

CHAPTER I

POST-WAR BRITISH NOVELS

The 20th century literature is dominated by war with common themes of alienation, isolation and fragmentation. The century opened with the Boer War and continued through World War I, World War II, The Balkans, Korea, and Vietnam, The First Gulf, Granada and many others. The impact of World War I was, "The war to end all wars" (until of course World War II!). The destruction was accomplished by bombing cities and towns without ever facing the foe as in previous wars. Whole towns were destroyed, families were uprooted. As a result, when talking about British Literature, most of the 20th century fiction, poetry and short stories especially that are produced have the common theme of loneliness. Much of the writing is marked by deep psychological trauma. 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. Women are asserting their equal rights. There is much more attention to social legislation and welfare concerns. The country moves towards its more modern socialist state. These concerns become the themes of the literature.

1.1 POST WORLD WAR II TO THE 1970S:

For British novelists, writing 'realistically' entails attempts at representing the new post-war life-the utterly changed context of social

welfare and the advent of a new, more democratic society, the realignment of social classes, and the emergence of new 'subjects', notably women and the non-British ('migrant' or 'immigrant') population, and the shift to a mass-consumerist economic dimension. 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 Modernism.

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 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. Dialogue is often carried out in regional dialects, giving a strong sense of the characters' identity and social background. The protagonists of these novels are 'outsiders'. They do not identify with modern society. Like the authors themselves they are impatient, dissatisfied and critical of conventional morality and behaviour. They feel resentful and powerless, and sometimes are violent. The creation of uneducated, undisciplined heroes is a departure from literary conventions, but it meant that dissent, honesty and openness are introduced into literature (not only in novel and drama, but also television and film) by a group of writers who are known as the "angry young men".

Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959) is a story of an impoverished Nottingham teenager who has few prospects in life and enjoys few pursuits beyond committing petty crimes. His home life is dismal. Caught for robbing a bakery, Colin is confined to a borstal, or prison for delinquent youth. He seeks solace in long distance running, attracting the attention of the school's authorities, but, during an important cross-country race which he is winning, he stops running just short of the finish line to defy his captors. Realist and 'angry' novels were by no means the only ones written during the '50s and '60s. Other novelists were interested in religious and metaphysical problems. 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 novel. 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. At an allegorical level, the main theme is the conflicting impulses towards civilization (live by rules, peacefully and in harmony), and towards the will to power. The title is said to be a reference to the Hebrew name Beelzebub (Ba'al-zvuv, "god of the fly", "host of the fly" or literally "Lord of Flies"), a name sometimes used as a synonym for Satan.

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 arts. 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. One day, she is seen by a gentleman, Charles Smithson, and his fiancée, Ernestina Freeman, and they end up having several clandestine meetings during which Sarah tells Charles her history and asks for his (mostly emotional) support. Fowles offers three different endings to the narration:

- 1) Charles marries Ernestina. Their marriage is not a happy one, and Sarah's fate is unknown.

(Before the 2nd and 3rd endings, the narrator appears: he flips a coin to determine in which order he will portray the two other possible endings, emphasising their equal plausibility.)

- 2) Charles becomes intimate with Sarah and breaks his engagement to Ernestina, but he falls into disgrace. Sarah flees to London and Charles will find her only after several years living with several artists and with a child.
- 3) The narrator appears again and turns back his pocket-watch by fifteen minutes before leaving in his carriage. Events are the same as in the second ending, but when Charles finds Sarah again in London, their reunion is a sour one. Throughout the story Sarah is portrayed with ambiguity: she is a genuine ill-used woman, the product of the French Lieutenant's lust. Is she a sly, manipulative character who tries to get Charles to succumb to her, using her own self pity? Is she merely a victim to the notions of gender in upper middle class Victorian society? Along the way, Fowles questions the role of the author and discourses on the difficulties of controlling the characters one has created, implying that the characters have a life of their own within the novel. He offers analyses of Victorian customs and class differences and the theories of

Charles Darwin. 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. One of the most persuasive and least polemical definitions of modernism is of David Lodge. He defines modernism in *Working with Structuralism* as :

Modernism turned its back on the traditional idea of art as imitation and substituted the idea of art as an autonomous activity.... The writer's ... style, however sordid and banal the experience it is supposed to be mediating, is so highly and lovingly polished that it ceases to be transparent but calls attention to itself by the brilliant reflections glancing from its surfaces. (Lodge. 1981:5-6)

Lodge writes about fiction in particular, but his comments apply to modernist drama and poetry as well. Modernism, then, offers a more internal and self-reflexive, and therefore potentially more comprehensive, window on the human condition than the approaches to art that preceded it.

But Lodge warns against equating “the modern” with the art of the twentieth century. He points out that throughout the period “modernism” coexisted with what he calls “anti-modernism, ” an anachronistic but more inclusive characterization than “realism” or “traditionalism.” Lodge's definition of “anti-modernism” is simple enough:

This is writing that continues the tradition modernism reacted against. It believes that traditional realism, suitably modified to take account of changes in human knowledge and material circumstances, is still viable and valuable. Anti-modernist art does not [like modernist art] aspire to the condition of music; rather it aspires to the condition of history. (Lodge. 1981:6)

The anti-modernist or realist approach to writing also flourished throughout the century, among women writers as well as men. It is most obviously to be

seen in the mystery fiction of Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and P.D. James, where tightly constructed plots and traditional characterizations are essential to the genre. But it is equally apparent in the work of writers as different as Barbara Pym and Iris Murdoch.

1.2 WOMEN'S WRITING:

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 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". 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. Women's writing is recognized explicitly by the numbers of dedicated journals, organizations, awards, and conferences which focus mainly or exclusively on texts produced by women. The idea of discussing women's cultural contributions as a separate category has a long history, but, as long as

there has been this laudatory trend there has been a counter-trend of misogynist writings.

