The War, Postwar and Postmodern British Poets: Themes and Styles

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Abstract

British literature, especially poetry has experienced different phases and showed the unique faces from the early periods to what called modernity era. The multi-facetted poetry is inflected by the dynamic atmospheres faced by Britain as results of the responses of poetic artists to the ups and downs of British history, especially the industrial changes and the brutality of World War I and II. Poets responded the political, social and cultural waves with their own unique styles and moods. The traumatic Wars and their casualties were not the sole themes during the war or post war era poetry, some poets reacted the issues of their own ways. This paper will discuss the reaction of some British poets to the wars. The discussion sections will be parted into the general responses, and also the analysis of two post war poets namely Adrian Henry and James Berry to represent their era of 1960 and 1980. This study reveals some findings that the poets experienced WWI and WWII responded the wars in such dramatic and gloomy ways as they are closely affected by the effects of 1915-1945 wars. Adrian Henry lived in the era post-modern, 1960s, the effect should have recovered. His poetic style speaks itself. James Berry, a Black immigrant poet, voices his root, past experiences and hope for a new life. Despite the style and theme, they all flourish British poetry with their own uniqueness.

Keywords: British poetry, postwar, postmodern, Adrian Henri, James Berry

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References


2. The Influence of World War I. How and why did this seismic shift in acceptable poetic themes and style come about? The nineteenth century provided a foretaste. It was still the style among the British “War Poets,” so named for their support of the war, a group which included Rupert Brooke, Rudyard Kipling, and Wilfred Owen; among Georgian poets Hilaire Belloc, Walter de la Mare, and Siegfried Sassoon; and with John McCrae, author of “In Flanders Fields.” The poems of these writers brought them deserved rank among the great poets in the language. After World War II the novel continued to be the dominant genre in postwar literature and many writers depicted the postwar world in realistic colours. Several major writers like C.P. Snow, Gr. Greene came to the fore in interwar period, but their specific manner outlined itself most markedly in their postwar work. The typology of realistic novel in the post-war period. Major themes: 1. Britain’s home and foreign policy. 2. Shift of social power, political values. 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 labelled as the Angry Young Men Movement. The literature of this age chiefly represented a rebellious and critical attitude towards the postwar British society. Paradoxically, this means that poetry has the potential to be the most ‘postmodern’ and the most ‘anti-postmodern’ of the arts. Anthologies of the period reflect the unease with which contemporary poets and critics have embraced and subsequently distanced themselves from such an elastic term.
Although there is some overlap between poets represented in anthologies of British poetry since 1980, what is most striking is the divergence between them that marks an important and decisive split in post-war poetry in Britain. Poets from both groupings have been termed ‘postmodern’. There are clearly a number of common themes and techniques. In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction. The Waste Land is often cited as a means of distinguishing modern and postmodern literature. The poem is fragmentary and employs pastiche like much postmodern literature, but the speaker in The Waste Land says, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins". Modernist literature sees fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis, or Freudian internal conflict, a problem that must be solved, and the artist is often cited as the one t