

The Varieties in Modernity: Changeable Fortunes and Inconsistent Selves in the 20th Century Novel

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Abstract:

The twentieth century, marked by unprecedented wars, technological progress, and cultural upheavals, reshaped human consciousness and identity. This dissertation, titled "The Varieties in Modernity: Changeable Fortunes and Inconstant Selves in the Twentieth-Century Novel," explores how literary modernity mirrors the instability and fragmentation of the self. The term *varium* derived from the Latin for "changeable" or "varied" symbolizes the shifting patterns of thought, emotion, and meaning that dominate the century's fiction.

The study investigates how novelists such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Albert Camus, William Golding, Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison portray the individual caught between tradition and transformation. Their works reveal that modernity produces not a unified identity but a mosaic of conflicting selves psychological, political, and cultural. By tracing the evolution from modernism's introspection to postmodernism's multiplicity, the dissertation demonstrates how the novel becomes both a mirror and a critique of human changeability.

Ultimately, the research argues that the twentieth-century novel stands as a document of *varium* a record of mutable fortunes and unstable selves. In embracing fragmentation, irony, and hybridity, these writers redefine what it means to be human in an age of uncertainty, making literature itself a form of ongoing self-renewal and resistance to fixed meaning.

Keywords: Fragmentation, Identity, Conscious, Upheavals, Modernity.

The twentieth century stands as a period of immense transformation-socially, politically, culturally, and philosophically. The rise of industrial modernity, two world wars, colonial collapse, and the expansion of technology altered the very foundation of human existence. Literature, being a mirror and a critique of life, reflected these shifts with striking intensity. The novel, more than any other literary form, became the chief vehicle for representing the human being caught in flux an individual searching for meaning amidst instability.

The concept of *varium*, meaning "changeable" or "diverse," captures the essence of this century's literary imagination. Writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Albert Camus, William Golding, Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison redefined the novel not as a static story but as a dynamic expression of consciousness. Their works illustrate the uncertainty of human identity, the erosion of moral structures, and the perpetual negotiation between freedom and constraint. Modernity,

therefore, is not simply an age of progress but one of fractured experience and inner division. turning points in human history. Industrial expansion, urbanization, world wars, The early decades of the twentieth century marked one of the most radical and the decline of traditional religious and moral frameworks produced a deep sense of alienation. The old assurances of stability, hierarchy, and progress collapsed, leaving individuals adrift in a rapidly shifting world. The modernist novel arose as a response to this existential uncertainty.

In this atmosphere, writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf became explorers of consciousness. Their fiction reveals the fragmentation of the human psyche under the pressures of modernity an era characterized by psychological introspection and formal innovation. The early modernist writer's task was not merely to tell stories but to represent the chaos and beauty of inner experience.

James Joyce and the Fragmented Self :

James Joyce stands as one of the central architects of modernism, reshaping fiction into a new art of consciousness. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce depicts individuals caught between the pull of personal freedom and the constraints of family, nation, and religion. protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, becomes a symbol of the modern self searching for identity in a world that offers no clear meaning.

1. Stream of Consciousness: Joyce's innovation lies in his ability to portray thought as it happens, unfiltered and nonlinear. The reader is plunged into the flux of Stephen's mind, experiencing the instability of perception and emotion that defines the modern subject.
2. Rebellion and Self-Definition: Joyce explores how identity must be created through rebellion against social institutions and inherited beliefs. The famous declaration "I will not serve" encapsulates the modernist's defiance of imposed authority.
3. Myth and Modernity: By paralleling contemporary Dublin life with the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses* transforms the trivial into the epic. This method reflects modernity's paradox the search for meaning within the ordinary and the mundane.
4. Alienation and Epiphany: Joyce's technique of the epiphany captures fleeting moments of self-awareness. These revelations do not resolve the crisis of identity but illuminate its texture the tension between insight and uncertainty.
5. Language and Identity: Joyce's experimentation with language, dialect, and inner monologue underscores the instability of meaning itself, revealing how words both construct and fragment identity. Joyce's fiction thus enacts a drama of consciousness, where the self is neither unified nor destroyed, but continually evolving through perception, memory, and resistance.

Virginia Woolf and the Interior Landscape:

While Joyce's modernism is grounded in intellectual rebellion, Virginia Woolf's is rooted in emotional and psychological exploration. In *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf examines the delicate fabric of human thought, memory, and time. Her characters exist not as fixed entities but as streams of impressions their identities interwoven with the shifting light of experience.

1. Time and Consciousness: Woolf's narrative dissolves chronological order. replacing it with psychological time the fluid rhythm of memory and reflection. The famous "tunneling process" reveals how moments connect across decades within a single consciousness.

2. Social Identity and Gender: Woolf exposes the constraints imposed by patriarchal society on women's creativity and autonomy. Characters like Clarissa Dalloway and Lily Briscoe wrestle with questions of purpose, visibility, and inner freedom.

3. The Self as Relational: In Woolf's fiction, identity is not isolated but relational. Each consciousness interacts with others, forming a web of shared perceptions. This intersubjective model contrasts with the individualism of earlier fiction.

