

Effective Aspects of the Study of the Originality of the English Postmodern Novel

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the British postmodern novel of the second half of the 20th century, depicting a world torn apart by war, political uncertainty, and cultural shift, John Fowles, Angela Carter, Julian Barnes, Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, and J.G. Writers such as Ballard contributed to the development of postmodern literature by exploring themes of narrative, identity and history, embracing ambiguity and irony, and their work continues to influence modern literature, offering subtle insights into the human condition in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Reflects on their presentation of concepts.

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The English postmodern novel is characterized by distinctive elements that set it apart from other postmodern literary traditions, such as those in American or European literature. Below are the key features that highlight the specificity of English postmodern novels, with reference to prominent authors like John Fowles, Julian Barnes, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, and Martin Amis. Twentieth century British literature is highly influenced by Victorian literature in the nineteenth century. Victorian literature brought gothic elements, romance, social justice and supernatural themes. Contemporaries want to expand on or move beyond those elements. Another historical or social influence on the themes in English literature is the change in England's role in the world. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, England was the dominating world power with its strong sense of imperialism and its establishment of colonies and political influence all across the world. After the First and even more-so after the Second World War, England's global reach is weakened. This change in world view changes the literature. There are labour organizations rising in power.

Many writers start drawing attention to material aspects of life to work, to the expectations brought about by social reformism and political change, and to the shift in relationships, often seen in generational, class- and gender-conditioned terms. In the fiction of the post-war years, there are no easily identifiable lines of development. It is only possible to speak about individual novelists, some of whom share particular themes and techniques in their work, and to outline a few dominant trends. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, following the bereavement of World War II, the public did not look for brave new ideas and styles, but for comfort and reassurance in literature. However, by 1955 the old values and certainties which religion and nation had traditionally provided were being questioned, and a new generation of critical young novelists, playwrights and artists emerged. The 1950s were characterized by the appearance of Neo-realism, a trend which worked against Modernism¹.

The Second World War left a tumultuous impact on the civilization. The post-World War II era was essentially characterized by depression and anxiety as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change. This very desolate prospect is also evident in the literature of the 20th

¹ Perry Anderson, 'The Origins of Postmodernity', London: Verso, 1998. , p. 131

century. These adverse impacts of World War II helped to create several new traditions in literature. One such movement made its way in the early 1950s. This radically new age was labeled as the Angry Young Men Movement. The literature of this age chiefly represented a rebellious and critical attitude towards the postwar British society. The “angry young men” comprised a group of English novelists and playwrights, mostly having lower middle or working-class, and with university background.

No clearly definable trends have appeared in English fiction since the time of the Post-World War II School of writers, the so-called angry young men of the 1950s and 1960s. This group, which included the novelists Kingsley Amis, John Wain, and John Braine, attacked outmoded social values left over from the prewar world. Novelists such as Alan Sillitoe, Kingsley Amis and John Braine were mostly under 30, and like many of the British readers at the time, they shared impatience with tradition, authority and the ruling class. Their works reflect their anger and frustrations. Many novels are set in working-class areas of depressed cities in the industrial north, and contain sexually explicit scenes. The best example is William Golding, who created a moral fable of the human condition. In his most popular novel, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), he states the “end of innocence”, the darkness of man's heart, and denied all hope of positive values existing even temporarily among children. *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel². It discusses how culture created by man fails, using as an example a group of British school-boys stuck on a deserted island, who tries to rule themselves with disastrous results. The book was written during the first years of the Cold War and the atomic age; the events arise in the context of an unnamed nuclear war and portray the descent of the young boys into savagery.

During the 1960s the resentment and frustration of the 1950s began to develop into a counter-cultural movement. At the same time, some of the most highly praised authors of recent times began to receive critical recognition as major writers. Their themes are diverse, but freedom and equality tend to predominate. Issues of personal morality in challenging and liberated times are frequently expressed in stories of the 1960s and 1970s, and are central themes in Anthony Burgess's works, for instance *A Clockwork Orange*, 1962. The novel is set in a future England, where an aggressive gang of young criminals rob, rape, torture and murder. The gang speak *nadsat*, a private teenage slang, an 'inhuman' language invented by the author (but based on Russian) to emphasize the gang's collective identity and their distance from conventional society. Eventually, their leader Alex is captured and treated, but he begins to produce mechanical, robotic responses to the things that make him human: sex, violence and the arts³. The story's main concern is morality and how to deal with transgressions of it, in a tale which satirizes both totalitarian and liberal humanist approaches. The book can be read as a straight horror comedy depicting picaresque villainy or, on a deeper level, as a social satire, a fable of good and evil and the importance of human choice. In 1971 the story was made into a highly successful film by Stanley Kubrick.