Women writers themselves have long been interested in tracing a “woman's tradition” in writing. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) exemplifies the impulse in the modernist period to explore a tradition of women's writing. Woolf, however, sought to explain what she perceived as an absence; by the mid-century scholarly attention turned to finding and reclaiming “lost” writers. Women's writing came to exist as a separate category of scholarly interest relatively recently. Commensurate with this growth in scholarly interest, various presses began the task of reissuing long-out-of-print texts. Virago Press began to publish its large list of nineteenth- and early twentieth- century novels in 1975 and became one of the first commercial presses to join in the project of reclamation, along with the Second Story Press and the Women's Press among others. In addition, collections and anthologies of women's writing continue to be published by both trade and academic presses. The widespread interest in women's writing developed alongside, influenced, and was influenced by, a general reassessment and expansion of the literary canon. Interest in post-colonial literatures, gay and lesbian literature, writing by people of colour, working people's writing, and the cultural productions of other historically marginalized groups has resulted in a whole scale expansion of what is considered “literature,” and genres hitherto not regarded as “literary”, such as children's writing, journals, letters, travel writing, and many others are now the subjects of scholarly interest.

The question of whether or not there is a “women's tradition” remains vexed. Some scholars and editors refer to a “women's canon” and women's literary “lineage”, and seek to “identify the recurring themes and to trace the evolutionary and interconnecting patterns” in women's writing, but the range of women's writing across time and place is so considerable that, according to some, it is inaccurate to speak of “women's writing” in a ‘universal’ sense. 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 gender. 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’. Both issues are brought into focus through her early, breakthrough novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962). Lessing has moved from the early short stories collected as *African Stories* (1965) to novels increasingly experimental in form and concerned with the role of women in contemporary society. Notable among these is *The Golden Notebook* (1962), about a woman writer coming to grips with life through her art. In *The Golden Notebook* the main character, the writer Anna Wulf, is deliberately split into different ‘subjects’, as her notebooks are, to explore the different layers of her multi-faceted identity: “four diaries: a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook in which I make stories out of my experience, and the blue

notebook which tries to be a diary.” *The Golden Notebook* is a novel within the novel (a novel, *Free Women*, is also written by Anna, and it ‘frames’ the notebooks) where the narrator/character trusts on the provisional formal composure and structure of fiction to fight the impending fragmentation of a world which is growing more and more aware of ‘conflicts’. Intertwining narration with self-analysis and political, psychological, philosophical and historical digression, Lessing manages to pull the threads together, and her double Anna becomes the (extreme) prototype of the writer and the woman who goes through self-exploration, taking the risk of dissolution and mental disaggregation in order to find liberation or a state of creative ‘diffusion’.

Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962) as well as the couple that followed it, enters the realm of what Margaret Drabble in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* has called Lessing’s “inner space fiction”, her work that explores mental and societal breakdown. The novel also contains a powerful anti-war and anti-Stalinist message, an extended analysis of communism and the Communist Party in England from the 1930s to the 1950s, and a famed examination of the budding sexual and women’s liberation movements. It is the story of writer Anna Wulf, of the four notebooks in which she keeps the record of her life, and her attempt to tie them all together in a fifth, gold-coloured notebook. The book intersperses segments of a realistic narrative of the lives of Molly and Anna, and their children, ex-husbands and lovers - entitled *Free Women* - with excerpts from Anna’s four notebooks, coloured black (of Anna’s experience in Central Africa, before and during World War II, which inspired her own bestselling novel), red (of her experience as a member of the Communist Party), yellow (an ongoing novel that is being written based on the painful ending of Anna’s own love affair), and blue (Anna’s personal journal where she records her memories, dreams, and emotional life.). Each notebook is returned to four times, interspersed with episodes from *Free Women*, creating non-chronological, overlapping sections that interact with one another. This postmodernist style is among the most famous features of the book. All four

notebooks and the narrative frame testify to the above themes of Stalinism, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear conflagration, and women's struggles with the problems of work, sex, love, maternity, and politics.

One aspect of identity which Lessing addresses and which has been undergoing change in both socio-political and cultural representation since the upheaval of feminism in the late 1960s is the 'woman question'. 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 fictional 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". They challenge the way women are represented in fairy tales, yet retain an air of tradition and convention through her voluptuously descriptive prose. For example, in the opening tale "The Bloody Chamber", which is a retelling of the Bluebeard story, Carter plays with the conventions of canonical fairy tales. Instead of the heroine being rescued by the stereotypical male hero, she is rescued by her mother. The stories are updated to more modern settings, although the exact time periods remain vague. They deal with women's roles in relationships and marriage, their sexuality, coming of age and corruption. Stories such as "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Company of Wolves" explicitly deal with the horrific or corrupting aspects of marriage and/or sex and the balance of power within such relationships.

Jeanette Winterson is one of the most contradictory of contemporary British women writers. A realist despite her use of myth, fairy tale, tarot, mysticism, and postmodern styles, political despite her repeated attempts to hide it all as fiction, traditional despite her repeated disavowals and her deconstruction of tradition, she is truly modern in the epochal sense of the term. In other words, her work is a self-conscious radical break with a tradition that it is an example of, the tradition, that is, sometimes called realism, by others modernism, and by others still postmodernism, in which writers attempted to represent the eternal in the light of the ephemeral. These attempts have resulted in her offering examples of both lifelike art (realist fictions) and of life like art (factual fictions). This is her originality.

Jeanette Winterson rose in a strictly religious climate, regards her religious and working-class environment as crucial to her training as a writer. A number of contemporary issues, as well as a deep concern with love, interpersonal relationships, sexual and gender identity, fall within the scope

of her writing, which intertwines fiction with other literary and non-literary genres. As she observes in a recent collection of essays, realism is hardly a satisfying paradigm, reality being a dimension where “a number of realities” tend to coexist in one’s own life/lives. Winterson’s *Written on the Body* (1992) revolves on a more than metaphorical relation between bodily ‘messages’ and emotional/psychological state. The narrator’s/character’s concern with the body and the physical as a way to the emotional and the spiritual turns into a startling apprehension the interdependence of all those aspects of life. This is important because Winterson leaves the question of identity in the background. She challenges her readers by obscuring the narrator’s/character’s sexual identity (it might be a man as well as a woman) and such indeterminacy shows very well the provisionality of any category, even the sexual. It shows the body as a threshold where identities are what is realized on an interpersonal, intersubjective level, rather than fixed essences or roles society might demand of individuals. Winterson comes to convey this through mastering an individual blend of realistic and metaphoric language, drawing inspiration from literature as well as from science, especially physics and chemistry. Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*, (1992) breaks down the received ideas of gender, love, sex and sexuality, time and space. It is at once a love story, a scientific investigation and a philosophical meditation on the body, as both physical entity and objective correlative of our innermost selves -- our bodies as our embodiment. The unnamed narrator falls for a married woman called Louise. Louise leaves her husband, but when she finds that she has cancer, she leaves her new lover, too. *Written on the Body* is a journey of self-discovery made through the metaphors of desire and disease. According to the author, disease, especially a disease like cancer or Aids, breaks down the boundaries of the immune system and forces a new self on us that we often don't recognize. This experimental work plays with form, refuses a traditional narrative line, and includes the reader as a player. As the narrator has no name, is assigned no gender, unspecified age, and is highly unreliable, it is up to the reader to discover as much as possible of him/her, to give him/her a shape, an identity and a face. It is a celebration of physical beauty,

in a sensual and voluptuous style. It is a deliberate interplay of languages that charge her poetic prose with the potential intermingling of genres, registers and micro-languages often regarded as incompatible.

