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Breaking Post-modernism: The Effects of Technology and Writing Programmes on Contemporary Literature

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Abstract

The paper explores the relationship between post-modern literature and contemporary literature after the expansion of the technological age. Through the effects of technology, such as the internet, the subject matter and the overall tone of literary fiction has made a departure from post-modern literature. Post-modernism is seen as a reaction to the end of World War II and the persistence of the Cold War, which creates a different socio-political atmosphere than in the contemporary era. The technological influences on contemporary literature encompass the growing inclusion of a globalised voice and an understanding and curiosity of other cultures that can be expressed through works of fiction. The writing programmes within the academic setting have also influenced the contemporary writer's relationship with the post-modern texts often consulted in the programmes. Because students react to the post-modern tone and writing style, they have created a post-post-modern attitude towards writing fiction.

[**Keywords**: Post-modern, contemporary literature, contemporary fiction, creative writing programmes, technology and literature]

Introduction

The differentiation between post-modernism and contemporary literature is vital to the literary community. By looking at contemporary works, academic journals, and the influence of technology and writing programmes on writers' perspectives, one perceives a significant difference between the post-modern literature movement and the contemporary literature writing forms today. As well as the technological influence on contemporary literature, the way in which budding authors are taught in an academic setting has also impacted the voice of the contemporary author. As many contemporary writers today have taken either coursework in creative writing or have pursued degrees in literature and creative writing, the academic setting of the classroom must be taken into account when studying contemporary works. The rise of creative writing programmes both in the United States and within the United Kingdom have impacted writers both by exposure to post-modern works and by working on self-reflection as well as taking in the opinions of peers.

Works of, for example, Vladimir Nabokov versus the works of David Foster Wallace show some of the gaps between post-modern literature and contemporary literature. The influences of post-modern writers vary greatly from those of contemporary writers. Nabokov's *Lolita* focuses on the inward struggle of the protagonist and the narcissistic

nature of obsession; David Foster Wallace's lengthy novel, *Infinite Jest*, includes numerous main characters (Hal Incandenza, Remy Marathe, John Wayne, Michael Pemulis, Don Gately, etc.), three separate locations and backgrounds of the characters, and an interweaving plot between the characters that allow the reader to experience multiple points-of-view by refusing to alienate the audience. Researchers and critics have commented on the narrow viewpoint that *Lolita* encompasses, and, as Kasia Boddy points out, "since *Lolita* was published in 1955, many have agonized over the fact that his eponymous heroine had neither much of a life nor, in Humbert Humbert's hands, much of a literary memorial," (Boddy 2008: 165). This single-minded need of Nabokov to indulge the reader in only Humbert's thoughts and emotions, and by depicting Lolita as literally incompetent, is testament to the post-modern tendency to absorb the work in the self. This self, often loosely attached to the musings and struggles of the author, outshines the other characters and often renders the other players as one-dimensional. This is due to the emphasis on the protagonist's opinions and conflicts, and deters the work from delving into other viewpoints that would divorce the work from an often egocentric frame of reference.

David Foster Wallace, on the other hand, has broken away from the post-modern notion of self-reflection in support of using multiple character points-of-view to create an all-encompassing narrative that veers from the ego of the protagonist into a patchwork of differing voices. He swiftly and abruptly moves from one character to another in often jarring segues. As Timothy Aubry notes, "when [Wallace] interrupts the progression of the narrative, rendering it all the more compelling, Wallace highlights the fact that plots are often propelled, or at least enhanced, by efforts to suspend them, and he exposes a similar pattern in addiction... Addiction and metafiction (sic), then, turn out to be peculiarly resonant," (Aubry 2008: 209). This literary device of diverting the reader from one plot to another is prevalent in contemporary literature in response to the often linear progression of post-modern works. By challenging the reader to abandon one character for another, Wallace is able to create an environment in which multiple viewpoints can be explored and understood. This understanding and study of differing characters allows the work to foster an open foray into empathising with varying scenarios and developments that is not easily created in single-protagonist centred works of post-modern fiction.

