

How Real is Real: Attitudes towards Realism in Selected Post-war British Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Despite its apparent precision in meaning, realism as a once-held literary school of thought provokes controversies regarding its basic definition and the works attributed to it. This is particularly the case with the postmodern use of the term, most specifically in relation to fiction, with realism generally asserted as the traditional language of the genre. This paper is an attempt to discuss the implication and tenets of realism, its progress and changes, in selected works of post-war British fiction. Accordingly, Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* are dealt with to trace realism within their respective modes of new realism, fantastic-grotesque and postmodern metafiction. Having survived the early twentieth century allure of modernism, realism has gradually evolved into a new identity capable of emerging in and mingling with new modes prevalent in postmodern fiction. Owing to the spirit of the time immediately following the Second World War and the particularities of different authors, the postmodern realism has gone beyond a mere portrayal of the objective world and is in demand of a refreshed understanding of the new outlooks contemporary realism has the potentiality to offer.

Keywords: Realism, post-war British fiction, metafiction, modernism, post-modernism, Graham Greene, Mervyn Peake, Ian McEwan

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INTRODUCTION

Socio-historical Background

Referring to the American civil war, Flannery O'Connor (1972) once made a very delicate indication as to how war could possibly affect those who were defeated:

We have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence (p. 59).

Regarding the war calamity and its effects, such a claim makes sense even in the case of the *conquerors* in the Second World War, perhaps with the exception of the United States as the only nation having had its land untouched by the battlefields. The United Kingdom and her European allies earned the victory at a great expense. Considering all the rationing, evacuation, and air-raids, Harry Blamires (1988) indicates that “the second world war was not just something happening overseas like the first” (p. 197).

All the aftershock effects of the war continued to haunt the minds with the threat of the ongoing development of the nuclear and atomic bombs and the arms race of superpowers. The invasion of Egypt in mid fifties rose concerns whether Britain was receding back into imperial days. Undeniably, these events had an impact on the literature of the age. The harsh reality of political and social situation of the time had a crude effect on how the new realism was portrayed in works of various literary genres particularly novel as the most life-like replica of the real world. Furthermore, the after-war pandemonium was accompanied by still another wave of change targeting the old world. The initiation of a social openness

to deal with the already assumed obscenity of sexual matters made it possible for writers to freely excavate new grounds in human relationships.

THE LITERARY SCENE

With all the turmoil in the air, one can expect the literary works of the age to be in a state of flux. Literary historians like George Watson (1991) believe that the mid-twentieth century witnessed “reviving a tradition of realism that had flourished first in the eighteenth century England” (p. 6). Recognizing the technical complexities of the literature of between the war years as an imported method, Watson favours the retreat to a British narrative style devoid of the stream of consciousness and complex points of view.¹ In *Flight from Realism*, Marguerite Alexander (1990) also indicates that it was the realist writers, who initiated a break from Modernism as early as 1930s (p. 9). Accordingly, it can be asserted that new realism acted as a revolt against the excesses of modernist style just like the way traditional realism had gone against romanticism in early nineteenth century.

As it is generally the case, new literary movements are born or old ones are revived when the current ones are taken to extreme. However, the spirit of the age is of such a quality that the course of contemporary events and context generally spreads its effects upon the epoch it touches. As to post-war British fiction, a revival of realism had the quality of *unrestricted* and *flexible* imitation of the eighteenth-century pioneering fiction or nineteenth-century Realism, particularly

in relation to technicalities of the style. Considering the spirit of the age, the public taste immediately following the war years was too overwhelmed and exhausted to be entertained with complex, esoteric and abstract notions most favoured by Modernists. As Blamires (1988) states:

In the central decades of the century public appetite created a market not only for the pulp fiction but for well-made novels of daily life, readably undemanding, handling with simplistic conviction the limited range of moral and emotional conflicts that the modern media allot to suburban man (p. 195).