A.S. Byatt uses nineteenth-century form in much the same way that she uses nineteenth-century content or history: not nostalgically, as most postmodern writers do of the styles of the past, but as the tenuous referent of a present that is itself contingent. She sees writing as that which produces but also that which derails this contingency. Her work is thus concerned with the artistic process—not only with its methods but with its uses and abuses as exorcism, manipulation, self-projection, self-forgetfulness, rescue, and paradigm. Because of Byatt's wide experience as a critic, novelist, editor, and lecturer, she offers in her work an intellectual kaleidoscope of contemporary world.

Byatt writes learned novels, which contain a multitude of quotations and allusions: to literary theory, to the fairy-tale traditions of many countries. A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) is partly a romance, partly a literary thriller. The story told in *Possession* involves two contemporary academics, Roland Michell and Maud Bailey, whose research into the lives of two Victorian poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte, reveals inextricably linked destinies, like those of their researchers. The two 20th-century academics uncover a love affair between the two imaginary poets, created through an abundance of apparently documentary details, which recall the lives of historical 19th-century figures. Byatt demonstrates her ventriloquial abilities as she composes not only their letters but also their poems. Her versions of Victorian poetry are astonishingly successful, most notably in their imitation of Robert Browning and Christina Rossetti. The two narrative strands of the novel converge as the twentieth-century academics find themselves re-creating and mirroring in their own relationship the romance of the 19th-century poets. Byatt mixes the historically real and the fictional in such a way that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between them. Their reading uncovers tales of hidden kinship and

illegitimacy, and the various strands of the novel are brought together in a denouement that undermines traditional expectations of closure and coherence. Through its parodically symmetrical and at times comically extravagant plot, *Possession* offers oblique comments not only on the "realism" of Victorian fiction, but also on the more universal human desire for coherent narrative. The novel, after its kaleidoscope of poetry, letters and contemporary literary criticism, is brought to a conventional resolution by an old-fashioned omniscient narrator.

1.3 POSTMODERNISM:

Postmodernism was originally thought of as a reaction to Modernism. Largely influenced by the Western European disillusionment induced by World War II, postmodernism tends to refer to a cultural, intellectual, or artistic state lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, interconnectedness or interreferentiality. The term is closely linked with *post-structuralism* and with Modernism, in terms of a rejection of its bourgeois, elitist culture. It was applied to a whole host of experiments in architecture, art, music, and literature that reacted against Modernism, and are typically marked by a parodic revival of traditional elements and techniques. In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard wrote a short but influential work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which is an insightful analysis of the postmodern age.

Of postmodernism, a third, later-appearing strain in twentieth-century writing that is also relevant to the subject at hand, Lodge observes,

Postmodernism continues the modernist critique of traditional realism, but it tries to go beyond or around or underneath modernism, which for all its formal experiment and complexity held out to the reader the promise of meaning.... A lot of postmodernist writing implies that ... whatever meaningful patterns we discern in [experience] are wholly illusory, comforting fictions. (Lodge, 1981:12)

As Lodge himself a late-twentieth-century novelist and professed antimodernist, asserts among twentieth-century writers. There was no clear chronological progression from one of these broad approaches to writing to another. This is true regardless of gender. T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Edith Sitwell, and Virginia Woolf, for example, may all be identified as pioneering modernists.

Postmodern literature describes certain tendencies in post World War II literature. It is both a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period (relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc.) and a reaction against Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature. Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is difficult to define and there is little agreement on its exact characteristics, scope, and importance. Instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world, the postmodern author eschews, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest. This distrust of totalizing mechanisms extends even to the author; thus postmodern writers often celebrate chance over craft and employ metafiction to undermine the author's "univocal" control (the control of only one voice). The distinction between high and low culture is also attacked with the employment of pastiche, the combination of multiple cultural elements including subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature. Postmodernist writers often point to earlier works as inspiration for their experiments with narrative and structure. Both modern and postmodern literatures represent a break from 19th century realism, in which a story was told from an objective or omniscient point of view. Both modern and postmodern literatures explore fragmentariness in narrative and character construction. With postmodernism playfulness becomes central and the actual achievement of order and meaning becomes unlikely. Postmodernists such as Salman Rushdie, Italo Calvino, and Gunter Grass commonly use Magical Realism in their work.

Graham Swift's *Waterland*, (1983) is a complex tale set in eastern England's low-lying fens region. It is narrated by Tom Crick, a middle-aged history teacher. Tom is facing a personal crisis, since he is about to be laid off from his job and his wife has been admitted to a mental hospital. He is a man who is keenly interested in ideas about the nature and purpose of history. Faced with a class of bored and rebellious students, he scraps the traditional history curriculum and tells them stories of the fens instead. The title itself indicates an ambiguous location between land and water, and the eternal heroic struggle of its inhabitants against the elemental forces of nature. The many stories that Tom Crick tells to his pupils form the substance of the novel, which takes place mainly in two time frames: the present (1983), and the year 1943, when Tom Crick was fifteen years old. The traumatic events of his adolescence in the fens reach forward in time to influence the present. The structure of the novel, which frequently moves back and forth in time, also suggests the fluidity of the interaction between past and present. Tom's tale of the fens includes a family history going back to the eighteenth century and such lurid topics as murder, suicide, abortion, incest, and madness. These events are set against a background of some of the great events in history, such as World War I and World War II. The novel also includes digressions on such off-beat topics as the sex life of the eel, the history of land reclamation, the history of the River Ouse, and the nature of phlegm. It is at once a philosophical meditation on the meaning of history and a gothic family saga.