Many contemporary writers utilise multiple viewpoints in order to create a broader and more encompassing experience for the reader. As stated above, creating multiple protagonists allows the reader to empathise with different persons and world views. Chuck Palahniuk, Irvine Welsh, John Barth, and Zadie Smith, amongst others, have worked with incorporating this style in order to challenge, involve, and intrigue the reader. McLaughlin states that "in the movement into the twenty-first century [literature] has learned to adapt post-modern techniques of subversion for its own purposes [by] constructing 'realities' from multiple narratives," (McLaughlin 2013: 289). The multiple narrative literary device is only one example of the contemporary movement to connect with the reader and forego the often cynical and alienating tone of post-modern fiction. Robert McLaughlin reminds the literary community, "David Foster Wallace, for one, argued that the post-modernists of

the 1960s made good use of irony for tipping various sacred cows, but at the end of the century, when all sacred cows have been tipped, irony leaves us caught inside a self-referring trap, unable to assert any belief, unable to connect with others, unable to make a new world," (McLaughlin 2013: 285). This "tipping of cows," as it were, is necessary to bring cultural issues to light, but (somewhat ironically) by relying solely on irony, an alienation of those within said culture is evident. An example of this depressing and empty irony can be found in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* when Jack states, "No sense of the irony of human experience, that we are the highest form of life on earth, and yet ineffably sad because we know what no other animal knows, that we must die," (DeLillo 1985: 20). This quote encapsulates both the self-absorption in the protagonist in regards to the "animals" around him, and the unrelenting use of irony to push others away.

Technology and the Introduction of the Internet

The technological age and the rise of connectivity from the 1990s to the present day has influenced the way in which writers create their works and express themselves. This expression differs from post-modernism in that it tends to look outward at the lives of others instead of inward at the life of oneself. Although not all post-modern writers focus solely on self-inflection, it is a common theme for the protagonist of post-modern works to question the self and the place that self has in his/her own environment. The inner focus creates works fundamentally concerned with self-perception (or lack thereof).

Contemporary works differ from focusing on the self in that, quite the contrary, protagonists tend to focus on the lives and perceptions of those around them in relation to themselves. In the past thirty years, the world in terms of communication has changed drastically. Because of this, writing styles and perspectives have changed as well in regards to the relationship between the subject and the encompassing setting. Before the technology boom, experiencing differing cultures and peoples involved travel, manually discovering literature, or extensive tedious research through archives, word-of-mouth, and personal connections.

Literary works before the age of the internet involving imagined advances in technology were often panned as pastime reading material, not literature. In Marleen S. Barr's article on science fiction and post post-modernism, she points to the incredible becoming the credible. She states, "Clones were once absolutely science fictional... The cellphone [mobile]/camera/internet portal is instantly recognized as being analogous to Captain James T. Kirk's communicator," (Barr 2006: 170). These imagined, yet often accurate, depictions of (at the time) fictional elements were influenced by the changing industries after World War II.

Because of the expanse of technological programmes throughout the world in the 1950s and 1960s, television and media becoming prevalent in the common household, and the introduction of new, more modern technical gadgets, most post-modernists, e.g. Kurt Vonnegut and Don DeLillo, believed this technology would alienate humanity. Through

their works, such as Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* and DeLillo's *White Noise,* authors postulated the negative influence of technology on the human race and one's ability to communicate effectively with others. In the post-modern sense, technology often goes alongside alienation and loss of community. DeLillo implies the old notion of blissful ignorance in regards to technology and the world in *White Noise,* when he criticises the family unit and its social connections. In DeLillo's novel, Jack states that "the family is the cradle of the world's misinformation... Murray says we are fragile creatures surrounded by a world of hostile facts... Facts threaten our happiness and security. The deeper we delve into things, the looser our structure may seem to become. The family process works towards sealing off the world," (DeLillo 1985: 81). The aversion to human contact and the cynicism of the family unit have come to fruition in the novel because of the encumbering technology within the culture.

With similar fervour, Vonnegut's works are highly critical of scientific and technological improvements. A majority of his novels involve a science fictional air to them. From space travel to martial communication, Vonnegut invests himself in a fantastical futuristic world. He becomes as harsh as DeLillo on the repercussions of indulging in technology. Vonnegut sees mechanical objects as cold, and mankind's (supposed) reliance on these objects creates a world without successful human contact or social bonding. He sees humans ruled by inanimate pieces of metal and light, suggesting so when his narrative describes, "The stop-and-go signs, garish ghosts in the sleet, went through their irrelevant tomfoolery again and again, telling the glacier of automobiles what to do. Green meant go. Red meant stop. Orange meant change and caution," (Vonnegut 1963: 30).