It might be unfairly inferred that the novelists who preferred to satisfy the public, mainly clung to a shallow realism, reportage of a series of events arranged in a way to be followed and rejoiced instantly. In the first place, this short-lived period can be considered as an 'interlude' or for the sake of its initiation more aptly a 'prelude' hailing and paving the way for the new realism. Furthermore, stereotypical notions conceiving a fixed framework of realism could and still can be challenged by imposing the question of to what extent the personal perception of a writer with regard to the reality surrounding him is 'real.' Can a piece of literary work be labelled as realistic on the ground that it sticks to a report-like account of a writer, who furnishes his fictional world setting by 'real' surroundings? Can it be guaranteed

that two authors of identical background and social surroundings perceive the world in the same manner? Is that the right criteria to take such works as 'real' on the ground that they follow what was once considered as Realism? As Bertolt Brecht (1992) asserts; "one cannot decide if a work is realist or not by finding whether it resembles existing, reputedly works which must be counted realist for their time" (p. 44).

As a recapitulation, it can be expressed that the rising individual consciousness of authors regarding their autonomy in representation of real along with the events of post-war period had its impact on the diversity which was to come. As already stated, political as well as social events of late fifties rekindled controversial issues and awakened the war-stricken and dormant public from their short term slumber. According to Blamires (1988), the "social and spiritual discomfiture," was then "restlessly or wryly, angrily or mockingly projected" through theatre and fiction (p. 223).

Types of fiction prevalent from mid twentieth century have thus enjoyed a variety less common to previous eras. This paper choice would, then, be more tangible in dealing with realistic elements in some sample works as diverse as socio-political fiction of Graham Greene, the grotesque and fantasy-bound novels of Mervyn Peake, and the more recent psychological works of Ian McEwan. The textual analyses are here to be preceded by a brief discussion of realism in relation to modernism and postmodernism.

REALISM, MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

In an essay entitled “Modernism, Anti-modernism and Post-modernism,” David Lodge (1981) makes the distinction between modernism and postmodernism by referring to modernism as being based on obscurity whereas postmodernism centres on uncertainty, “a labyrinth without exits” (p. 13). Where does realism abide in the territory where modernism is giving place to postmodernism? Lodge takes a very illustrative standpoint by conceiving a pendulum which alternatively dangles from modernism to realism and vice versa. Accordingly, he considers 1920s as the time of modernism while 1930s is dominated by realism. To him, a half-way move toward modernism occurs in 1940s. In turn, mid 1950s is the age of new realism. Lodge exploits Roman Jakobson’s idea of metaphor and metonymy to respectively refer to modernism and realism. Then, the gradual upheaval of postmodernism from 1960s onward is what Lodge calls the “powerful emblem of contradiction, defying the most fundamental binary system of all” (p. 13). He believes in postmodernism as a follower of “the modernist critique of *traditional* realism” (p. 12) (*italic mine*). Regarding the defiance of binary opposition, which in this case refers to the dichotomy between modernism and realism, it can be deduced that postmodern fiction is not necessarily anti-realist in certain respects.

Patricia Waugh’s *Metafiction* seems to invoke a standpoint similar to that of

David Lodge, whom she acknowledges for his inspiration in the writing of her book. Waugh asserts that metafiction “is an elastic term which covers a wide range of fiction,” identical to a spectrum (1984, p. 19). At the centre of this imaginary spectrum resides the new realism, which “manifests the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity but allows their deconstruction to be finally re-contextualized or ‘naturalized’ and given a total interpretation” (Waugh, 1984, p. 19). Her stipulation distinctly illuminates the strength of the new realism in pushing back traditional boundaries.

