Absurdist fiction is a genre of fictional narrative (traditionally, literary fiction), most often in the form of a novel, play, poem, or film, that focuses on the experiences of characters in situations where they cannot find any inherent purpose in life, most often represented by ultimately meaningless actions and events that call into question the certainty of existential concepts such as truth or value.[1] Common elements in absurdist fiction include satire, dark humour, incongruity, the abasement of reason, and controversy regarding the philosophical condition of being “nothing.”[2] Works of absurdist fiction often explore agnostic or nihilistic topics.

While a great deal of absurdist fiction may be humorous or irrational in nature, the hallmark of the genre is neither comedy nor nonsense, but rather, the study of human behavior under circumstances (whether realistic or fantastical) that appear to be purposeless and philosophically absurd. Absurdist fiction posits little judgment about characters or their actions; that task is left to the reader. Also, the “moral” of the story is generally not explicit, and the themes or characters’ realizations — if any — are often ambiguous in nature. Additionally, unlike many other forms of fiction, absurdist works will not necessarily have a traditional plot structure (i.e., rising action, climax, falling action, etc.).

The absurdist genre grew out of the modernist literature of the late 19th and early 20th century in direct opposition to the Victorian literature which was prominent just prior to this period. It was largely influenced by the existentialist and nihilist movements in philosophy, and the Dada and surrealist movements in art.

Psychologists at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of British Columbia published a report in 2009 showing that reading absurdist tales improved test subjects’ ability to find patterns. Their findings summarized that when people have to work to find consistency and meaning in a fragmented story, it increases “the cognitive mechanisms responsible for implicitly learning statistical regularities.”[3]

Examples of notable absurdist fiction writers include:

- Samuel Beckett (e.g., Waiting for Godot)
- Albert Camus
- Nikolai Gogol
- Franz Kafka (e.g., The Metamorphosis; The Trial; The Castle)
- Jean-Paul Sartre[4]

Individual absurdist works include:

- Joseph Heller’s Catch-22
- Thomas Pynchon’s V.
- Plays by Eugène Ionesco (e.g., The Bald Soprano; The Lesson)
- Some early plays of Harold Pinter
- Edward Albee
- Tom Stoppard (e.g., Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead)[5]
- Jára Svěrák’s “The Lying Student”[6]

1 See also

- Absurdism
- Absurdist humor
- Existentialism
- Literary nonsense
- Theatre of the Absurd
- List of genres

2 References

3 External links

- Fiction of the Absurd
- Absurdist Monthly Review Magazine
4 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

4.1 Text


4.2 Images


- **File:P_literature.svg** Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/P_literature.svg License: CC-BY-SA-3.0 Contributors: ? Original artist: ?

4.3 Content license

- Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0