

Post-modern Period Authors (1945-present)

The Post-modern period in English literature begins after World War II and continues to the present day. This era is characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives, playful self-referentiality, intertextuality, and the blurring of boundaries between high and popular culture. Post-modern literature often challenges traditional forms and assumptions, embracing fragmentation, paradox, and unreliable narration. The period reflects globalization, technological advancement, and increasing cultural diversity in the English-speaking world.

Salman Rushdie (b. 1947)

Life

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, to a Muslim family. He was educated at Cathedral and John Connon School in Bombay, Rugby School in England, and King's College, Cambridge. After graduating, he worked briefly as an advertising copywriter before becoming a full-time writer. His second novel, "Midnight's Children" (1981), won the Booker Prize and established his literary reputation. However, it was his fourth novel, "The Satanic Verses" (1988), that brought him worldwide attention when Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for his death due to the book's alleged blasphemy against Islam. Rushdie spent nearly a decade in hiding under police protection. In 2022, he was severely injured in a stabbing attack while giving a lecture in New York. Despite these challenges, Rushdie has continued to write prolifically and has been knighted for his services to literature. He has been married four times and has two sons.

Works

- **Midnight's Children:** A magical realist novel connecting a man's life to India's independence
- **The Satanic Verses:** A controversial novel exploring migration, identity, and religious faith
- **Shame:** A novel allegorically depicting Pakistan's political history
- **The Moor's Last Sigh:** A family saga spanning a century of Indian history
- **The Ground Beneath Her Feet:** A novel reimagining the Orpheus myth in the world of rock music
- **Joseph Anton:** A memoir of his years in hiding
- **Quichotte:** A modern retelling of Don Quixote

Contribution to English Literature

- Pioneered postcolonial literature, examining the legacy of empire
- Developed magical realism in the English novel
- Explored themes of migration, hybridity, and cultural identity
- Combined Eastern and Western literary traditions
- Defended freedom of expression against religious extremism
- Created a distinctive linguistic style blending multiple languages and registers
- Challenged conventional narrative structures with metafictional techniques

Angela Carter (1940-1992)

Life

Angela Carter was born in Eastbourne, England, and grew up in Yorkshire. She studied English literature at the University of Bristol. After university, she worked as a journalist for the Croydon Advertiser. Her first marriage to Paul Carter ended in divorce after she used money from her Somerset Maugham Award to leave him and move to Japan, an experience that profoundly influenced her writing. She later married Mark Pearce, with whom she had a son. Carter taught creative writing at various universities, including the University of East Anglia and Brown University. She was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. A lifelong smoker, she died of lung cancer in 1992 at the age of 51.

Works

- **The Bloody Chamber:** A collection of darkly reimagined fairy tales
- **Nights at the Circus:** A novel about a woman aerialist with wings
- **Wise Children:** Her final novel, about twin chorus girls and their theatrical family
- **The Magic Toyshop:** A Gothic novel about a young girl sent to live with her sinister uncle
- **The Passion of New Eve:** A dystopian novel exploring gender and identity
- **The Sadeian Woman:** A feminist reinterpretation of the work of the Marquis de Sade
- **The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman:** A surrealist novel about reality and desire

Contribution to English Literature

- Reimagined fairy tales and folklore from a feminist perspective
- Combined Gothic and magical realist elements in fiction

- Explored gender, sexuality, and power relations in innovative ways
- Developed a rich, sensuous prose style
- Challenged patriarchal narratives and structures
- Influenced feminist literary theory and practice
- Created a distinctive form of literary fantasy grounded in social critique

Ian McEwan (b. 1948)

Life

Ian McEwan was born in Aldershot, Hampshire, to a Scottish army major and his English wife. Due to his father's military career, he spent much of his childhood in East Asia, Germany, and North Africa. He studied English literature at the University of Sussex and creative writing at the University of East Anglia under Malcolm Bradbury. His early works earned him the nickname "Ian Macabre" due to their disturbing content. McEwan has been married twice and has two sons from his first marriage. In 2002, he discovered he had a brother who had been given up for adoption during World War II. He has been involved in various political and environmental causes and is a member of the Royal Society of Literature. McEwan lives in London and continues to publish regularly.

