain, fear or taboo, to be expressed in a socially acceptable way, according to Freud. This release is used as a paradox in dark comedy: it is something pleasurable which causes a discomfort. Beatty uses this paradox to make the readers laugh at things that are deeply disturbing; slavery, racism, and social injustice, putting the emotional repression into critical consciousness (Freud, 1905, 67).

Conversely, the incongruity theory considers laughter to be the reaction to inflexibility or senselessness in human deeds. In the case of Bergson, comedy occurs when the mechanical patterns come to play instead of actual feeling and they produce an effect of detachment leading to laughter. The Sellout concurs with this perspective in its representation of the mechanical following of racial stereotypes and bureaucratic inanimate. The comic but tragic inflexibility of contemporary existence is revealed through the overdrawn depiction of racial identity politics and social hypocrisy by Beatty. The humor he causes is not simply cathartic but analytical-it can make the readers aware of the ridiculousness of the mechanisms that perpetuate racism. Combined, the theories of Freud and Bergson allow to better understand the way The Sellout functions on several levels: in the form of psychological discharge, intellectual criticism, and moral challenge. Beatty uses laughter to confuse the divisions between entertainment and guilt and challenge readers to evaluate their emotional reactions to racial satire. This twofold role of humor to be relieving and uncomfortable is the key to the dark comedy in modern literature (Bergson, 1911, 52).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The Sellout is one of the most daring and creative novels of modern English literature that combines political satire with the outlook of the postmodern dark comedy. The novel turns humor into a serious tool of questioning the racial dialogue, moral inconsistency and cultural integrity within the twenty-first century America. By use of absurdity, irony and use of language games Beatty is able to destabilize the moral security that a reader has, forcing them to think about the paradoxes of the modern society. In this chapter, the author focuses on five essential aspects of the dark comedy The Sellout, namely its use as a political weapon, its alternation between the absurd and the ethical, its language subversion, its postmodern narrative techniques and its work with the trauma and cultural memory (Beatty, 2015, 15).

"This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I've never stolen anything" (Beatty, 2015).

This introductory statement sets at once the usage of dark comedy and racial irony in the novel. The narrator foresees a stereotype that belongs to the Black identity and nullifies it with the help of humor. The sentence is comic but at the same time reveals the ingrained racial beliefs that shaped the American society. This ironic confession makes Beatty compel readers to view the racial stereotypes as absurd. According to the Critical Race Theory, the quote explains how racial prejudice is a social construct and not a factual event. The humor disrupts the anticipations of the reader and reveals implicit racial prejudice (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

4.1 Dark Comedy as a Political Thunderbolt

In The Sellout, humor is a subversive weapon of engaging institutionalized racism. The main character, called Beatty, in his role, has an ambitious task to bring about segregation and slavery in a dystopian Los Angeles neighborhood called Dickens. This ridiculous twist of the shift in civil rights is a mockery of the irony of what Beatty describes as the color-blind America. Introducing an African American character who is aware of recreating the oppressive systems is a way of presenting how the discourse of racial impartiality is merely a cover to reveal the perpetuation of structural inequality.

Satanic argument on Critical Race Theory that racism is not an exceptional issue but it is systemic directly interacts with the satire (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, 45). The myth of post-racial harmony is broken down by the humor of Beatty who pushes the

reasoning of the myth to its absurdity. The futile effort of the protagonist to reinstate the segregation portrays ironically that equality has been largely performative- only in language and legislation but not reality. The narrator suggests that laughter itself becomes a strategy for confronting racism until it cries, as the narrator puts it. This quote summarizes the approach of the novel: laughing as defense and offense. The Sellout is a satire that turns into a political activism through its bold sense of humor. Beatty does not laugh in order to escape, but to rebel. It shows hypocrisies of liberal discourse and reengages the power of defining Black identity without being a victim (Beatty, 2015, 15).

"The Supreme Court has asked me to come here today and explain why I illegally reinstated slavery and segregation in the farming community of Dickens." (Beatty, 2015).

This quote is the main satirical assumption made in this novel. The idea of the narrator trying to restore slavery and segregation may sound ridiculous, but it is also a criticism of the post-racism illusion in America. Beatty overstates the reasoning behind the racial hierarchy to show the existence of the idea even in the modern institutions. The absurd situation, through the prism of Postmodern Satire, disrupts the official discourses of the racial progress following the Civil Rights Movement. The comedy is a kind of political satire revealing the hypocrisy of the discourse of equality and the actual state of racial inequality (Hutcheon, 1988).

4.2 The Absurd and the Ethical

The story of Beatty swings between the grotesque and the comic, creating a tonal duality that reflects the contradictions of contemporary life that is moral. The comic element in the novel is based on its ethically awkward situations like the enslavement of his friend Hominy Jenkins, which is what makes the readers have to challenge their own responses. Do they laugh at what the author is saying or those he is satirizing? This uncertainty makes humor an ethical challenge. The absurdity is used according to the definition of humor by Simon of the ethical incongruity of humor: laughter as the acknowledgment of human failure and contradiction (Critchley, 2002, 47).