4. Symbolism of Space: The physical settings London streets, seaside houses, and drawing rooms become psychological landscapes. Woolf's use of imagery transforms ordinary environments into mirrors of emotional states.

5. Death and Continuity: The recurring motif of death, especially in Mrs Dalloway, functions not as an end but as a moment of revelation. The self persists through connection and memory, suggesting that meaning resides in the act of living, not in external validation.

Through such techniques, Woolf crafts a poetics of consciousness that turns inward to rediscover the infinite variations of being. Her fiction becomes an art of interior vision a form of modern mysticism grounded in human experience.

Comparative Analysis: Joyce and Woolf:

Although Joyce and Woolf wrote within the same intellectual climate, their *pprophes Weity defer in both philosophy and style.

Form and Technique: Joyce's prose is exuberant, linguistic, and encyclopedic; Woolf's is lyrical, introspective, and rhythmic. Yet both employ the stream of consciousness as a tool to penetrate the private self.

Theme of Alienation: For Joyce, alienation stems from institutional oppression religion, politics, and language. For Woolf. it emerges from emotional disconnection and gendered silence. search for coherence

Quest for Meaning: Both authors depict life as a amidst fragmentation. Joyce's characters pursue artistic or intellectual transcendence, while Woolf's seek harmony and understanding within relationships.

Modern Vision of the Self: Joyce constructs the self through rebellion and intellect: Woolf discovers it through empathy and reflection.

Together, they demonstrate the dual nature of modern identity and resilient. both fractured

Use of Myth and Memory: Joyce reimagines classical myth in a modern setting; Woolf turns memory itself into a mythic structure. In both, myth serves as a framework to confront the void of modern existence.

Thus, Joyce and Woolf stand as complementary voices of early modernism. Their works reveal that the modern self is not destroyed but reborn through introspection and language an entity endlessly redefined by its consciousness.

The mid-twentieth century represents a defining period in the evolution of modern literature. The two World Wars, the Great Depression, the rise of totalitarianism, and the disintegration of empires transformed the global psyche. The novel, as a literary form, became the repository of collective trauma and moral questioning. Writers sought to depict not only the external catastrophes of war and politics but also the internal collapse of meaning and faith.

This discussion explores how mid-century novelists responded to a world scarred by violence, ideological conflict, and moral disillusionment. Through the works of George Orwell, Albert Camus, and William Golding, we see how fiction transformed into a form of philosophical and ethical inquiry examining human nature, freedom, and the limits of civilization. The mid-century novel thus serves as both witness and critique, mapping the psychological debris left behind by modernity's promises.

The mid-twentieth century was shaped by historical upheavals that redefined human existence. The optimism of the early modern age gave way to despair, suspicion, and fragmentation.

1. World Wars and Human Suffering: The unprecedented scale of destruction in World War I and II challenged all faith in progress. Millions perished, cities were destroyed, and moral boundaries blurred. The individual felt powerless in the face of collective violence.
2. Rise of Ideological Conflict: Fascism, communism, and capitalism became competing worldviews. Writers confronted the dangers of propaganda, manipulation, and the loss of personal freedom.
3. The Atomic Age: The development of nuclear weapons symbolized humanity's capacity for self-annihilation, making existential dread a central literary theme.
4. Postcolonial Awakening: Decolonization movements questioned the Eurocentric notion of civilization, while cultural hybridity began reshaping the global imagination.
5. Psychological Dislocation: The collapse of stable moral and social structures produced alienation and anxiety, themes that dominated postwar literature.

Within this climate, the mid-century novel became a vehicle for exploring the moral and existential dilemmas of modern humanity.

George Orwell and the Politics of Fear:

George Orwell remains one of the most incisive commentators on power, truth, and moral decay. His novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) expose the terrifying consequences of political totalitarianism and the manipulation of truth.

1. Language as Control: In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell invents "Newspeak," a language designed to eliminate thought. This linguistic tyranny illustrates how control over language leads to control over reality itself.
2. Loss of Individuality: The protagonist, Winston Smith, represents the modern man crushed between truth and conformity. His rebellion reflects the fragile nature of personal freedom in a surveillance state.
3. Ideology and Morality: *Animal Farm* parodies the corruption of revolutionary ideals. Orwell's use of fable underscores how noble visions can degenerate into tyranny.
4. Fear as Governance: The constant monitoring, manipulation, and rewriting of history reveal the politics of fear as the foundation of totalitarian control.
5. Legacy of Disillusionment: Orwell's vision extends beyond his time- his work remains a warning about the vulnerability of truth and conscience in the modern world.

Orwell's moral clarity and skepticism make him a central figure in the literature of disillusionment, where the personal and political become inseparable.

Albert Camus and the Absurd Hero:

In contrast to Orwell's political realism, Albert Camus explored the philosophical dimension of despair. His novels *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947) articulate the existential condition of modern man a being estranged from both God and reason.