Julian Barnes's, *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) sets an intricate intertextual web of allusions, references and literary improvisation within the apparently realistic story of Geoffrey Braithwaite, a retired English doctor now freely indulging a lifelong interest/obsession with Gustave Flaubert, the celebrated author of *Madame Bovary*. Travelling through Rouen and Croisset on the trail of the French writer, Braithwaite discovers two stuffed parrots which are claimed to be Flaubert's parrot, hence the obstination to investigate the writer's public and private life, through his diaries, letters and many other kinds of writing, to discover which of the two parrots really belonged to him.

Beneath this narrative, however, runs a further personal drama, concerning the infidelity and death of the narrator's wife. The search for 'authenticity' - in art as well as in love - thus forms the unifying motif of the work, which evolves in the form of a hybrid, subjective, incomplete and contradictory collage of fiction, literary criticism, satire, biography, as well as medieval bestiary, 'train-spotter's guide' and even examination paper. This medley of prose genres subverts all conventional taxonomic boundaries yet, despite its textbook 'postmodern' techniques ('bricolage,' unreliability of the narrative voice, linguistic self-consciousness), the novel remains relentless in its quest for historical truth, stressing the necessity of both acknowledging the irretrievability of the past and learning to cope with its present effects.

After dealing with the post-war period and the 1980s, Ian MacEwan has shifted his focus on urgently contemporary issues, such as the reflection of the attacks on the Twin Towers and the World Trade Centre in New York on the British scene, haunted by the 'ghost of fundamentalism' since the attacks in 2004. But the anxiety over contemporary history is often transferred into a re-reading of past history which reveals not only its discontinuity and disruption, but also the utter complexity of the stories that are spun around it. So *Atonement* (2001) tackles the subject of pre-war England and of the subsequent conflict by focusing on a family history: class conflicts are pitted against a wide historical canvas and individuals are confronted with the need to find out the truth about their past and the story of those who surround them. Like many fellow novelists, McEwan adopts a thoroughly meta-literary perspective (the narrator, Briony Tallis, is a writer) and opens up to intertextual perspectives to reinforce the implications of an unstable balance between fact (in history, in personal or collective memory) and fiction, which look inevitably inextricable. In *Atonement*, he tells the story of Briony Tallis's terrible mistake and how it changes Cecilia Tallis's, Robbie Turner's and her own lives forever, and consequentially her effort to find atonement. The story opens on a hot summer day in 1935. Precocious but naive aspiring writer Briony Tallis, is confused as to the relationship between

her older sister Cecilia and Robbie Turner, the housekeeper's son. When a rape occurs in the garden of the villa, Briony accuses Robbie, who is arrested and spends three years in prison, before being released on condition of enlistment in the army. Both Cecilia and Briony become nurses and are trained at the same hospital in London, the latter seeking a kind of atonement for having accused Robbie and ruined his love affair with Cecilia. Briony chooses hard and lowly work instead of a comfortable student life at Cambridge. In the hospital, Briony comes into contact with the harsh reality of war. By the end of the novel, the fourth section, titled "London 1999", is written from the perspective of Briony, now a successful novelist in her seventies. The reader knows that Cecilia and Robbie died tragically and were never reunited, and that Briony was haunted all her life by having irreversibly deprived them of their chance for happiness. However, Briony chooses to end her novel (written within McEwan's) with part 3, wherein the two lovers survive the war and embark on a happy life together. The novel ends with a meditation on the nature of atonement and authorship. The conclusion that Briony appears to reach is that no amount of authorial fantasizing (or, for that matter, wretched work as a nurse) can actually atone for the crime she committed as a girl of 13. The ending attempts to consider differing forms of fiction—both lies in reality and in novels—and suggests that while the one can be irrevocably destructive, the other can offer a chance at happiness unachievable in life. *Atonement* contains intertextual references to a number of other literary works including Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Twelfth Night*.

The relation to England is one of the threads non-English writers have started to pull since the late sixties while foregrounding their regional-national belonging and allegiances. The internal situation of Scotland, Wales and Ireland is now being investigated through a clear focus on the current sociopolitical situation. This has emerged for example, in a breed of Irish

writers who manage to win not just national but worldwide acclaim by addressing the delicate issue of Irish politics, from the rising of the Troubles in the 1960s to the pacification process of the 1990s. Irony, interplay between registers, concerns with history and urgent aspects of contemporary society underlie some major works written by British-born writers whose belonging to the de-centred realities of Ireland, Scotland, Wales (and to some extent Northern England) also pertain to the perception of a multi-cultural society. A representative of such de-centred strain, especially after his groundbreaking novel *Trainspotting* (1993; source for Danny Boyle's film) is Irvine Welsh (b.1958) A writer for film, television and theatre, Welsh was born in Scotland and his Scotland is in some ways his loved/hated dimension as a writer, though like other Scottish novelists (James Kelman, Iain Banks, Janice Galloway) his views are not qualified by 'regional' interests. In the novel, dislocation is not only geographical but social (covering the question of the working-class). It is actually set in Edinburgh and more specifically in the forgotten neighbourhood of Leith in the 1980s. The characters openly talk about a depressed climate brought about by unemployment, lack of opportunities, boredom, which afflict the new working-class generation. These themes are not exceptional with the period, as they are also the primary concern of Northern English literature, and cinema of the nineties (think of directors Ken Loach and Mike Leigh), but Welsh's original viewpoint is defined by both his controversially 'national' concern and by his techniques. Focusing on Scotland, and contrasting the post-devolution Scottish nationalism, Welsh makes explicit an element of contemporary literature in Scotland as well as in Ireland and Wales. The keen perception of cultural subjugation to England and the willingness to disentangle from it is clearly shown. This defines a provocative, and often ambivalent, 'postcolonial' perspective. The disenfranchisement from England is mostly perceived thought, the very use of language (Edinburgh's Scots as opposed to Standard English) where dialect is intertwined with the characters' own idiolect and with a deliberately demotic register. As far as technique is concerned, the realistic grasp of language is counterpointed by a strain of (black) humour

and hallucinatory distortion which is connected with the drug-addiction theme, but is also a landmark of Welsh's writing, as his following novels will reveal (*The Acid House*, 1994, *Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance*, 1996, and *Glue*, 2001). Irvine Welsh's, *Trainspotting* (1993) was published in 1993. Set in the mid 1980s, it uses a series of loosely connected short stories to tell the story of a group of characters, various residents of Leith, Edinburgh, tied together by decaying friendships and heroin addiction. To escape from the oppressive boredom and brutality of their lives in the housing schemes they engage in destructive activities that are implicitly portrayed as addictions and that serve the same function as heroin addiction. The novel was released to shock and outrage in some circles and massive acclaim in others. As most of Welsh's fiction and non-fiction, the novel is dominated by the question of working class and Scottish identity. The author explores the rise and fall of the council housing scheme, denial of opportunity, sectarianism, football, hooliganism, sex, suppressed homosexuality, dance clubs, low-paid work, freemasonry, Irish republicanism, sodomy, class divisions, emigration, and, most engagingly, the humour, prejudices, and axioms of the Scots.