To consider postmodernism as a reconciliation of realism and modernism may sound rather too bold or hasty to be expressed directly. Nonetheless, the advent of new narrative modes since mid-twenties rendered the mingling of already existing modes more smooth. Whether termed as metafiction or postmodern fiction, the new novel has consolidated new realism by bridging the gap between modernism and realism. As Linda Hutcheon (2002) points out, postmodern fiction bears no threat to representation of reality but, the point that is of significance is a “question of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it” (p. 32). Accordingly, her standpoint appears in *The Politics of Modernism* as follows:

What postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism’s transparency and modernism’s reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically

attested power of both. This is the ambivalent politics of postmodern representation.

(Hutcheon, 2002, p. 32)

GRAHAM GREENE: EARLY RETREATS TO REALISM

Although Graham Greene lived well into the post war era, he is considered by some critics to be a writer of 1930s. This “inescapably 1930s writer,” as Watson (1991) puts it in his preface to *British Literature since 1945* (p. xiv), is included in this discussion due to two main reasons. First, he is undeniably classified as an early new realist writer back in the thirties.² More important are his own declarations regarding realism. In a series of correspondence with Elizabeth Bowen and V.S. Pritchett published under the title *Why Do I Write*, Greene (1948) asserts that telling the truth is the responsibility of the novelist. He elaborates on his standpoint as follows:

I don't mean anything flamboyant by the phrase 'telling the truth': I don't mean exposing anything. By truth I mean accuracy - it is largely a matter of style. It is my duty to society not to write: 'I stood above a bottomless gulf' or 'going downstairs, I got into a taxi,' because these statements are untrue. My characters must not go white in the face or tremble like leaves, not because these phrases are clichés but because they are untrue (p. 30).

Considering a few main concerns of Greene, this is indeed a new realistic trend. As it is generally acknowledged, traditional Realism is more liable to verisimilitude and moral and didactic concerns in literature. From a technical point of view, the realism Greene has in mind has scarcely anything to do with verisimilitude. Furthermore, he does not advocate a moralist and didactic view of literature. He indicates that the novelist has no undertaking to ‘edify,’ which has to do with the personal essence of morality than the false assumption of amorality of literature (1948, p. 32).

In *The Power and the Glory*, the conceptual realism goes beyond a formal sense of closure at the end. A priest, betrayed by his drinking habits and a child out of wedlock, is on a constant flight from the government, where Church services are to be banned. After a long procession of escape and wandering, he is finally under arrest and shot to death. The whisky priest, as he is referred to recurrently throughout the narrative, faces the reality in his acceptance of what is made real to him through his various encounters with the realities in his life. He comes to admit that he feels more delighted than resentful by the fruit of his adultery. The reality is too vivid for him to blame himself for the wrong act; he is concerned with what the future may hold for his daughter. When finally arrested, he experiences the natural fear of death like any other human being. It can be assumed that reality comes to him gradually, and with every step he takes in his flight from the police.

A very significant part of this novel is the prison scene, from which he eventually manages a narrow escape. In a dirty dungeon of a cell, the whisky priest spends the night in the company of criminals; grownups, an old man, a pious woman imprisoned for having a Bible at home, and a child. He unwillingly comes to speak about God and religion with the woman and some others, while hearing a couple making love in the darkness, and someone urinating. It is in this gloomy, impious, and grotesque scene that the priest feels at home:

... he was touched by an extraordinary affection. He was just one criminal among a herd of criminals... he had a sense of companionship which he had never experienced in the old days when, pious people came kissing his black cotton glove.

(G. Greene, 1962, p. 128)

How can one interpret the reality of this scene? From an objective point of view, which is more susceptible to verisimilitude than true realism, this incident is most queer and untruthful. It can, in fact, be considered as a grotesque experience expressed through a very subjective standpoint of reality. Greene's portrayal of the whisky priest is not certainly of a typical religious man one expects to encounter very often. Thus, his treatment of the reality surrounding the social issue of the story is a reality from a fresh look, which managed to enrage religious radicals of his time.³ Nevertheless,

this could assuredly be the right way to deal with the issue of priesthood and Catholicism at the time, more to show than to judge a reality all too present to be taken for granted. Looking through the public eye, there seems to be a banal sense of reality, which fails to notice the depth of his predicaments. From phenomenological point of view, one cannot see the reality unless he gives up his position of a public spectator and walks with the priest along his path which more involves a fresh encounter with life than a mere way to escape police. This may be the case with the lieutenant, who parallels the priest's escape with his obsession to hunt him down. This sort of reality certainly differs from a light account of daily events to entertain the average mind.