The hierarchical nature of the signs and the resignation of the people driving their cars show the complete dependence of humans on technology. This scepticism and suspicion towards technological advancements are prevalent throughout post-modern works. Where post-modern writers believed that technology would disrupt society and destroy human contact, contemporary writers have embraced the accessibility of socialisation within and apart from geographical cultures. -

Opposite to the post-modern stance of technological wariness, contemporary writers use the abundant availability of information on other cultures and lifestyles in order to connect with and understand individuals contradictory to themselves. They do not shy away from technology, but rather embrace it. Instead of being wary of its power, contemporary writers use the social aspects of technology in order to connect with those around them, and those halfway around the world. For instance, Dave Eggers explores the power in connecting with individuals around the globe in his novel, *You Shall Know Our Velocity*. In this work, he utilizes social media and technological outputs in order to discover others and immerse himself in the lives of others. In this way, the wariness of post-modern authors to technological advancements has been countered in the social advantages used by contemporary writers.

In fact, an overwhelming amount of contemporary novels, e.g. the works of Irvine Welsh or Chuck Palahniuk, stray away from technology all together. Instead they focus on human relations and they strip their stories of most modern advancements in order to create a character-centred plot-line instead of a plot revolving around a reaction to inanimate objects and the powers that implement the technological instruments. Chuck Palahniuk goes as far as to renounce consumerism and the social desire for excessive possessions and advanced toys within contemporary culture.

In his novel, *Fight Club*, the unnamed protagonist is ridden of his collection of furniture from catalogue and online shopping by a house fire. He struggles with his identity without his material possessions as he monologues, "You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug," (Palahniuk 1996: 44). Devoid of both his societally reasonably placed apartment and middle-upper class belongings, he indulges in a life without importance on "things." He has no phone, no computer, no car, no electricity in his house. He has divorced himself from technology, and therefore creates his own identity as Tyler Durden.

As Alex Blazer points out, "For all his power and potency, Tyler is nothing more than the narrator's narcissism abjectified. Tyler is born of the narrator's alienation from his own narcissism – his egotistical, commodified desires go unfilled... Tyler is the narrator's fragmenting narcissistic inwardness splintering itself into the outside world," (Blazer 2008: 188). Tyler's objection to narcissism and material goods symbolises the relationship between Palahniuk and the post-modern literary era of egocentricity, irony, and cynicism. Though utilising irony, Palahniuk shows that each person strives to be individualistic, yet at the same time, cannot be. This is directly in odds with the post-modern self-concerned protagonist. Palahniuk's Tyler exclaims, "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile," (Palahniuk 1996: 133). By the dual protagonist refusing to consider himself unique, he has broken away from the post-modern idea of self-inflection and a sense of oneness often displayed in post-modern works.

The Influence of Socio-political Conflicts

The world around oneself influences the work produced. The influence of war and the threat of nuclear disaster weighed heavily on the topics and concerns of post-modern writers, and as such affected the content and tone of post-modern literature. After World War II, post-modern writers had broken away from modernist ideology, focusing in on a harsher and more cynical present. Peter Knight exemplifies this mindset in his article by writing, "In interview [Don] DeLillo expressed his uncertainty about what the collapse of the Soviet empire meant: 'We're in between two historical periods, the Cold War and whatever it is that follows it. I'm not sure that this is what follows it. This may just be the interim. I think we're just beginning to wonder what happened, and what didn't happen'

(Williams 1997)" (Knight 2008: 193). This in between in regards to war and the ambiguity of the present times of the 1950s-1980s created an atmosphere of uncertainty that was expressed in the literature of the post-modern era.

The Red Scare in the United States and turmoil over the Vietnam War, as well as the technological threat of a nuclear strike in the Cold War, fostered writing that was critical of the outside world and critical towards the self. In Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, the protagonist, Slothrop, slowly declines into despair as he is immersed in the secret coercion of a World War II mission and loses those he loves. Pynchon's work epitomizes the psychological struggle writers contended with in post-modern works. In fact, Slothrop is wary of a nuclear threat, and is suspicious of those around him. The work signifies the foreboding nature of writers within the era, and criticises the trust of both one's acquaintances and oneself. McLaughlin postulates that "the post-modern fiction of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s made use of [irony] to challenge readers' expectations for how fiction could work and, more broadly, how the world could be known and how a person could situate herself (sic) in the world. In one sense, post-modern fiction sought to turn the world into fiction so as to expose the mendacity of the culture we have inherited and to invite us to invent other, better cultures," (McLaughlin 2013: 285). This desire to fabricate alternate realities can be connected directly with the aftermath of the wars. Post-modern writers both indulged in recreating the reality around them while remaining suspicious of the changes being implemented around them.