1.4 OPENING UP THE CANON:

Since 1948 the influx of migrants from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Africa has created a variety of religious and ethnic groups within the wider British society, and the experience of growing up bi-cultural has produced new perspectives which have invigorated English literature and become one of its most distinctive features from the 1980s onwards.

Salman Rushdie's, *Midnight's Children* (1981) won the 1981 Booker Prize and it was awarded the "Booker of Bookers" Prize and the best all-time prize winners in 1993 and 2008. Rushdie's multicultural background (he was born in Bombay, but moved to the U.K. and has been travelling all of his life) is the starting point for his work, which explores the borders between the 'East' and the 'West' through a culturally complex stance. A major aspect of his work lies in the mingling of facts and fiction, which underscores the importance of relativity and mediation in both our historical memory and our

apprehension of present realities. All these issues are tackled through a perspective that pushes beyond the boundary between genres, as much as between high and popular culture. Rushdie's scope is geographically as well as historically really far-reaching, as shown by his early novel *Midnight's Children* (1981). At the core of Rushdie's fiction lies the notion of individual identity as tightly connected with national and socio-political identity/s. This is why in the book, the narrator's grasp of history and biography starts from an impression of fragmentation as much as of 'dispersion' (into the other children's voices). The author and his narrator Saleem intertwine fiction and romance, storytelling and ordered, realistic narration, drawing from as different literary forms as the Indian oral saga and folk-tale, the Bildungsroman and the 'fake' autobiography, magic realism, and non-literary genres, such as the Bollywood movies. All this enhances the conscious 'provisionality' of any story told in the novel, especially considering the unreliability of its narrator as he sets out to provide readers with an ('his') account of Indian history since the formation of the modern Indian nation. Hybridity, interplay, and even a strong stress on orality are some of the devices Rushdie uses to challenge his audience into a wider understanding of history, even through the ironical appeal to fiction as 'fabrication.' *Midnight's Children* is an allegory of India both before and after the independence and partition of India, which took place at midnight on 15 August 1947. The protagonist and narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai, a telepath with an extraordinary nose. The novel is divided into three books. The first section details both the peculiar roots of the Sinai family and the earlier events leading up to India's Independence and Partition, connecting the two lines both literally and allegorically. Saleem is born at the exact moment that India becomes independent. From that point on, Saleem Sinai feels the pressure of his chronology and invests his life and narrative in describing the *zeitgeist* of his child- and adulthood. During his childhood, Saleem discovers that he, as well as all the children born in India between AM and 1 AM on August 15, 1947, are imbued with special powers. The convention, or Midnight Children's Conference, is in many ways reflective of the issues India faced in

its early statehood concerning the cultural, linguistic, religious, and political differences faced by such a vastly diverse nation. Saleem acts as a telepathic conduit, bringing hundreds of geographically disparate children into contact while also attempting to discover the meaning of their shared miraculousness. Saleem's Muslim family migrates to Pakistan and back in the decades after the Partition, but during the Indian-Pakistani War Saleem simultaneously loses the majority of his family in an air raid. Meanwhile, Indian politics continues, and eventually reclaims him during the Indira Gandhi proclaimed Emergency. For a time Saleem is held as a political prisoner; these passages contain scathing criticisms of Indira Gandhi's overreach during the Emergency. When the potency of the *Midnight's Children* ends, Saleem brings together the few pieces of his life he may still find and write the chronicle that encompasses both his personal history and that of his still-young nation for his son, who is equally chained to history by birth.

The technique of magical realism finds liberal expression throughout the novel and is crucial to constructing the parallel to the country's history. It has thus been compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The narrative framework of *Midnight's Children* consists of a tale - comprising his life story - which Saleem Sinai recounts orally to his wife-to-be Padma. This self-referential narrative recalls indigenous Indian culture, particularly the similarly orally recounted *One Thousand and One Nights*. Recognized for its remarkably flexible and innovative use of the English language, with a liberal mix of native Indian languages, this novel represents a departure from conventional Indian English writing. *Midnight's Children* chronologically entwines characters from India's cultural history with characters from Western culture, and the devices that they signify - Indian culture, religion and storytelling, Western drama and cinema - are presented in Rushdie's text with postcolonial Indian history. It has been compared in its scope and execution to works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram*

Shandy. Like them, Rushdie's novel presents an encyclopedic exploration of an entire society through the story of a single person.

The novelist-playwright Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) also plays on the chord of cultural 'contamination'. The protagonist, a Londoner of Indo-Pakistani descent in his teens is actually caught between his identity as a "Englishman born and bred, almost" and the loyalty to and affiliation with his family's culture. Growing up in the feverish and 'pop' atmosphere of the sixties, the protagonist becomes aware of a number of allegiances which bind him to both contexts: his friends, his social surroundings, his family past glimpsed through tales but, also, the life of the burgeoning Anglo-Pakistani community in London. While showing how class, ethnic belonging and other identities overlap, Kureishi comes to dramatize the allegiances and divisions of a multi-cultural society in a stimulating way and to dramatic, as well as to comic and ironic purpose. Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) is a novel about initiation, (black, Asian) British youth, pop culture, the condition of England, and London. It has been translated into 20 languages and was also made into a four-part drama series by the BBC in 1993, with a soundtrack by David Bowie. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is said to be very autobiographical. It is about Karim, a hybrid teenager, who is desperate to escape suburban South London and make new experiences in London in the 1970s. Gladly he takes the unlikely opportunity when a life in the theatre announces itself. He then takes on the offer of a part in a TV soap opera and the book leaves its reader on the verge of Thatcherism. Due to the oral texture of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the historical events, and the many dialogues full of colloquialism, the reader gets the impression of realism. The suburbs are "a leaving place" from which Kureishi's characters must move away. To Karim, London—even though it is geographically not far away from his home—seems like a completely different world. Therefore his expectations of London are great. The move (in) to the city (and later on through the city) seems to be like an odyssey, or even a pilgrimage. On the first page Karim introduces himself as follows:

“Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere”. This motif is reinforced throughout the novel—a rather funny novel on cultural, class and gender differences, and how the British way of life copes with these. Within the problems of prejudice and racism lies the question of identity. Furthermore, London seems to be the perfect setting for the protagonists' often painful growth towards maturity through a range of conflicts and dilemmas, social, sexual and political. This novel is considered an example of *Bildungsroman* and novel of initiation.