The grotesque comedy practiced by Beatty makes the readers feel some moral unease; the resulting laughter is mixed with the feeling of guilt. This dynamic transforms a sense of humor into a self-criticism that forces the audience to recognize their role in perpetuating the injustice of the system instead of being

relieved in the irony. In addition, the existentialist traditions of the dark comedy, the moral irony of authors such as Swift and Vonnegut, are reflected in the moral absurdity of Beatty. But contrary to their universal satire, the absurdism of Beatty is racialized, it reveals how the absurd does not exist as an abstract concept but is grounded in the realities of living in a Black life. The grotesque is thus a reflection of moral anarchy in a so-called rational society.

"I'm not trying to start a race war. I'm just trying to end one" (Beatty, 2015).

This is a paradoxical quote, which shows the ethical vagueness of dark comedy. The narrator seems contradictory, but this statement emphasizes the racial conflict in modern America being complicated. Beatty uses irony to challenge the notion that racial harmony is already attained. Through Critical Race Theory racial conflict is entrenched in institutional structures of power. The novel brings out hypocrisy of social narratives that purport to support racial equity by giving an absurd solution (Bell, 1992).

4.3 Language, Identity, and Irony

Words have been used by Beatty as one of his major instruments of defiance. His exploitation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), slang, and over-the-top metaphor puts into question linguistic hierarchies which place privileged status on standard English as a sign of intelligence or civility. Words in Beatty are not neutral; they are not up arguments. He claims cultural identity by an assertion of cultural identity against the assimilating forces of white normativity by lending the text a sense of cultural identity through the rhythms, idioms and humor of Black speech.

This literary work conforms to the idea of Henry Louis on Signifying, or a technique of rhetoric that involves African American literature in which irony and wordplay are used to challenge authority. The narrator of Beatty is the signifier of the American discourse, which is parodied in his moral earnestness. When the father of the protagonist, who is an amateur social scientist, takes him through psychological experimentations on race, the ensuing conversation turns both comedic and tragic in nature with the subjects of language being the very cause of racial classification. More so, the satire by Beatty questions the influence of linguistic identity on perception. The court scenes with all its bureaucratic wording and its self-contradictory speech serve as clear instances of how institutional language hides, but does not solve, moral inconsistencies. By making language a farce, Beatty frees it of the false neutrality and makes it a rebellion (Gates, 1988, 89).

"Our blackness was like a country we were born into" (Beatty, 2015).

Such a metaphor indicates that racial identity is also a kind of social territory. Beatty does not depict race as something biological but as a political and a social social fabric that constitutes the social life. This concept is consistent with the Critical Race Theory that considers the notion of race to be a socially constructed system supported by institutions and cultural discourses. The metaphor focuses on the role of racial identity on belonging, amount of citizenship, and social power (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

4.4 Postmodern Techniques in Narrative

The story by Beatty is highly postmodern in form and style. It uses self-reflexivity, unreliable narration and metafictional commentary to populate the boundary between fiction and social commentary. The plot is presented in the form of a confession in the court where the main character describes his alleged crimes to the Supreme Court of the United States. This ridiculous scene is the caricature of the social vanity of the national institutions, where the law is turned into a stage of irony.

The untrustworthy narrator upsets the reader, as the narrator is a representative of the fractured identity in the postmodern society. The metafiction that Beatty uses to attest that he is telling a story within the story makes readers challenge not just the truth of the text, but also the periodicity of any social story. In a sense that Hutcheon notes, postmodern satire problematizes the very notion of representation and by doing so it transforms fiction into an instrument of epistemological criticism (Hutcheon, 1988, 46).

The absurd trial is a symbolic microcosm of the US history: a country that tries to question its own conscience using the system based on contradiction. The narrative structure adopted by Beatty, that is chaotic, intertextual, and ironic is, therefore, a reflection of the fragmented and performative racial identity in the present day.

"The city had literally erased us from the map" (Beatty, 2015).

This is a statement about the imaginary town of Dickens being taken off the official maps. The ridiculousness of the situation is an allegory of the social invisibility of the marginal communities. In a postmodern way, this literal erasure is a demonstration of how majority histories tend to leave out the experiences of the minority. Beatty turns political marginalization to dark humor showing how the systems of bureaucracy destroy communities in the name of neutrality (Hutcheon, 1988).

4.5 Humor, Trauma, and Cultural Memory

Maybe, the greatest success of *The Sellout* is that it addresses the issue of historical trauma in a way that is deeply moving and yet only partially gets laughter. Beatty reinstates the dark humor as a means of remembering, turning the group suffering of the racial history into a sort of cultural survival. The comedy expresses trauma without pity, unlike heartfelt portrayals of suffering as he does.

Laughter in *The Sellout* does not come to light out of happiness but by acknowledging the absurd in the perpetual oppression. This can be related to the concept of humor, as a discharge of repressed tension, by Freud (1905) but in the case of Beatty, it is a two-sided process - it is freeing, yet it is also hurting. Dark comedy, as Palmer suggests, is the moral conscience of the postmodernity because it pushes the readers to laugh, but at the same time, the moral dissonance is present. The sense of humor of Beatty, then, a survival mechanism: the pain is turned into stamina, the absurdity into consciousness (Palmer, 2004, 79).

