Abstract

This paper explores the emergence of a new literary tendency in American short form fiction. First, we provide a cursory definition of the contemporary understanding of a few core concepts integral to this new tendency, such as human desire, which we come to define as the interrelationship between what we call the Aristophanesian desire and the Diotimatian desire. Moreover, in extension of this, we also look at the role that the human imagination plays in this context.

Then, progressing from a great wealth of source material, consisting chiefly of short stories and a few films, we proceed by comparing and contrasting said source material with each other. The intention here is to arrive at a definition of just which core theme(s) make up this new literary trend, and in what manner they distinguish themselves from those of other contemporary literary trends and movements. This is the primary aim of our paper.

In addition to this, confined primarily to the Discussion section, we also draw in examples of modern and post-modern fiction, in order to look at ways in which this new trend is simultaneously borne from these previous literary movements, and at the same time, an example of its very own movement. Consequently, we arrive at a few characteristics of said tendency, before identifying a key, possibly unique, feature.

Finally, we come to the conclusion that, while fiction from all three periods naturally exhibit characters with strong desires and a lively imagination, the differences, it would seem, can be found in the specific expressions of desire, which vary greatly from movement to movement. In, say, the fiction of Hemingway—needless to say greatly influenced by the aftermath of the First World War—desire typically attaches itself to modernist ideals such as Ezra Pound’s ‘Make it new’ dictum and the willingness to, as it were, strive towards the creation of a newer, better world, whereas desire in post-modern literature, almost by definition, and influenced as much by the Second World War as by how the glorious hopes of modernism were dashed along with it, is spread decidedly more thin. One could argue that, put crudely, while modernist desire is defined by the wish to create one perfect world by way of one perfect method[[1]](#footnote-1) (that is, telling an all-encompassing story of the human experience, or, in more specific terms, the Great American Novel), post-modern desire, disheartened by a second world war, and believing perfection to be impossible, is defined by the wish to create an endless set of new worlds by way of any which method available.

In the Discussion section, we investigate this further, and what we arrive at is that this new trend in American literature seeks more than anything else a way to merge both the modern desire and the post-modern into one, and in short, the result is a desire for, on the personal level, an existence, and on the social level, a society, which will never come to be but is worth pursuing nonetheless purely for the dream of it.

1. The extensive stylistic experiments, for instance, that modernist writers—Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Hemingway himself—are so famous for, is a sign of precisely this. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)