Zadie Smith's, *White Teeth*, 2000 focuses on the later lives of two wartime friends - the Bangladeshi Samad Iqbal and the Englishman, Archie Jones, and their families in London. The book won a number of awards, including the 2000 Commonwealth Writers First Book Prize. Archie is married to the much-younger Clara, a Jamaican girl whose mother is a devout Jehovah's Witness and they have a daughter, Irie, who grows up to be intelligent but with low self-confidence. Samad has immigrated to Britain after World War II and has married Alsana, also much younger than him. Their union is the product of a traditional arranged marriage, and they have twin boys, Magid and Millat. The marriage is quite rocky, as their devotion to Islam in an English life is troublesome. Samad is continually tormented by what he sees as the effects of this cultural conflict upon his own moral character, and sends 10 year-old Magid to Bangladesh in the hope that he will grow up properly under the teachings of Islam. From then on, the lives of the two boys follow very different paths. Ironically, Magid becomes an atheist and devotes his life to science whereas Millat, despite his earlier womanizing and drinking, eventually becomes an angry fundamentalist, and part of a Muslim brotherhood. The story mixes pathos and humour, all the while illustrating the dilemmas of immigrants and second-generation immigrants as they are confronted by a new, and very different, society. Middle and working-class British cultures are also satirized.

Monica Ali's, *Brick Lane*, 2003 is an epic saga about a Bangladeshi family living in the UK, and explores the British immigrant experience. It is set

in the eponymous area of East London and switches occasionally to Bangladesh. It begins with the troubled birth of the central character, Nazneen, in 1967 in what was then known as East Pakistan. After a short preamble, the novel is concerned with the events after her arranged marriage. She is sent to England at the age of 18, with little knowledge of English, to live with her new, much older and to her unappealing husband, Chanu. The story of her sister who remains in Bangladesh is delivered as an additional narrative through her letters. Ali chooses the contemporary storyline of the migrant community in London and keeps a focus on the connections between geography, identity and human relationships, the juxtapositions between tradition and innovation, between roots and adaptation to a new country, but also the generation conflict, the gap between migrant parents born elsewhere and their unrecognizable westernized children.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) is set in June 1948. The S.S. Empire Windrush sailed in to London's Tilbury docks carrying 492 young men from the West Indies. In search of a better life, they were the first large group of Caribbean immigrants to Britain. Andrea Levy's father was on that ship, and in her previous books she has written about the children of "the Windrush generation" and their efforts to find a way of being both black and British. In her fourth novel, *Small Island*, she has turned to the struggles of the pioneering generation itself. The book is a tragicomedy that provides a fascinating and thoughtful portrait of post-war Britain and the first dynamic encounters between newly arrived black Caribbean immigrants and the resident white British population. It is narrated by four characters – two black and two white – each with their own perspective on the situation.

Gilbert, a Jamaican volunteer in the RAF, has returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush, having realized there are no opportunities for him back home. After his wartime experiences, he has few illusions left about the wonders of the 'Mother Country'. Hortense, his prissy school teacher wife, has followed Gilbert to Britain naively believing all she has been taught about the superiority of the British and her privileged place among them. Queenie, their

Earls Court landlady, is a brash, bighearted woman yearning for excitement, who has found herself stuck in a run-down house with disapproving neighbours. Bernard, Queenie's racist and dull husband, is movingly shown to have his own share of hopes and disappointments. The story switches between the four voices and between 1948 and 'before' – as well as across three continents – to reveal how each person has reached this particular point in their life. The 'small island' of the title refers to Jamaica, once considered the 'big island' of the Caribbean but now seen as an insignificant place by those who have returned from the war. It also refers to Britain; reluctantly waking up to the fact it no longer rules the world, the borders of its once global empire shrinking around it, as well as to the individual characters that are isolated from each other by their failure to communicate.

1.5 HISTORY- A THEME IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION:

Outlining the trends in British fiction between 1979 and the 1990 in *The Modern British Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury marks a tendency in British fiction toward history especially in the novels of the "eighties":

Certainly exploring past and recent history, at a time when its progress seemed either ambiguous or disastrous, and many of the progressive dreams of the earlier part of the century had plainly died, did become a central theme of Eighties fiction. (Bradbury, 432)

For Bradbury, this tendency is the outcome of the developments in the field of history which show that "writing history is more like writing novels than we often choose to think" (Bradbury: 432). Therefore, Bradbury seems to stress particularly Hayden White's influence on this tendency in novel writing toward history and historical themes, as he acknowledges that "what we understand by history, the means by which we construct significant histories, and the way we relate those histories to our understanding of our own situation" has been reshaped by the recent philosophy of history (Bradbury: 432).

The historical novels in the eighties differ greatly from the historical novels written in the previous years. Literary critics foreground the intense preoccupation with history in the works of many contemporary novelists such as Graham Swift, Peter Ackroyd, D. M. Thomas, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, John Fowles, Jeanette Winterson and Angela Carter among many others.