Regarding the ending of the novel from a technical view, it can be said that it does not fully display the sense of ending traditionally expected from a realistic work in which matters are generally resolved and settled down by the end of the story. As the whiskey priest is shot dead, another priest arrives at the scene, an incident which is potentially open to interpretations such as the indestructible Catholic Church or the continuation of the belief battles. The fate of Coral Fellows, the teenage girl who once helped the priest, is also left unuttered by her parents, who seem too distressed to mention her mysterious going away even in private.

Related to the point of view, technical aspect of realism can be discerned in that the third person narrative proceeds smoothly throughout the story leaving minimal confusion common to multi-

voiced modernist novels. There is no shift of narrative voice as the plot moves into different settings. Nevertheless, there is also no trace of an omnipresent narrator, whose authorial tone governs the text, directing the reader what to praise and what to abhor.

MERVYN PEAKE: MID-CENTURY REALISM IN FANTASTIC-GROTESQUE FICTION

For the sake of a fresher outlook on the realism of the post-war British fiction, this paper abandons the more commonly asserted works of realism in 1950s in favour of the fantasy-bound *Gormenghast*, the second novel in the trilogy of Mervyn Peake. Regarding the significance of the work, C.S. Lewis wrote to the author that it “had the hallmark of true myth ... adding to a class of literature in which the attempts are few and the successes very few indeed” (qtd. in Winington, 2006, p. 21). Peake’s fiction is mainly recognized as works of the grotesque and the fantastic. However, this study means to consider his works in the light of its implication of realistic elements since new realism is here viewed as capable of blending with other modes beyond the conventional bonds of Realism. Among various modes, the grotesque has a well-grounded claim for mixing the unreal/surreal with reality.⁴

Mingling fantasy with reality has long been the debate of many critics and the practice of many writers. In a discussion of the fantastic in postmodern fiction, Gerhard Hoffman (2005) speaks of the paradoxical copresentation of the real and the fantastic as

an “interface of the *actual* and the *possible*” (p. 261) (italic mine). As the discussion goes, one certain quality of contemporary realism is its capacity to merge in with a wide range of modes such as European surrealism or the more recent magic realism first associated with the writings of Latin American authors. The line dividing these modes sometimes seems so blurry. Dealing with magic realism, Hoffman (2005) quotes Gabriel Garcia Marques speaking of Latin American realism as an “outsized reality,” which Marques refers to as *their* ‘reality’ (pp. 240-241). In a similar vein, Salman Rushdie echoes the notion of ‘outsizedness’ in defining certain representations of reality. In “Influence” in his collection of nonfiction *Step across this Line* (2002), Rushdie stipulates that Charles Dickens’ style of using realism in a liberating way influenced him in writing *Midnight Children*:

In Dickens, the details of place and social mores are skewered by a pitiless realism, a naturalistic exactitude that has never been bettered. Upon this realistic canvas he places his outsize characters, in whom we have no choice but to believe because we cannot fail to believe in the world they live in (p. 71).

In fact, it is a very illuminating point to detect such liberalism in a distinguished author of nineteenth-century Realism. This thorough explication on Dickensian use of realism seems most appropriate and

applicable to Mervyn Peake's works. If Dickens places 'outsized' characters upon a realistic canvas, Peake portrays both the characters and settings in a fusion of fantasy-bound reality and reality-bound fantasy. Peake's mastery of the grotesque is an indispensable factor in creating such fusions. Interestingly enough, Peake's realism and his use of the grotesque are likened to Dickens by Duncan Fallowell in the short entry of his profile in *Makers of Modern Culture*:

Peake is the most accomplished Fantastic Realist in modern English literature, having more stylistically in common with Dickens than with any of his British contemporaries. The world of Gormenghast and its inhabitants is the exaggerated one of dreams and nightmares. Where Dickens was eccentric, Peake is entirely grotesque.

