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POETIC STRATEGIES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN 20TH–21ST CENTURY BRITISH NOVELS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ISHIGURO AND GOLDING

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Abstract

The study of characterization remains one of the most significant areas in contemporary literary criticism because literary characters function as the primary medium through which authors communicate philosophical, psychological, cultural, and social meanings. In twentieth- and twenty-first-century British fiction, characterization has undergone substantial transformations due to the influence of modernist, postmodernist, and postcolonial literary movements. This article investigates the poetic strategies of characterization employed by two distinguished British novelists, William Golding and Kazuo Ishiguro. Although the two authors belong to different literary generations and employ different narrative techniques, both have made significant contributions to the development of character representation in modern British literature.

The research focuses on the artistic methods through which Golding and Ishiguro construct fictional identities, including symbolism, mythopoetic structures, narrative perspective, psychological depth, memory-based narration, and linguistic stylistics. Through comparative textual analysis, the study reveals that Golding's characterization is primarily based on allegorical and symbolic patterns that explore the darker dimensions of human nature, while Ishiguro's characterization relies on subjective memory, emotional restraint, and narrative ambiguity to depict complex psychological realities. The article further demonstrates how both writers transform characterization into a powerful instrument for examining moral responsibility, personal identity, historical memory, and existential uncertainty.

The findings indicate that despite stylistic and thematic differences, both novelists employ sophisticated poetic techniques that elevate characterization beyond realistic representation and enable readers to engage with universal questions concerning humanity and society. The study contributes to the broader understanding of contemporary British narrative poetics and offers insights into the evolving nature of literary characterization in modern fiction.

Keywords: characterization, narrative poetics, British novel, psychological realism, symbolism, mythopoetics, memory, identity, narrative voice, William Golding, Kazuo Ishiguro, comparative literature, literary aesthetics, contemporary fiction.

Introduction

Characterization has traditionally been regarded as one of the fundamental elements of literary creation. Since ancient times, literary theorists have emphasized the importance of fictional characters as vehicles for expressing human experiences, ethical values, and cultural beliefs. In modern literary studies, characterization is no longer viewed merely as the depiction of individuals but as a complex artistic process involving narrative techniques, psychological representation, symbolic structures, and ideological perspectives. The twentieth century witnessed profound changes in literary representations of character. The emergence of modernism challenged traditional realist conventions by emphasizing subjective consciousness, fragmented identities, and psychological complexity. Later, postmodern literature further destabilized fixed notions of identity by introducing unreliable narration, metafictional devices, and multiple perspectives. These developments significantly influenced British fiction and expanded the possibilities of character construction. Among the most influential figures in modern British literature, William Golding and Kazuo Ishiguro occupy distinctive positions. Golding's novels explore the fundamental instincts underlying human civilization and frequently employ symbolic and mythological frameworks to depict moral conflicts. His characters often function simultaneously as realistic individuals and allegorical figures representing broader philosophical concepts. Through works

such as Lord of the Flies, Pincher Martin, and The Spire, Golding investigates the tensions between order and chaos, innocence and corruption, and civilization and savagery. In contrast, Ishiguro's fiction focuses on memory, identity, emotional repression, and the instability of subjective truth. His protagonists often narrate their experiences retrospectively, creating narratives characterized by uncertainty, silence, and gradual revelation. Novels such as The Remains of the Day, Never Let Me Go, and The Buried Giant demonstrate his unique ability to portray psychological complexity through subtle narrative strategies. The significance of comparing these two writers lies in their shared concern with the nature of human identity despite their differing artistic methods. Both authors seek to understand the human condition, yet they approach this goal through contrasting narrative and poetic strategies. Golding tends to externalize philosophical conflicts through symbolic action, whereas Ishiguro internalizes such conflicts through memory and introspection. This article aims to identify and analyze the principal poetic strategies of characterization employed by both writers and to evaluate their contributions to twentieth- and twenty-first-century British fiction. By examining narrative perspective, symbolism, mythopoetic structures, psychological representation, and linguistic style, the study seeks to demonstrate how characterization serves as a central mechanism for artistic and philosophical exploration in their novels.