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, (1969) is told in a highly original way, with the author showing a self-awareness of how he uses language and imagination to shape the reader's reality. The novel's central character is Sarah Woodruff, a heroine featuring prominently and combining femininity with mental strength. She lives as a disgraced woman, supposedly ill-used by a French sailor who returned to France and turned out to be married to another woman. Existentialist philosophy is referred to frequently in the novel. The early decades of the century coincided with the rise of “modernism,” not only in literature but also in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and dance. An early observer of modernist art might well have described it with terms such as haziness, distortion, fragmentation, and dislocation, but from the perspective of later decades the movement seems far less disturbing.

The achievement of women's suffrage, the continuing pace of urbanization, the movement of women (in Britain, very gradual) into stereotypically “male” occupations, the redefinitions of class, power, and prestige that were effected, at least in part, by two world wars, the loss of Britain's international dominance, and the shifts of the political spectrum over both the short and long terms—all of these were at least equally important concerns in the post-modern era. In the more immediately artistic sense, the

² Thornley G.C. *An outline of English literature*. Longman, 2003, p. 132

³ Russell, C. (1985). *Poets, prophets, and revolutionaries: The literary avant-garde from Rimbaud through postmodernism*. Oxford University Press, USA: a bibliography 1926-1994.

possibilities offered to women writers by the proliferation of small and specialized journals, presses, and fringe theaters—and most notably, the re-emergence and growth in the final quarter of the century of the political and cultural feminist movements—contributed to the emergence of an identifiable “women's” literature. An important development in the postwar period is the rise of the “feminist literature”⁴. A new consciousness of the peculiarity of women's outlook and social role opens up new directions for women's writing. Women's writing, as a discrete area of literary studies and practice, is based on the notion that the experience of women, historically, has been shaped by their gender, and so women writers by definition are a group worthy of separate study, on the basis that their texts emerge from and intervene in conditions usually very different from those which produced most writing by men.

Further, women writers cannot be considered apart from their male contemporaries and the larger literary tradition. Recent scholarship on race, class, and sexuality in literature further complicates the issue and militates against the impulse to posit one “women's tradition.” Some scholars maintain a commonality, the sense of a tradition in women's writing based on common experience and spanning geographical and cultural boundaries. Using the term “women's writing” implies, then, the belief that women in some sense constitute a group, however diverse, who share a position of difference based on gender⁵. This approach implies that although gender dynamics vary from time and place, the dynamic of difference itself is persistent and further, that those differences present opportunities for fruitful inquiry. Interest in the 1970s focused on writers as disparate in their concerns and styles as Doris Lessing. Lessing's life is wide in its wanderings, both existential and intellectual, and the broad range of her writing plainly reflects this. She actually experiments both in short stories (London Observed, African stories) and in broader canvasses of social lives, where her concern with realism merges with a political (Africa in her Children of Violence sequence, 1953-69) science-fictional or mystic-philosophical interest (Memoirs of a Survivor). Lessing's considerable output still enjoys high critical acclaim and a wide readership [2007 Nobel Prize for Literature], not least because of her political views (left-wing and broadly socialist) and of her concern with ‘the woman question’⁶.

In the second half of the century, a basic concern with woman as the object of fictional worlds and as textual subjectivity is typical of both the more generally ‘traditionalist’ (Fay Weldon, Margaret Drabble, Anita Brookner) and more experimental writing (in different ways, Iris Murdoch, Angela Carter, and A. S. Byatt). The merging of different genres has been one of the most important devices, used by women writers to cope with an open idea of identity: for example, A. S. Byatt's work is marked by a constant interplay of ictional genres (Possession: a Romance, 1990), whereas Angela Carter is regarded as the representative of a new subgenre, the rewriting of fables and fairy tales, which she ‘revisits’ through gender concerns (The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, 1979). Angela Carter, one of Britain's most original, provocative contemporary writers, was a cultural subversive who was fascinated and disturbed by the impact of popular culture on gender politics. Her work treats issues of female sexuality, eroticism, and violence with a transgressive humor that stuns and unnerves, leaving readers uncertain whether to laugh, scream, or cry. Employing a pastiche of traditional literary forms, Carter conflated romance with realism and infused the picaresque with the pornographic, the Gothic with the grotesque, and the fairy tale with the fantastic. Although she was noted for her lush imaginative prose, Carter's profane themes, wicked wit, irreverent tone, and radical leftist/feminist politics contributed to her wildly variable literary reception. Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) is a movement towards fantasy. It offers an escape from a male-dominated society to Angela Carter. Fascinated by the matriarchal, oral, storytelling tradition, she reworked fairy tales from a feminist point of view in the short stories collected in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) - where she stated the need for female resourcefulness and independence. The anthology contains ten stories which vary greatly in length, - including rewritings of “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Bluebeard,” and two re-workings of “Beauty and the Beast”.

⁴ Richard Gray. *A History American Literature*. Third Edition. Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2012. UK, p.90

⁵ Reichl, Ruth Cook's November 1989; *American Heritage Dictionary's* definition of "postmodern. , p.93

⁶ Thornley G.C. *An outline of English literature*. Longman, 2003. , p.76

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