(Wintle, 2001, p. 404)

The commonality can be associated with their simultaneous handling of the grotesque and fantastic in fictional worlds of a unique intense reality. The fact that reality is capable of fitting into a work of grotesque and fantastic dimension is a notion hinted at as early as 1957 by Wolfgang Kayser in his seminal book; *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. With a partially rhetorical question, he engages our mind in whether the 'new realism' is to be "actually devoid of all fantastic elements" (1963, p. 126). Even

earlier than Kayser, Bertolt Brecht (1992) asserts that reality can be well-portrayed in a fantastic context where actors "wear grotesque mask and represent the truth" (p. 44).

Although Peake's *Gormenghast* is limited to the imaginary world of Gormenghast, the Groan royal family and the school staff as the most eccentric and 'outsized' characters are so deliberately placed in a surrounding with all realistic details that their existence is made plausible. Accordingly, Joseph L. Sanders (1984) indicates that "Peake's vivid description convince the reader of Gormenghast's physical existence" (p. 78). In the world of *Gormenghast*, the castle certainly has a life and society of its own, made conceivable through all the vices and wishes that the characters share with mankind in general. Their world is populated in a manner much identical to our own familiar world in its endless battle of good and evil.

In this "microcosm of decaying civilization", as Blamires (1988) terms it (p. 204), good and evil are barely of a fairytale-like nature. This implies a thematic realism in which no clear-cut absolutism between good and evil exists. Titus, the protagonist, who manages to slay the villain (Steerpikie), is hardly portrayed as the hero and the saviour of his Earldom. Far from that, he even sees himself as a 'traitor' in his mother's eyes; "he was her traitor" for the obvious reason of his disbelief in the vitality of retaining his family line (Peake, 1950, p. 488). He kills Steerpikie out of a personal sense of revenge for Fuchsia's death and the

robbery of his boat.⁵ Neither is the power-thirsty red-eyed Steerpike the epitome of a monster from the very start. He has his gradual spiritual downfall from a clever mischievous urchin to an insatiable and over-ambitiously power-infatuated youth, which finally leads him to be the heartless vampire especially after killing barquentine. His initial revolt against authority is the most realistic reaction which leads us to identify him as “one of us” (Johnson, 2004, p. 13).

Since this novel is the second in a trilogy, the sense of ending is of a rather different nature here. As mentioned above, Steerpike is killed at the end by Titus, who himself departs from Gormenghast into the wide world outside the castle walls, into the unknown. In a traditional ending, Titus could have stayed back and enjoyed ruling his territory. Even the end of the third book, which washes Titus ashore to Gormenghast after a harsh journey into the modern world, does not terminate in his being ultimately settled down. It once again ends with Titus leaving Gormenghast in a different direction. Therefore, there is no fixed sense of ending neither to *Gormenghast* nor to the trilogy.

Gormenghast trilogy is written from the point of view of the third person. The crucial point in the narrative style is the descriptive and poetic language, which relieves the narrative tone from a more traditionally realistic mode of omniscient third-person view. As a painter and illustrator, Peake reveals his talent by creating a pictorial text, a slide-like

procession of images woven into each other through a poetic language. Although there is no shift in the point of view, the dominance of the narrative viewpoint cannot be of much concern since any possible authorial conventionality is overshadowed by the language itself. This is what makes the storyline realistically unconventional, without the use of complexity in the point of view.