As stated before, both DeLillo and Vonnegut were wary of technological advances, yet still wrote works that were futuristic in nature. In a similar vein, Thomas Pynchon focuses on wars of the past to create a fictionalised present. In his work, *Mason & Dixon,* Pynchon writes on the topic of Americanism and what those who broke away from England during the American War of Independence thought of the culture around them. Though embedded in history, and technically classified as a historical fiction, *Mason & Dixon* parallels many of the questions post-modernists had towards their own culture after World War II.

As Stacey Olster concludes with her article on Pynchon's novel, "If such is the case [that America is but 'a Patch of England'], and the New World is indistinguishable from the Old, its history of empire may simply confirm the view of history implied by the Indian lore of forestry in which, as Pynchon writes, 'ev'ryone comes 'round in a Circle sooner or later' until '[o]ne day, your foot comes down in your own shit' (1997: 677)" (Olster 2008: 107). Applied to the aftermath of World War II and the conflict involved in the Cold War and the Vietnam War, Pynchon is introducing the notion that nothing can be done within the present society, and that current affairs have been dictated years before by the actions of past generations. The notion that the present is inevitable and cannot be avoided creates a post-modern literature rife with irony and the propensity to search for either an alternative reality or to focus on the self within the present.

With the end of the Cold War, the introduction of the internet and social media,

and the dawning of a new millennium, writing subject matter has abandoned harsh introspection for empathetic outward connection. Though the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the Gulf Wars, the terrorist attacks of September 11th, and the terrorist train bombings in London have had affected contemporary culture, technology and social media have created a realm for individuals to connect and to try to understand the conflicts around them. Within the literature of the contemporary era, wariness is not often seen in regards to war. Instead, many works focus on multiple viewpoints from other countries, regions, religions, politics, and backgrounds. Frank Kermode writes, "We think of our crisis as pre-eminent, more worrying, more interesting than other crises," (Cowley 2002: 108). While in American terms, the tragedy of September 11th altered the secure belief in one's safety, it also shook the world as a whole. Cowley makes an interesting assumption in his declaration, "Reflecting on the history of the 20th century, it is hard not to conclude that the most challenging literary works were produced at moments of the greatest political and social upheaval: that crisis nurtured creativity, as it may yet again today," (Cowley 2002: 109). The post-modern era and the contemporary era both have a stronghold in the times of political and social upheaval. It is what the writers do to express themselves and how the culture desires to digest the literature that makes the difference between times of historical challenges. The technological advances of the late 20th and the early 21st century have changed the way in which individuals cope with conflicts, and the "in between" DeLillo spoke of has come to an end.

Regionalism and Identity in Contemporary Literature

Contemporary writers have a need to connect with their audience and with their subject matter, and often touch on exotic and foreign subjects (in regards to the author's own identity versus the topic the author has chosen to depict and explore, not necessarily in regards to exoticism in a geographical sense). This need to understand and represent the "other" is catalysed by the breadth of information available through the World Wide Web, through internet communicable sources, through open social media, and through the fact that today's world has become increasingly minuscule because of technological advancements.

In this way, the concepts of regionalism and identity have grown more prevalent as the world (in a social sense) has become smaller. One has a tendency to describe oneself based on not only the country or the region one comes from, but based on the social clubs, interests, family ties, education, etc., one is a part of. Rather than creating an atmosphere of "us" versus "them," technology has created a way in which people connect through common interests, be that person from the East or the West side of the globe. On the contrary, the global scale of communication in regards to literature has opened opportunities for writers to explore the lives and cultures of others. The propensity to discover and empathise with other lifestyles has been attributed, in the United States, to the need of ethnic minorities to marry their culture with their identity as Americans.