Works

- **Atonement:** A novel about a young girl's false accusation and its lifelong consequences
- **Saturday:** A novel set during a single day against the backdrop of anti-Iraq War protests
- **On Chesil Beach:** A novella about a disastrous wedding night in the early 1960s
- **The Child in Time:** A novel dealing with child abduction and grief

- **Enduring Love:** A psychological thriller about obsession and delusion
- **Amsterdam:** A novel about euthanasia and betrayal, which won the Booker Prize
- **Machines Like Me:** A novel exploring artificial intelligence and alternate history

Contribution to English Literature

- Mastered the psychological novel with precise, elegant prose
- Explored moral dilemmas and their consequences
- Examined the intersection of personal lives with larger historical events
- Developed complex, morally ambiguous characters
- Addressed contemporary social and ethical issues through fiction
- Combined literary sophistication with narrative tension
- Influenced the development of the contemporary British novel

Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954)

Life

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, and moved to Surrey, England, with his family when he was five years old. He studied English and Philosophy at the University of Kent and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Before becoming a full-time writer, he worked as a social worker and grouse beater for the Queen Mother at Balmoral. Ishiguro is married to Lorna MacDougall, a social worker, and they have one daughter. He became a British citizen in 1982. Ishiguro has maintained a relatively private life despite his literary success. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017 for his novels of "great emotional force" that "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world."

Works

- **The Remains of the Day:** His masterpiece about a butler reflecting on his life of service
- **Never Let Me Go:** A dystopian novel about human clones raised for organ donation
- **An Artist of the Floating World:** A novel about a Japanese artist's reflections on his pre-WWII career
- **The Buried Giant:** A fantasy novel exploring memory and collective forgetting
- **A Pale View of Hills:** His first novel, about a Japanese woman living in England
- **When We Were Orphans:** A novel about a detective investigating his parents' disappearance
- **Klara and the Sun:** A novel narrated by an artificial friend in a dystopian future

Contribution to English Literature

- Developed the unreliable narrator technique with extraordinary subtlety
- Explored memory, self-deception, and regret in distinctive ways
- Created a spare, restrained prose style that conceals deep emotion
- Addressed historical trauma and responsibility through individual lives
- Combined elements of realism, fantasy, and science fiction
- Examined cultural differences between East and West
- Influenced contemporary fiction with his exploration of human dignity and connection

Zadie Smith (b. 1975)

Life

Zadie Smith was born in Brent, London, to a Jamaican mother and English father. She studied English Literature at King's College, Cambridge, where she began writing her first novel, "White Teeth," which was published to acclaim when she was just 24. After its success, she spent time at Harvard University as a Fellow of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Smith has taught creative writing at New York University and is currently a tenured professor of fiction there. She is married to the poet and novelist Nick Laird, whom she met at Cambridge, and they have two children. Smith has been open about her struggles with the pressures of early success and the challenges of balancing writing with motherhood. She divides her time between New York and London.

Works

- **White Teeth:** A multigenerational novel about multicultural London
- **On Beauty:** A novel exploring academic politics, family dynamics, and cultural differences
- **NW:** An experimental novel set in northwest London
- **Swing Time:** A novel about friendship, race, and dance
- **The Autograph Man:** A novel about celebrity obsession and Jewish-Chinese identity
- **Changing My Mind:** Essays on literature, film, and culture
- **Feel Free:** Essays on politics, social media, and the arts

Contribution to English Literature

- Captured the complexity of multicultural, postcolonial Britain
- Developed a distinctive voice combining humor, social observation, and intellectual depth

- Explored issues of race, class, and identity with nuance and insight
- Created vibrant, diverse characters that reflect contemporary urban life
- Combined postmodern literary techniques with accessible storytelling
- Addressed the tensions between tradition and modernity, belonging and displacement
- Influenced contemporary fiction with her energetic prose style and cultural hybridity

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (b. 1977)

Life

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria, the fifth of six children in an Igbo family. Her father was a professor of statistics, and her mother was the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria. Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria before moving to the United States at 19 to study communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University. She later earned a master's degree in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University and a master's in African studies from Yale. Her breakthrough came with her second novel, "Half of a Yellow Sun," which won the Orange Prize for Fiction. Adichie divides her time between Nigeria and the United States. She is married and has a daughter. Beyond her literary career, she has become known for her TED talks on feminism and the danger of the single story, and she has been involved in teaching writing workshops in Nigeria.

Works

- **Half of a Yellow Sun:** A novel set during the Nigerian-Biafran War
- **Americanah:** A novel exploring race, identity, and immigration

- **Purple Hibiscus:** Her first novel, about a girl growing up in a religiously oppressive household
- **The Thing Around Your Neck:** A collection of short stories
- **Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions:** An essay on raising a feminist daughter
- **We Should All Be Feminists:** An essay adapted from her TED talk
- **Notes on Grief:** A memoir about losing her father

Contribution to English Literature

- Brought contemporary African experiences to global attention
- Explored the Nigerian diaspora and the complexities of return
- Addressed issues of gender, race, and cultural identity
- Developed a clear, accessible prose style that engages with complex ideas
- Combined political awareness with compelling storytelling
- Influenced discussions of feminism in literature and beyond
- Created nuanced portrayals of Nigeria that challenge Western stereotypes