IAN MCEWAN: POSTMODERN REALISM

As a contemporary writer with a flourishing career from the last two decades of the twentieth century, Ian McEwan never fails to shock postmodern readers by his choice of revolting subject matters, “the shock value” of which “is reflective of the world” (Slay, 1996, p. 5). McEwan has earned his professional reputation not owing to the experimentation prevalent both at the outset and the closing decades of the twentieth century. In *Understanding Ian McEwan*, David Malcolm (2002) elaborates the point by asserting that McEwan makes no use of experimental style neither in “observing sequence in terms of time and cause and effect” nor in narrative techniques (p. 29).⁶

As indicated in ‘The Literary scene’ section of this article, new realism inaugurating in the mid-twentieth century has revived nineteenth-century Realism particularly in subject matters, with a concern for social issues. Due to its wide-range readership potential, realism has always been popular in dealing with social issues. The trend is also noticeable in the

generation of British fiction writers since the seventies (Slay, 1996, p. 3). Considering British literature as “characterized by conscience,” Slay (1996) compares McEwan and his contemporaries with the Victorian authors:

British literature has come full circle, returning to the formative literature of the Victorian Age, to the societal warnings, bemoaning, and railing of such writers as Dickens, Eliot, and Carlyle. The concerns have transmogrified from the horror of slums and labour conditions to the terror of nuclear armament and unconscionable patriarchies.

(Slay, 1996, p. 4)

In line with Slay’s sound remark about the conceptual nature of realistic fiction since the seventies, the present study proceeds with the discussion focusing on a contemporary novel by an author starting his career since the seventies. Nonetheless, this article does not deal with a work by McEwan only because he can be considered as a contemporary realist. The significance of McEwan’s fiction, particularly the selected novel which has been penned with the maturity of its author in full swing, is the perfect blend of new realism with metafictional mode of narration.

As far as literary tradition is concerned, most writers start their career based on the influence they receive from already accomplished works, and finding one’s

own voice comes with the passage of time. McEwan’s early works were the two collections of short stories, most of which were later used as thematic background for his novels. Therefore, an early experimental style (see note 6) with later practice of more traditional techniques culminates in a postmodern fiction with a simultaneous claim both for realism and metafiction.

In an essay entitled “McEwan: Contemporary Realism and the Novel of Ideas,” Judith Seaboyer (2005) draws quick sketches of the themes of Realism reflected in McEwan’s novels. She discusses how some themes such as ethics and gender subjectivity are exploited by McEwan, addressed in a way different from traditional realism (p. 24). Dealing with issues of Victorian age, the psychological weight of his works is crucial in its depictions of postmodern attitudes toward those themes. Taking *Atonement* into consideration, it is noticeable how thematic realism is fused into a metafictional narrative style.

The novel is the portrayal of a typical upper-middle class suburban family with the background event of World War II, and the unsuitable love match of the Tallis older daughter and the charlady’s son. Jack Tallis is the absent father who financially supports the education of the charlady’s son in Cambridge. Nevertheless, this certainly does not help Robbie Turner to equal Cecilia. The way he is kept in a lower status is typical of the class struggles of its time in England as in many other countries. He is accused of rape by Briony and, except for Cecilia, the family consents to his accusation. Unlike

Paul Marshall, the real rapist, Robbie has neither money nor a big name to help a possible exoneration. As a matter of fact, the love between Cecilia and Robbie is typically unconventional due to class differences. The typical social class discrimination is also noticeable later in Robbie's relation with his two comrades in the battlefield, where he leads but is not recognized in the role. The love catastrophe ends with both Cecilia and Robbie dying in the war. They are never reunited, which makes Briony suffer from guilt complex all through her life, once she learns the truth. She comes to see the folly of her judgment too late. As Lynn Wells (2006) in "The Ethical Otherworld: Ian McEwan's Fiction" states, Briony painstakingly learns "to abandon fantasy in favour of a more adult style of psychological realism" (p. 124).