The Sellout alters the cultural memory through the combination of the satire and the trauma. It denies the accounts of resolution or redemption, but demands the continuation of historical traumas into the present. In this sense, laughter turns into a mourn and at the same time, a pronouncement of survival, a rejection of pain being subdued by etiquette or refusal (Freud 67; Palmer 79).

"Sometimes a black man just can't catch a break" (Beatty, 2015).

Even though the statement seems straightforward, it summarizes the anger of the marginalized communities. Beatty employs subtle humour to demonstrate inexorable social setbacks against African Americans. Laughter is, according to Humor Theory, a psychological discharge of social tension (Freud, 1905). The contrast of the casual manner in which the narrator talks and the solemn history of racial discrimination creates the effect of dark comedy and encourages critical thinking.

"If you can't laugh at yourself, the world will laugh at you" (Beatty, 2015).

This quote brings out the philosophical purpose of humor in the novel. Beatty introduces laughter as a tactic of challenging social injustice. Laughter can derive mostly out of the identification of discrepancies between societal ideals and life as experienced according to philosophical theories of humor (Critchley, 2002). There is a form of resistance in *The Sellout*, where humor is used to show that the institution of race is absurd.

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the place of dark comedy in the English literature of the post-2000 period by critically discussing *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty (2015). The discussion shows that the evolutionary process of the dark comedy in the twenty first century has not only been a stylistic form of comic but also a potent literary tool of social and political commentary. Through satire, irony, and the absurd, Beatty is able to reveal the contradictions that lay hidden in the discourse of racial equality in the modern American society.

Using a postmodern theory, Critical Race Theory, and humor theory, the study demonstrates that *The Sellout* uses dark comedy to disorient the hegemonic discourse on race, progress, and national identity. Exaggerated situations that Beatty presents, like the ironic effort to restore segregation, do not trivialize the issue of racial injustice, but instead they demonstrate that the social reality still exists along with its system of inequality. The novel shows how laughter might serve at the same time as a means of resistance, ethical reflection and cultural critique.

Moreover, it can be seen that Beatty employs linguistic play and narrative fragmentation, as well as metafictional devices, which contribute to the postmodern nature of a modern-day dark comedy. The humor in the novel does not just exist as entertainment, but functions in a critical manner to force the reader to face some uncomfortable realities of racism, hypocrisy and moral dilemmas that define the present society. In that regard, the laughter created by text is deliberately disturbing, making the reader think of the ideological suppositions which organize the social life in the day-to-day life.

The results also emphasize the greater relevance of the dark comedy in post- 2000 literature. With the cultural context of political polarization, historical anxiety, and discussion around identity and justice, the dark humor has become one of the most essential narrative modes used by writers to express the dissent and question the prevailing power regimes. *The Sellout* is a bright example of how modern literature alters satire as a kind of intellectual and political interaction that can reveal the inequities within the system, and, at the same time, cause people to take self-criticism.

To sum up, this research paper proves the existence of dark comedy in modern English literature as a valuable tool to question the contradictions in society and redefine the moral purpose of the humorous in the present narrative. Future

research may further explore additional contemporary texts that employ dark comedy to address issues of race, identity, and power in global literature after 2000.

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الكوميديا السوداء في الأدب الإنكليزي المعاصر: دراسة بعد عام 2000

- دراسة حالة بول بيتي الخائن -

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الكوميديا السوداء. عدم المساواة العرقية. السخرية ما بعد الحداثة. الأدب الإنكليزي المعاصر

الملخص:

يناقش هذا البحث تطوّر جنس الكوميديا السوداء في الأدب الإنكليزي المعاصر منذ عام 2000، وخاصة في رواية *The Sellout* لبول بيتي (2015) فالكوميديا السوداء بوصفها جنسًا يمزج بين الفكاهة والتعليق الأخلاقي والاجتماعي، أثبتت أنها أداة قوية يكشف بها الكتاب التناقضات والظلم والعبث في المجتمع الحديث وتقدّم رواية بيتي إعادة صياغة استفزازية وما بعد حداثة للسخرية الأدبية، إذ تواجه مباشرة قضايا عدم المساواة العرقية وخرافة التقدّم في أمريكا ما بعد حركة الحقوق المدنية ومن خلال السخرية والمحاكاة الساخرة والعبث، يعطّل بيتي السردية التقليدية للتناغم العرقي ويكشف الحقائق المزعجة الكامنة خلف مظهر الثقافة المعاصرة وبالاعتماد على نظرية ما بعد الحداثة، والنقد العرقي، ونظرية الفكاهة، يوضّح هذا البحث أن *The Sellout* مثال على كيفية تجاوز الكوميديا السوداء لحدود الترفيه لتصبح خطابًا سياسيًا وفلسفيًا وتبيّن النتائج دور الضحك بوصفه فعل تحدّي وكشف، قادرًا على تفكيك علاقات القوة وتقويض التناقضات الاجتماعية التي تميّز القرن الحادي والعشرين.