In *Caucasia*, by Danzy Senna, this conflict of self-identification is explored through

one of her protagonists, light-skinned Birdie. Birdie's father is African American and her mother is Jewish American. When her parents decide to divorce, her father assumes custody of her dark complected sister, while her mother cares for her. Suzanne Jones explains in her article, "Birdie passes as white in order to protect her mother's alias and mark time in the hope that her family will be reunited. Sandy... reminds [Birdie] that she 'wasn't really passing because Jews weren't really white, more like an off-white," (Jones 2008: 93). The jumble of personal identity increases when she moves from one social circle into another. While living with her sister, she attended a predominantly African American school, and as so assumed her African roots into her cultural identity. When forced to deny her father's background, she assimilates into the Jewish community. The chameleon-like nature of her life exemplifies the intangible definition of ethnicity and culture. Through this literature, not only is the experience of being the "other" in multiple situations expressed, but also the audience sees the blending of the cultures that exist in the United States. As Jones hints, "white" citizens of America once used to be European: English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, French, etc.

Though racial and cultural divides still exist in the modernised world today, the melding of traditions and the acceptance of the "foreign" has grown with the aid of technology. Nahem Yousaf writes of the prevalence of questioning and bringing to light conflicts between cultures when he says, "By the end of the [1990s], even best selling (sic) blockbusters had begun to engage with 'multicultural' issues... In [Proulx's] epic second novel, she explores America as a nation of immigrants through metaphors distinctive of the decade's struggle with multiculturalism: the kaleidoscope and the mosaic," (Yousaf 2008: 33). Leading to the dawn of the 21st century, writers continued to explore the existence of "others" within their own cultures. Yousaf points out that, "fiction often performed the delicate negotiation between assimilation and distinctiveness that social commentators were slower to grasp," (Yousaf 2008: 35). This negotiation has been taken on by writers because literature is one of the more nuanced media tools in contemporary life today.

Having the entirety of the world at one's fingertips allows one the opportunity to learn and explore other cultures and lives; however, it also creates a specific identity for the author. When presented with many separate cultural influences, one's own identity becomes more precise: The more choices to identify with, the more unique the personal identity. With the technological advancement of the internet, "identity" no longer refers solely to socio-economic background or ethnicity. The widening of definitions creates the need for the individual to describe exactly who he/she is. Contemporary writers have been influenced by this need for precise cultural identity, and because of this, regionalism has become more prevalent in contemporary writing, e.g. in regards to Irvine Welsh and his foray into the underground drug scene of the 1980s in his novel, *Trainspotting*. This regionalism differs from post-modern regionalism as the writers of the contemporary era often use their identity to observe differences and similarities to another culture, whereas in post-modern writing, regionalism had been used on occasion to alienate the author from the subject matter.

Using Welsh's work as an example, the "regional" group explored in *Trainspotting* is that of addiction; however, within this group exists sub-groups (drug users, user abusers, and non-drug addiction). One might argue that Welsh's novel, set in Edinburgh, only touches on the subject of Scottish culture by his use copious amounts of colloquial Scottish phrases, therefore alienating readers unfamiliar with turns of phrase. However, he has also created an alternative culture within Edinburgh's underbelly. His use of drug-scene vocabulary, and words specific to the individual speaker, create a world with its own rules and expectations severed from the general Scottish public. In fact, his character Renton (in Story 4), with his harsh Scottish brogue, detaches himself from society and furthers himself into the drug culture to which he identifies. He exclaims, "Society invents a spurious convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae's behaviour is outside its mainstream... The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whut they huv tae offer. Choose us. Choose life... Well, ah choose no tae choose life," (Welsh 1996: 187). Welsh ironically writes Renton as denouncing Scottish culture while doing so in his thick Scottish accent.

Irvine Welsh also uses multiple viewpoints and fragmented chapters and stories (literary devices also used by David Foster Wallace in *Infinite Jest*) to show the break between the characters and the society and culture the characters are expected to have assimilated to. Welsh also uses irony in regards to a heading of different identity cultures in his short story, "The Two Philosophers." He creates a scene in which three separate entities are represented, and the conclusion creates a blunt look into the social interactions and expectations of differing communities within a region:

"The duty sergeant was going through his routine of asking each brawling set of prisoners who the Billy and who the Tim was. If the handshake is right he will let the Billy go and slap the Tim around a bit. That way everybody's happy. The Billy gets to feel superior and delude himself that being a non-churchgoing 'protestant' is somehow important; the Tim gets to feel persecuted and indulge his paranoia about masonic conspiracies; the sergeant gets to slap the Tim around," (Welsh 1994: 116).