The notable contemporary fiction writers of Helen Dunmore who show their interest in historical, war and other such contemporary themes are also praiseworthy writers. Antony Beevor is Britain's leading military historian. Dunmore credits Antony Beevor's *Stalingrad* for its military history. She also admires him for well capturing the surroundings of German troops and their disintegration, also the sheer folly of decisions people make in war. Dunmore is not a didactic writer, and she sees a clear distinction between herself and military historian, Antony Beevor. Using a small cast of characters - essentially one family in her novel, *The Siege* she depicts the deprivations of Leningrad and the determination of its people so vividly that the reality of the siege is inescapable and unforgettable. The siege of Leningrad in particular left a deep mark on the collective memory of Russia, owing to the excessive number of civilians killed and the terrible sufferings of the people especially during the endless first winter. Such events have been dealt with Helen Dunmore while Antony Beevor wrote about the epic siege of Stalingrad. Beevor evolved a style of writing that moved seamlessly between affairs of state, military strategy, and personal accounts of life on the frontline, as if blending the historian's objectivity with the novelist's eye for detail. On the contrary, the ability to combine striking details about people's experience of warfare with the broader sweep of narrative history is one of Helen's great skills. She didn't live through the Nazi blockade of Leningrad. Yet Dunmore has taken the alien milieu and made a narrative that works. She writes in the present tense, which can be as infuriating as the past perfect, but much of the time her words shadow her imagination closely enough to give the vivid immediacy the style demands. The story is told through the eyes of one

family who are struggling to survive physically and psychologically through this period. Helen Dunmore's *The Siege* brilliantly shows the epic struggle of ordinary people to survive in a time of violence and terror. Numerous novels have been written about the siege of Leningrad but this one stands out for two reasons. One is that it covers only the first few months, that terrible first winter in which so many people perished, often while out on the streets in search of food. The other is that it looks at the siege from a social rather than military point of view, in particular from a woman's perspective. Beevor, in the Guardian Hay Festival praised Dunmore's writing for its historical accuracy, and he appreciated that "in comparison with some historical novelists she does not try to novelize characters" (01). Dunmore added on the power of the characters. She likes to give an idea of her characters living in the present moment, which is another reason why she is very interested in the sensory qualities of daily life – how people ate and dressed. Beevor likes her approach of recreating the period – it adds as much to the understanding of the period as history does. Antony Beevor honours Dunmore's *The Betrayal* as it is a beautifully written and deeply moving story about fear, loss, love and honesty amid the demented lies of Stalin's last days.

Gillian Slovo has also dealt with the historical themes. Loyalties, beliefs, love, family ties: all are tested to the limit in one of the most devastating moments of human history- the siege of Leningrad during World War II. Two great English novels, Gillian Slovo's *Ice Road* and Helen Dunmore's *The Siege*, have the same epic event as their background – the blockade of Leningrad, the 900-day siege of Russia's second capital, when millions died from cold, hunger and Nazi forces bombing. Both novels came out roughly at the same time and have the same subject matter (Stalin's purges and the siege of Leningrad during the War) and similar story lines and characters. Both writers skillfully portrayed the psychology of the people and realities of life in that unfamiliar country in the long-removed period, the Soviet Union of 1930s. There are no non-Russian characters in Dunmore's novel, and just one, secondary, in Slovo's. Gillian Slovo opens her novel *Ice*

Road (2004) with a chapter on the story of the Chelyuskin expedition in the early 1930s, an attempt by the Soviet Union to open up one-season navigation from European north to the Far East via the Arctic. The expedition ends in disaster, but the successful international rescue effort was made into a huge propaganda success for the Soviet Union. Slovo mentions a little-known theory that the expedition was doomed from the beginning. The episode introduces the main character in the novel, an uneducated cleaner-cook Irina Davydovna, who survives the Chelyuskin disaster, the purges and, finally, the siege, which is described towards the end of the book. That is why, perhaps, the title of Slovo's novel may be slightly misleading. The *Ice Road* or the *Road of Life* was the name given to the only route by which supplies could reach the besieged city – over the frozen lake Ladoga to the east of Leningrad. But of course, *Ice Road* in the title has a broader meaning, referring also to the Chelyuskin voyage, and, metaphorically, to the hardships of people under Stalin's regime. Dunmore begins her narrative closer to the War and deals less with Soviet regime, but more with survival of individuals and their personal feelings under extraordinary circumstances. This is perhaps why her narrative is tighter, easier to follow. She writes beautifully, and creates a powerful romantic image of the most Westernized city in Russia. Stylistically Helen Dunmore is stronger than Slovo.

Dunmore's novels do not deal with grand themes and great public events rather, they tend to be quite personal and limited in scope. Her most recurring theme is that of sexuality, and the consequences of repressing it. Margaret Atwood (born 1939), like Helen Dunmore, also touches various disciplines of literature. Her fiction has ranged from the dazzling dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale* to the sexual power games of *Life Before Man*. One of her finest works of fiction, *Alice Grace* is an exploration of women's sexuality and social roles wrapped up in a gripping story of a nineteenth-century housemaid who may or may not have been a murderess. Helen Dunmore writes about women caught between passionate love and social repression.

They have to choose either real feelings or accept emotions which are corrupted by greed fear or manipulation.

Patricia Barker (born 1943) is an English writer and historian. In Barker's fiction, history is a vast and encircling pressure on the lives of her characters. Her *Regeneration Trilogy* is a landmark in British fiction and in her writing career. It explores the history of the World War I by focusing on the aftermath of trauma. Her sustained evocation of the warrior as well as wartime extends the way in which the soldier-combatant has been examined in fiction. Her soldiers are men whose drives and desires are as much a part of the war story as their soldiering. The conflation of sex with war in the social imaginary underpins the trilogy. Barker defamiliarizes some of the effects of war in order to illuminate a neglected facet of war neuroses: sexual anxiety. She has written a number of novels which turned an unsentimental eye on working-class life in her native Teesside, particularly, the life led by working-class women, before she achieved a critical and commercial breakthrough with *Regeneration*. In *The Siege* Helen Dunmore described in riveting detail one family's struggle to survive the 1941-42 siege of Leningrad. Her new novel is a sequel and picks up exactly 10 years after *The Siege* left off. Unlike *The Siege*, which was essentially descriptive, *The Betrayal* relies for its effects on the characters and story Dunmore has made up. Her research is meticulous, and details of the workings of Soviet bureaucracy, hospital life and Leningrad in the 1950s are expertly stitched in. As in previous novels, Dunmore is particularly eloquent about the intimate feelings of women. In 1950s Leningrad, many have lost partners and children. She also shows us people who don't quite believe what they know is going on, who can't or won't see that the worst will probably happen. But the novel is not morally complicated. With *The Betrayal* she has spliced a rather cozy domestic story with the horrible history of Stalin's Russia, and written an absorbing and thoughtful tale of good people in hard times. Compared to other series of historical novels – Pat Barker's superb *Regeneration* trilogy, for example – it falls short. But Dunmore's intelligence and gift for narrative,

as well as her fascinating choice of subject-matter made her writing distinctive.