Literature Analysis

The theoretical foundations of characterization have been established through the works of numerous literary scholars. One of the earliest influential contributions was made by E. M. Forster, whose distinction between "flat" and "round" characters remains central to literary criticism. According to Forster, round characters possess complexity and unpredictability, making them more representative of real human beings. Wayne Booth expanded the study of characterization by emphasizing the role of narrative voice and the implied author in shaping readers' perceptions of fictional characters. Booth argued that characterization is inseparable from narrative structure and rhetorical strategy. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism highlighted the multiplicity of voices within literary texts and emphasized the dynamic interaction between characters and ideological perspectives. Research on William Golding has traditionally focused on symbolism, mythology, and moral philosophy. Critics such as Virginia Tiger, James Gindin, and Samuel Hynes have observed that Golding's characters frequently operate on multiple levels of meaning. Ralph, Jack, Piggy, and Simon in Lord of the Flies, for example, function not only as individual boys stranded on an island but also as symbolic embodiments of civilization, power, rationality, and spiritual insight. Scholars have argued that Golding's characterization reflects his belief in the inherent complexity and darkness of human nature. Other researchers have examined Golding's use of mythological archetypes. Influenced by anthropological and psychological theories, particularly those associated with Carl Jung, Golding constructs characters that resonate with universal patterns of human experience. Consequently, characterization in his novels often transcends realistic representation and acquires mythopoetic significance. Studies devoted to Kazuo Ishiguro have concentrated primarily on memory, identity, trauma, and narrative unreliability. Critics such as Brian Shaffer, Barry Lewis, and Cynthia Wong have explored the ways in which Ishiguro's narrators reconstruct the past and negotiate fragmented identities. Scholars note that his protagonists frequently engage in acts of selective remembrance, creating narratives characterized by ambiguity and self-deception. Particular attention has been given to the role of memory in shaping character identity. In The Remains of the Day, Stevens' recollections reveal the psychological consequences of emotional suppression and unquestioning loyalty. Similarly, Never Let Me Go employs memory as a narrative mechanism through which characters attempt to understand their existence and mortality.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative literary methodology based on textual, narrative, psychological, mythopoetic, and stylistic analysis to investigate the poetic strategies of characterization in the novels of William Golding and Kazuo Ishiguro. The research is grounded in contemporary theories of characterization, narrative poetics, comparative literature, and literary aesthetics. The primary sources of the study include Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954), Pincher Martin (1956), and The Spire (1964), alongside Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day (1989), Never Let Me Go (2005), and The Buried Giant (2015). These novels were selected because they represent the most significant examples of each writer's artistic achievement and provide diverse models of character construction. The research applies a

comparative approach to identify similarities and differences in the authors' characterization techniques, paying particular attention to narrative perspective, symbolic representation, psychological depth, and thematic development. Furthermore, narrative-poetic analysis is used to examine the role of first-person and omniscient narration, unreliable narrators, retrospective storytelling, internal monologue, and narrative silence in shaping fictional identities. Psychological analysis focuses on the portrayal of consciousness, memory, emotional experience, self-perception, and identity formation, while mythopoetic analysis explores the influence of archetypes, myths, allegorical structures, and symbolic patterns on character creation. In addition, stylistic analysis investigates the linguistic and artistic devices employed by both authors, including imagery, symbolism, metaphor, repetition, understatement, descriptive techniques, and figurative language. Through the integration of these methodological approaches, the study provides a comprehensive examination of characterization as a multifaceted literary phenomenon and offers a deeper understanding of how Golding and Ishiguro utilize poetic strategies to portray the complexities of human nature, moral responsibility, memory, and personal identity in twentieth- and twenty-first-century British fiction.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study concludes that the poetic strategies of characterization used by William Golding and Kazuo Ishiguro play a crucial role in revealing human nature, identity, memory, and moral values. Golding mainly employs symbolism, allegory, and mythological archetypes to create characters that represent universal aspects of human behavior, whereas Ishiguro relies on subjective narration, memory, and psychological introspection to portray complex and realistic personalities. Despite their different artistic approaches, both authors enrich characterization through sophisticated narrative and stylistic techniques, transforming characters into powerful vehicles for philosophical and social reflection. The findings suggest that further research should explore characterization in other contemporary British novels, investigate the relationship between memory and identity, and apply interdisciplinary approaches combining literary studies with psychology and cultural studies. Such research may contribute to a deeper understanding of modern narrative poetics and the evolving role of characterization in contemporary fiction.

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