The narrative technique is itself very crucial since the storyline shifts several times, and the story is related in a metafictional manner. The narrative is divided in four sections, three of which are related from the third person point of view. The first and longest part is set in rural England of 1930s, followed by the next part with Robbie wandering about in the battlefields of the Second World War. The third part, again with no lapse of time, is London and the hospital where Briony serves as a nurse during the war. The final section which is narrated by Briony from the first person viewpoint is at the close of the century, London in 1999. The often shifting narrative account is artistically used in full measure to convey delicate psychological details.

As to the sense of ending, two different endings are amusingly offered at the end of the third and fourth part of the narration. One is the wish-fulfilment of Briony in reuniting the couple through narration. It is only at the end of this section that the reader is made aware of the fact that whole first three parts were possibly the manuscript of BT, which obviously refers to Briony Tallis. This is followed by the truth of elderly Briony, the author, confessing that in reality the couple desperately died far from each other during the war.

The ending can be doubtlessly called an unconventional one as it shocks the readers by the innovative way the novel seems to end and how it really ends. It simultaneously does and does not fulfil the existence of a closure, which is a vivid manifestation of how boundaries between realism and experimentation can be crossed. In the closing part of the final section, Briony intelligibly doubts if the sad truth has to be revealed by rhetorically asking "who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism" (McEwan, 2001, p. 350). Though a novel and not a critical piece of writing, the issue of realism is intrinsically brought up as the above-mentioned quotation is shortly followed by the coming part, which seems to hint at how delicate the dividing lines between reality and dream can be:

I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what really happened? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. As long as there is a

single copy, a solitary typescript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love

(McEwan, 2001, p. 350).

CONCLUSION

As debates about the presence of realism in post-war fiction continue, realistic themes and elements keep appearing in literary works. Owing to its rich thematic implication, realism has outlived a definite time span and continues to reciprocally enrich and be enriched by eclectic fusions with contemporary modes of narration. As Patricia Waugh (1984) asserts, “the ‘meta’ levels of fictional and social discourse might shift our notion of reality slightly but can never totally undermine it” (p. 52). In this regard, realism was particularly traced in this study merging with the fantastic-grotesque of *Gormenghast* and the metafictional mode of *Atonement*.

With all the talks about the anti-realism of postmodern fiction and the emergence of metafiction, there are growing numbers of articles and books depicting traces of realism in contemporary works. As observed in the discussion of the selected novels, realism in the post-war British fiction has survived in thematic dimensions rather than style. Accordingly, the typical stylistic techniques of traditional Realism such as the omniscient point of view, sense of ending and judgemental authorial attitude faded away as new realism began mixing with other modes of narration.

To conclude, as a conceptual standpoint in post-war British fiction, realism has followed a steady pace to be employed thematically rather than stylistically through different modes and in a variety of works since late 1940s. As witnessed in the sample works under study, realism proves broad enough in its thematic quintessence not to be limited to a certain era of literary history. As Dominic Head truly (2002) encourages, it is high time for “new hybrids and fresh extensions of realism” to demonstrate “the falsity of the realism/experimentalism dichotomy” (p. 10).

ENDNOTES

¹Regarding the narrative point of view and the role of the narrator in the contemporary fiction, a most recent source for further study is Paul Dawson’s article, ‘The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction’, *_Narrative_* 17.2 (May 2009).

²It may be worth mentioning that Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*, included in this paper, was first published in 1940.

³The book aroused the dissatisfaction of the Catholic Church and was condemned by Cardinal Bernard Griffin of Westminster in 1953.

⁴The basic structure of the grotesque is defined as a simultaneous copresentation of incompatibilities such as real/unreal, comic/tragic, attractive/repulsive and so on. Philip Thomson’s *The grotesque* (Routledge, 1972) is good source for further reference in this matter.

⁵Fuchsia, Titus' sister, who is for a while courted by Steerpike, kills herself by jumping down through her room window into the flood water. The boat incident is related to the final battle scene between Titus and Steerpike.

⁶Of course, as Malcolm later mentions, McEwan refers to his early works as being imitations of certain experimental writers (p. 39).

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