In Welsh's play on differences in cultural identity, he portrays the irony that all three characters are subconsciously content with the way in which the hypothetical interaction between them would occur. Whereas the Scottish nature of Welsh's monologue yet again portrays colloquial terms that most non-British readers would not be able to decipher (e.g. a "Tim" being a Celtic fan, and a "Billy" being a Rangers fan, however, the terms are often used to symbolise the clash and the vitriol between Scottish Catholicism (Tim) and Protestantism (Billy). Welsh is once more dividing and dissolving Scottish identity whilst cementing his characters within it.

As examples of contemporary literature focused on character identity in regards to ethnicity, religion, and cultural beliefs, he works of Danzy Senna and Irvine Welsh show the rejection of a geographical identity in favour of a "pick-and-choose" personal identity of choice. This is but one way that contemporary writers have started to break down the physical and ethnic structures of identity in order to explore a more global social context.

The expanse of literary works into other facets in regards to "otherness" is not limited to cultural breakdowns and personal definitions. In Michael Schudson's review of Beth Luey's *Expanding the American Mind: Books and the Popularization of Knowledge,* he states that "popularization depends on a body of specialized knowledge [and] on the existence of a potential audience [which] mushroomed in the post-World War II era... from 1.6 million (1940) to 12 million (1980)," (Schudson 2011: 201). Here Shudson shows the global need for explanatory literature that not only conveys information (frequently of a hard science nature) but does so in a way that is entertaining to the readership. This, in turn, allows writers to create works of fiction and nonfiction in order to explain procedures and concepts that would not normally be accessed by the general public. Luey, however, cautions that "while more polemical works have been the most spectacular sellers, quieter efforts at description, explanation, and overview have been more common and have proved popular, steady sellers," (Shudson 2011: 202). In short, using contemporary literature to introduce new concepts to communities has been successful in the short run, but may run the risk of over-popularization. In all works of literature, there is a delicate balance between catering to the audience (in contemporary literature terms, for emphasis on empathy or open-mindedness) and retaining integrity (by acknowledging the limitations of "others" without patronisation or condescension).

Post-modern Texts in Writing Programmes

The influence of the writing programme era, coming to fruition in the 1950s after World War II and continuing to flourish in contemporary university academia, has allowed creative writers to consider post-modern works whilst creating and experimenting with their own styles and subject matter. The referral to the "programme era" is in correlation to Mark McGurl's *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. McGurl studies the realms of creative writing within academia and writing workshops. He discusses branches within contemporary writing, including technomodernism, autopoetics, high cultural pluralism, and lower-middle-class modernism. For the relevancy to technology within the contemporary era, this research will focus on the technomodernist expression within contemporary literature.

This influence of post-modernist works, usually in the form of short pieces and excerpts from collections, e.g. the short works (or chapters) of Kurt Vonnegut, have been introduced in writing workshops as examples and templates for successful short works. Shorter pieces are often used in workshop settings as they can be read rather swiftly, and the entirety of the narrative can be studied in a more concise way than with a novel. With this approach, multiple genres can be introduced in order to familiarise the student with the literary genre that best fits his/her creative process. Because the programme era came to rise in the 1950s, creative writing students in academia onward have been able to study their post-modern contemporaries, and the study of post-modern authors continues at present in the university classroom. Through workshops, education, and general intake of popular works from the post-modern era, contemporary writers are influenced by the writing styles directly before them. As post-modernist writers reacted to the modern era,

so have contemporary writers reacted to the post-modern era.

The use of short pieces to introduce different types of writing, as well as the increased literary outlets on the internet and with devices such as electronic reading machines (e.g. the Kindle), have helped to propel the short story into a contemporary literary outlet. For example, "between January 1988 and December 1992 American trade book publishers brought out nearly twice as many single-author volumes of short stories as during a comparable period between 1973 and 1977" (Clark 2004: 148). Considering the period of 1988-1992 includes the beginning of the internet phenomenon, and the rising sales of short-chaptered e-books from companies such as Amazon, the very nature of contemporary writing has been changed by the programme era in congruency with the technological advancements of the 1990s.

