

# 20th century english literature assignment

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May 3, 2011 British Literature II Defining Literary Techniques of 20th Century English Literature During the 20th Century, much advancement and change occurred throughout English Literature. All of the works we studied from this period were heavily influenced by current events in the world. The writers all examined the world around them and tried to express it through their writings. The three things that weave a common thread throughout all 20th Century English Literature are global warfare, radical artistic experimentation, and the effects of colonial expansion.

The first point of global warfare is an easily identifiable and widespread one. All of the poetry we examined was centered around warfare and the effects of it on those involved. In "The Man He Killed" by Thomas Hardy, the protagonist is struggling with the idea of warfare in general. He seems to be torn about the impersonality of war, and that he feels like he is just shooting at his enemy because they have a different uniform on. The protagonist wonders how different it would be if they had met anywhere except the battlefield and if they would even be friends.

The warfare theme is continued with "Arms and the Boy" by Wilfred Owen. The point Owen is trying to get across to the reader is that God put us humans here not to fight. He gave animals antlers and claws to fight with, and He gave us brains to reason with. These are only two of the many poems that highlight and weave the warfare thread throughout 20th Century English Literature. Radical artistic experimentation is another common thread that 20th Century English authors tried to bring out. Probably the best and most recognizable story utilizing this is "The Garden Party" by Katherine Mansfield.

This ground-breaking short story eventually became the model on which all short stories after this were written. She “ manipulates time masterfully” and “ makes particularly effective use of the unobtrusive flashback” (English Literature, 2645). “ The Prophet’s Hair” was written by the genius, yet highly controversial Samuel Rushdie. It is a moral fable with a flashback incorporated in it. It also uses magical realism as another form of artistic experimentation. In “ The Moment Before the Gun Went Off,” the uthor Nadine Gordimer caught some flak for experimenting in her literature by writing it about racism rather than focusing on the more feminist issues of the day, as were the norm. She also wrote this story from several viewpoints, wanting to enable the reader to understand the full scope of apartheid. One more literary experiment she incorporated was foreshadowing the twist ending subtly throughout the entire story. Radical literary experimentation was a big part of 20th Century English Literature. Lastly, the colonial expansion theme is perhaps the easiest and broadest similarity to pick up on.

Each story we studied is set in and has the culture of a foreign land. Usually this land was one from England’s massive colonial empire, but not always. Take “ The Day They Burned the Books” by Jean Rhys for example. This story being set in the Caribbean clearly shows a foreign setting. They way the natives rebel in the story also brings out the oppressive nature of colonialism and how they struggled against it. “ Walker Brother’s Cowboy” by Alice Munro is set in depression era Canada and shows how the people struggled with the effects of colonialism even during the Great Depression.

The third defining feature is possibly the greatest one of 20th Century English Literature. In conclusion, the English literature of the 20th Century had several defining features that set it apart from the literature of any other time period. The authors of this period drew from current events happening in the world around them and pushed the artistic experimentation envelope as well. These authors stories and techniques will continue to influence how literature is written and comprehended into the future.