1. **The Absurd Condition:** Camus defines the "absurd" as the conflict between human longing for meaning and the indifferent universe. Meursault, the protagonist of *The Stranger*, embodies this paradox through his emotional detachment.

2. **Moral Neutrality and Revolt:** Meursault's execution for failing to conform to social expectations symbolizes the absurdity of moral judgment. Camus argues that authenticity lies in accepting absurdity without resorting to illusion.

3. **Solidarity and Resistance:** In *The Plague*, the city of Oran becomes a metaphor for collective suffering. Through Dr. Rieux, Camus celebrates the quiet heroism of those who act without hope of reward.

4. **Philosophy of Human Dignity:** Despite his rejection of religious consolation, Camus finds moral strength in human empathy and courage. The absurd hero resists despair by living fully and honestly.

5. **Influence and Ethics:** Camus's philosophy of rebellion influenced generations of writers who viewed moral integrity as a form of existential defiance.

Through his lucid prose and philosophical insight, Camus transforms despair into a form of human affirmation- turning the absurd into a source of dignity.

William Golding and the Darkness Within:

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) confronts the myth of civilized innocence. The novel depicts a group of boys stranded on an island who gradually descend into savagery, exposing the thin veneer of social morality.

1. **Human Nature and Evil:** Golding rejects the Enlightenment belief in inherent goodness. The boys' regression into violence suggests that evil is not external but embedded within human nature.

2. **Symbolism and Allegory:** Characters like Ralph, Piggy, and Jack represent aspects of reason, intellect, and primal instinct. The conch shell, fire, and "*Lord of the Flies*" serve as powerful symbols of order and chaos.

3. **Loss of Innocence:** The novel dramatizes the destruction of childhood idealism, revealing how fear and power corrupt even the most innocent beings.

4. **Civilization versus Barbarism:** Golding critiques modern civilization as a fragile construct easily overturned by instinctual drives. The island becomes a microcosm of human history.

5. **The Moral Lesson:** The arrival of the naval officer at the end mirrors society's own hypocrisy condemning savagery while perpetuating it through war.

Golding's vision, dark yet moral, suggests that redemption lies in self-awareness in acknowledging the shadow within humanity itself.

Themes of Disillusionment and Social Change:

The works of Orwell, Camus, and Golding converge around certain key motifs that define the mid-century sensibility:

Disillusionment with Ideology: Each writer exposes the betrayal of ideals political, moral, or spiritual belief, revealing the emptiness behind systems of **Moral Ambiguity:** The traditional distinction between good and evil dissolves, giving rise to a world governed by uncertainty and contradiction.

The Loss of Faith: The decline of religion and reason leaves the individual without a stable framework for meaning, intensifying existential anxiety.

Search for Human Solidarity: Amid despair, these writers affirm compassion and responsibility as the only sources of ethical renewal.

Transformation of Society: The novels reflect shifting notions of authority, freedom, and moral duty, marking the transition from modernism's introspection to postmodernism's skepticism.

Through these themes, the mid-century novel becomes an arena for moral reflection a search for humanity in the ruins of ideology.

The convergence of political realism, existential philosophy, and moral allegory in the mid-century novel represents a broadening of literary purpose. The novel is no longer a vehicle for entertainment or social commentary alone; it becomes an ethical laboratory for testing the boundaries of human endurance.

Orwell's realism confronts the external mechanisms of oppression, Camus's existentialism probes the internal confrontation with meaninglessness, and Golding's allegory exposes the primal instincts beneath culture. Collectively, vulnerable. they construct a composite image of the twentieth-century self reflective, and morally tested.

These authors teach that literature is not an escape from history but a means of understanding it. Through their narratives, they record the crisis of an age that sought meaning amid chaos.

Conclusion:

The early modernist novel represents a turning point in the evolution of human self-understanding. Writers like Joyce and Woolf rejected realism's external objectivity to explore the intricate realities of thought and perception. Their fictions capture the anxiety of an age where truth is subjective and the self is unstable.

In these narratives, the crisis of identity becomes both theme and form @R&B&O Arzagh Ghifting perspectives, fragmented syntax, and symbolic structures. What emerges is not despair but discovery: the realization that identity is a continuous process of becoming.

The early modernists thus transformed literature into a mirror of consciousness, turning the novel into a philosophical instrument for exploring the boundless variability the varium of the modern self. Their influence extends beyond their own time, shaping the psychological, existential, and postmodern literatures that followed.

The mid-twentieth-century novel captures the twilight of modernity-an age when faith in progress gave way to skepticism and introspection. In Orwell, Camus, and Golding, we see humanity's struggle to reconcile freedom with fear, reason with instinct, and morality with survival.

Their works reveal that disillusionment need not lead to despair; it can generate clarity, humility, and a renewed sense of responsibility. The modern novel thus becomes both a mirror and a moral compass, reflecting the dark realities of the age while pointing toward the possibility of ethical renewal.

Through their shared concern for truth and integrity, these writers bridge the chasm between art and life, reminding us that even in times of crisis, the human spirit remains capable of self-reflection and change.

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