However, there should be made a distinction between short pieces of questionable merit (self-published, one-offs, chapter-by-chapter books, etc.) and those of literary merit. Though not much research has been done in regards to contemporary short fiction, it can be noted that, "the [contemporary] short story emerges as site for consideration of the post-modern," (Contemporary Short Fiction). In this way, students of the programme era are challenging and contradicting the styles and devices of post-modern fiction in condensed form.

Creative Writing as a university subject (both undergraduate and postgraduate) is a fairly new concept to both American and British academia. By 1960, the number of postgraduate programmes solely for the purpose of creative writing had increased, but the undergraduate programmes were still either offered as a minor concentration or a supplement to the English Literature degree. However, with the aid of technology and the increased opportunity for the writing of literature to become more lucrative than before, programmes for undergraduates have increased exponentially in the last twenty years. As stated in *The Program Era*, "Such are the vicissitudes of a system whose conception of individuality poses it at one and the same time as a form of heroic resistance to the conventionalities of mass culture… It would fall to the institution of the family – and to the schools that understood themselves on the model of the family – to attempt to stabilize this paradox," (McGurl 2009: 103). This paradox is the need for creative writing programmes and instructors both to constructively criticise the writer's work while also acknowledging the irony of instructing writing under a set of guidelines. Writing, at its core, cannot be done well by following a formula (a slippery slope which *The Program Era* points to as "repetition and industry," a common practice of genre and popular fiction). The conclusive factor must be not to teach students how to write, but to teach them how to write *better*.

Because of the evolving practices and teaching techniques within the university atmosphere, contemporary writing has evolved alongside instruction. Many notable contemporary writers began their literary careers through writing workshops and university courses. The plethora of present writers utilising the instruction of creative

writing have created a writing culture that connects with peers in order to better his/her writing skills and experience.

Though writing programmes began to appear in the late 1940s to the early 1950s, attending institutions instructing creative writing were not the norm for professional and aspiring writers. As stated by Mark McGurl, "cases like David Foster Wallace, who were said to have been harshly criticized by his teachers in the M.F.A. Program at Arizona for his experimental impulses... the most reliable source of negativity in the graduate workshop is no doubt other students – the competition – not the teacher," (McGurl 2009: 17). This competition amongst students did not exist in the post-modern dawn of the 1950s to the extent that it does in academia today. The constant criticism and revision of pieces by peers has created literature that, if anything, is self-aware as well as privy to the opinions of others. It is this break from the self, from the post-modern writer's need to search within oneself, and (often) oneself alone, that helps define contemporary literature and the way in which the contributors create said works.

In the example of Florida State creative writing instructor, Robert Olen Butler's process for teaching creative writing has been extensively studied, thanks to Florida State University's experiment on the writer. Butler was filmed "totaling some 30 hours of video" with his "computer screen and his dreamstorming visage" while he created a short story. He provided "a running verbal commentary on his various compositional decisions... a veritable orgy of literary observation and self-observation" (McGurl 2009: 389) to unveil his short piece, "This Is Earl Sandt." The work, consequently, read like "a writing exercise designed to elasticize the sympathetic imagination," (McGurl 2009: 390). Because Butler was working on his piece without outside opinion or a secondary personal opinion of his own work, "This Is Earl Sandt" rang false and over-trying. As a part of the creative writing process in academia, prompts are often given to evoke a topic are worked and reworked with peer reviews and supervisor reviews in order to show where exactly the piece should be going and where it resonates with (or alienates) the audience. The reading audience has become comfortable with literature that grasps ideas and points-of-view on multiple levels, and one has to attribute a part of this affinity for the inclusion of other opinions to the expansion of creative writing programmes in universities today.

Conclusion

Because of the differences between post-modern literature (those works accepted as post-modern by literary academics) and contemporary literature, works from the technological boom (aided by the internet) from the early 1990s up to present day should not be classified in the same vein as those classified as post-modern. Little research has been done on identifying the differences and nuances between post-modern and contemporary works. In order to better understand contemporary literature, and to implement comprehensive contemporary texts into creative writing academic coursework, a definition and study into the present break from post-modernism must be examined. Taking influence, background, history, and education into account, a new era of writing has emerged in contemporary literature, and deserves to be respected as such.

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