Graham Swift, nominated as one of the twenty “Best of Young Novelists” in the Book Marketing Council’s promotion in 1983 is the author of eight novels- *The Sweet Shop Owner (1980)*, *Shuttlecock (1981)*, *Waterland*, *Last Orders (1996)* and so on. His each novel is different in its theme and style. His novels are all ambitious in their own ways in their thematic and narrative scope. Swift tackles ideas of narrative, history, conflicts between the generations, and the place of an individual in the larger scale of events. His oblique and non-linear narrative technique lends itself to a gradual revelation of events in a manner reminiscent at times of the nineteenth century detective novel. He explores variety of themes like parenthood, coupledom, identity via personal thoughts and memoires, love affair and also the memories of the World War II. History as narrative is for Swift primarily a personal rather than a factual reality. Graham Swift's novels deal with the extraordinary in the ordinary. In their settings, language and characterizations, Swift's novels are sparse and consciously drab. His protagonists are often ordinary men, middle-aged clerks or teachers or accountants. In their voices Swift ponders some of the bigger issues of life - death, birth, marriage and sex - as well as the everyday politics of relationships and friendships. His intricate narrative patterns raise questions about the relationship between personal histories and world events, between personal and public perceptions. Compared to Graham Swift, Helen Dunmore’s writing has been distinguished by its rich vein of imagery depicting the natural world, food and bodily pleasures, combining poetic intensity with compelling storytelling. She also has a strong historical imagination, although, as a character in *Mourning Ruby (2003)* observes, ‘Sometimes we recognize history as a sensation – a smell, or a touch – before we can name it or know what it really is’. Dunmore is a thoroughly competent author, straightforward with her narrative and more than capable of maintaining action that serves her plot.

1.6 HELEN DUNMORE AS A WRITER:

Helen Dunmore has contributed to various forms of literature-poetry, novels, plays, essays, reviews and children's fiction. Her novels deal with war, historical, and literary concerns. *Zennor in Darkness*, *The Siege* and *The Betrayal* are her war novels. She creates imaginary history of World War I and II in context of social, political and Cultural history. These novels look at the war from social point of view rather than military point of view. These novels render with the themes of horror of war and siege, betrayal, food and starvation, love, fight to survive along with the themes of hunger, cold and deprivation. The historical novels, Dunmore wrote are *House of Orphans*, *A Spell of Winter* and *Counting the Stars*. These novels represent the culture, language, and literature of concerned historical setting. There are the themes of orphanhood and parenthood, fight for survival, love and sexuality, war and betrayal, food and starvation. *Burning Bright*, *Talking to the Dead*, *Your Blue Eyed Boy*, *With Your Crooked Heart*, and *Mourning Ruby* are Dunmore's novels with contemporary settings. These novels depict the themes of love, urban corruption, sexual exploitation, social tensions and gross hypocrisy of society.

Dunmore inserts historical material in her fiction, and she turns it into a playground where she can foreground the suppressed histories in her novels. The main characters in her novels, particularly her female characters, may stand for what deviates from the norm. With her particular interest in history, she makes history as a recurring theme in most of her novels. In an interview, she states:

“I would say that all my historical novels have been written out of a long-standing fascination with the period, the setting and the people. That is, I have never decided that it might be interesting to write about a certain time or about particular characters, and then begun the research ‘cold’. Sometimes I can identify the moment when reading; study, travel and reflection

coalesced into the knowledge that this was going to become a novel.” (Dunmore 30-32)

When she is asked about her use of changing narrators, a technique that she uses most effectively in *The Siege* where the narration slips from Anna to Marina, or occasionally to Andrei or an outside character, the only deliberate exception being the boy, Kolya. The effect is one that Dunmore describes as “modulating consciousness”, or the slippage created in the narrator’s voice as it moves from character to character, offering the reader a different slant on the same event. “As a writer and as readers, we are enormously privileged to have insight into their thoughts and motives. I am also fascinated by what a character doesn’t say or by a dishonest character ... then the fun really starts!”(Ibid30) This brings to the question of language. Dunmore highlighted the difficulty of finding the right tone of voice. Dunmore opts for the captivating, contemporary language that builds what she describes as a “layered reading”: “I want people to feel that these people live in the present moment, although their ‘mental furniture’ may be different.” (Ibid31) Each character has his or her own vocabulary and register. She then focused on the background work that preceded the writing of *Zennor in Darkness*.

“Long before I thought of writing it, I had read all the novels and short stories of D H Lawrence, as well as a lot of biographical material about Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murray, Lady Ottoline Morrell and other members of Lawrence’s circle... *Zennor in Darkness* is set during the First World War and deals with the period which Lawrence and Frieda spent in Cornwall. I had been reading the history and literature of the First World War since my teens: poetry, diaries, novels and letters... The long, slow process of reading and brooding over material about the First World War was a matter of many years, not of months, and I could not have written

Zennor in Darkness without it. I would describe it as formation, as much as research.” (Ibid31)

Dunmore’s books are often described as sensuous, filled with exquisite descriptions of food, plants and gardens, clothing, furnishings, and buildings. These carefully selected details recreate the worlds her characters inhabit, and also help to form their personalities. She highlighted this by confirming that

“One of my chief aims in writing fiction is to give a sense of the present, palpable moment, uncoloured by hindsight. In *Zennor in Darkness*, the characters do not know that they are living through the First World War: there has been no second. They don’t know that there will be an Armistice next November. They don’t know, either, that the U-boat campaign on the Western Approaches has had a devastating effect upon food supplies in Britain, and is causing huge anxiety at the highest levels; nor do they know how this anxiety may affect their own lives. They certainly don’t know that Germany will be defeated, and must not ever seem like people whose present is coloured by certainty about the future.” (Ibid32)

Another aspect of her writing is the political content. Many critics have ignored the political content of Dunmore’s books, choosing instead to focus on women’s issues. All of Dunmore’s writing highlights political issues of the time, whether slavery or the tragedy of the war brides. Again, the story of *Zennor in Darkness* focuses on how the First World War redefined the relationship of the State to the individual, and permanently altered the social fabric: for example the impacts of the Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 and of the Military Service Act of 1916 cannot be overestimated. She uses this political focus to examine the nature of history and to explore the ways in which individuals as well as nations deal with their past. For example, the tensions between different versions of Finland’s history are central to *House*

of Orphans, and are expressed through characters that cling passionately to their opposing beliefs.

As a result, Dunmore's fiction opens up new possibilities of thematic concerns. Her fiction installs a particular narrative space at the centre of the novels and their understanding of history, sexuality and identity.