

BLACK HUMOR IN
THE DREAM LIFE OF BALSÒ SNELL

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this paper is to show that Nathanael West's first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, is distinctly colored by his deep sense of black humor, with special references to its effect on the novel's subject matter, structure, theme, and the literary techniques used.

The paper begins with an examination of the fundamental meanings and the aesthetic background of black humor, in order to justify and facilitate the discussions of many details concerned.

Among the main devices West employed skilfully for the sake of black humor are the highly complex dream structure and the scatological and other kinds of imagery, which are strikingly suggestive of shams, spiritual sterility, physical degeneracy, and absurdities on the waste land. Besides, West has created many grotesque characters whose life is extremely morbid, meaningless, and ridiculous.

Finally, in order to shed some light on the philosophical foundation of West's black humor, the paper also examines the influences of dadaism and surrealism, among other things, on West's perceptions about this world, human life, and fictional creation.