

THE EVOLUTION OF DISCONTENT: ANGRY YOUNG MEN LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract The "Angry Young Men" literary movement emerged in mid-20th century Britain, representing a generation's discontent with post-war socio-political realities. This study investigates how the themes of alienation, rebellion, and frustration have evolved in 21st-century literature. Focusing on contemporary authors such as Mohsin Hamid, Aravind Adiga, Dave Eggers, and Ocean Vuong, the research compares modern works with the classics of Osborne and Amis. The study reveals that while the socio-political context has shifted, core themes of class conflict, technological alienation, and identity struggles persist. Furthermore, modern literary techniques, such as multivocal narratives and nonlinear storytelling, enhance the relevance and inclusivity of the Angry Young Men tradition in a globalized, digital world.

Keywords Angry Young Men, literature, discontent, alienation, globalization, economic inequality, technology, masculinity, identity

INTRODUCTION

The term *Angry Young Men* refers to a group of British writers in the 1950s and 1960s who rose to prominence for their critiques of post-war British society. Writers like John Osborne, Kingsley Amis, and others brought issues of class conflict, disillusionment with authority, and personal identity struggles into the mainstream, often highlighting the frustrations of working-class youth. These works, such as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Amis's *Lucky Jim*, exposed a stark and rebellious dissatisfaction with the established norms of British life. They were emblematic of a generation grappling with the aftermath of war, the limitations of the British class system, and the search for personal meaning in a post-imperial world[1].

By the 21st century, the cultural and political context in which writers explore anger and discontent has shifted. Today's authors engage with issues such as economic globalization, technology-driven alienation, and evolving gender roles. The traditional markers of identity—class, race, and gender—are now understood within a much more global and interconnected context. In the contemporary world, frustrations around economic disparity and personal isolation have taken new forms, yet the core themes of the *Angry Young Men*—rebellion, alienation, and the rejection of authority—remain potent and relevant[2].

This paper seeks to explore how 21st-century writers continue the legacy of the *Angry Young Men* movement, adapting its themes to the modern socio-political landscape. By analyzing works from authors such as Mohsin Hamid (*Exit West*), Aravind Adiga (*The White Tiger*), Dave Eggers (*The Circle*), and Ocean Vuong (*On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*), this study explores how the themes of alienation, frustration, and rebellion persist, and how these authors reframe the *Angry Young Men* tradition for a new generation[3].

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative literary analysis to explore how the themes of the *Angry Young Men* movement have evolved over time. The primary texts for this analysis include both 20th-century works, such as *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis, as well as 21st-century novels that engage with similar themes, including Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013), and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)[4].

The research method involves close reading of the primary texts, with a focus on themes of class conflict, alienation, identity struggles, and rebellion. Secondary sources include critical essays and articles on both the original *Angry Young Men* writers and contemporary literary trends. These texts provide contextual background and critical frameworks for understanding how the *Angry Young Men* tradition has shifted in response to globalization, technological advancements, and changing societal norms[5].

To enhance the comparative analysis, this paper considers the evolution of literary techniques over time. Specifically, it examines how modern writers employ multivocal narratives, nonlinear storytelling, and intersectional analysis to reflect the complexities of contemporary identity and social issues. The study also considers the political and cultural contexts in which these works were written, recognizing the role of global economic forces and technological changes in shaping modern discontent[6].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study finds that while the socio-political contexts have evolved, the central themes of the *Angry Young Men* literature—alienation, rebellion, and class conflict—are still deeply relevant in the 21st century. However, contemporary authors expand these themes to reflect a globalized world and the complexities of modern identity.

Globalization and Economic Inequality

One of the key themes in the modern adaptation of *Angry Young Men* literature is economic inequality. In *Exit West* and *The White Tiger*, Hamid and Adiga explore the growing divide between the global elite and marginalized populations. These works highlight the psychological toll of poverty and the frustration of individuals trapped in

systems of exploitation. The protagonists in both novels seek to escape their social realities, much like the working-class characters in Osborne and Amis's works. However, the modern struggle is more global in scope, as characters grapple with issues like migration, systemic corruption, and the widening wealth gap between countries[7].

For example, in *The White Tiger*, Adiga's protagonist, Balram Halwai, challenges the entrenched caste system and corrupt power structures in India. His desire to break free from this system parallels the frustration felt by the earlier Angry Young Men, who rejected the rigid class system of post-war Britain. However, Adiga's narrative incorporates global themes of inequality, illustrating how the world's most vulnerable populations are affected by economic globalization[8].

Technological Alienation

A defining characteristic of 21st-century life is the pervasive influence of technology. In *The Circle*, Dave Eggers explores the alienating effects of technology, where the constant pressure of being "always on" creates a form of emotional and social isolation. The protagonist, Mae Holland, initially finds empowerment in her work at a tech company but soon realizes that this hyperconnectivity is a source of profound alienation. This theme echoes the sense of disconnection present in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, where the protagonist's anger stems from personal and social isolation. Eggers's portrayal, however, focuses on the digital age's impact on personal identity, highlighting the erosion of genuine human connections in the face of technological advancement[9].

Similarly, in Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream*, the protagonist's deteriorating health and the blurred boundaries between reality and illusion reflect a form of psychological alienation exacerbated by modernity. In both cases, technology and modern living lead to a breakdown in authentic human relationships, a shift from the class-based conflicts of earlier Angry Young Men literature to a more existential form of alienation[10].

Masculinity and Identity

Another important shift in 21st-century Angry Young Men literature is the exploration of masculinity and identity. In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong reflects on the complexities of masculinity, race, and sexuality, offering a critique of traditional notions of manhood. His protagonist, Little Dog, navigates a path of self-discovery that challenges the rigid, stereotypical expectations of masculinity found in earlier Angry Young Men literature. The novel confronts issues of vulnerability, emotional expression, and the intersectionality of gender and race, revealing how modern identities are shaped by a variety of cultural and societal influences[11].

In contrast to the hyper-masculine protagonists of the 20th century, Vuong's work offers a nuanced portrayal of male identity in the context of immigrant experience and sexual orientation. This shift reflects broader societal changes in the understanding of masculinity, making the Angry Young Men movement more inclusive and reflective of a wider range of experiences[12].

Literary Techniques

Contemporary Angry Young Men literature frequently uses innovative narrative techniques to reflect the fragmented, interconnected nature of modern life. Multivocal narratives, nonlinear structures, and intersectional perspectives are common tools used to reflect the complexities of identity and social issues. For example, in *Exit West*, Hamid uses magical realism and nonlinear storytelling to explore the journey of migrants as they navigate a fragmented world. These techniques mirror the disjointed realities of modern existence, where personal and societal histories are often fragmented and complex[13].

CONCLUSION

The Angry Young Men literary tradition has not only endured but evolved to address the complexities of modern life. While earlier works focused on post-war class struggles and personal alienation in a rigidly stratified society, 21st-century authors have adapted these themes to reflect a more globalized and technologically mediated world. Issues of economic inequality, technological alienation, and the complexities of identity have become central concerns in modern works, expanding the scope of the Angry Young Men movement.

Contemporary writers continue to question authority, critique societal norms, and express frustration with the systems that shape their lives. However, they do so with a more inclusive and globally aware perspective, addressing the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The use of multivocal narratives, nonlinear storytelling, and intersectional analyses makes these works resonate with a broader audience, ensuring that the tradition remains relevant in today's literary landscape.

In conclusion, Angry Young Men literature remains a vital force in contemporary fiction, providing a powerful lens through which to examine the discontents of modern society and the ongoing search for identity and meaning in an increasingly complex world[14].

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