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Postmodernism and Social-political Conversions in Tew's Clark Gable and his Plastic Duck

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Abstract

This research explores the interaction between postmodernism and socio-political transformations in Philip Tew's novel "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck." Through an in-depth examination of the narrative strategies and thematic investigations utilized by Tew, the study clarifies how the narrative mirrors and analyzes the socio-political environment of late 20th-century Britain, especially regarding the Falklands War and the Thatcher administration. By incorporating ideas such as intertextuality, metafiction, and historiographic metafiction, the novel functions as a narrative arena where personal and political identities clash and merge, uncovering the intricacies and uncertainties present in postmodern literature. This research seeks to emphasize how Tew's writing encapsulates essential postmodern traits while concurrently engaging with the historical and cultural contexts of its era.

Keywords: *Gable or Plastic Duck, Philip Tew as A Novelist, Postmodernism Fiction, Social and Political Changes.*

Introduction

Philip Tew's appointment as Professor of English at Brunel University London in 2006 represented a defining moment in his distinguished academic journey, signaling both recognition of his scholarly achievements and the beginning of a new chapter in his intellectual leadership. "Academic leaders can pursue a range of different leadership paths. Many academic leaders enter department-level leadership positions and beyond via a faculty route" (Montgomery, 2020). This is what can be true for Philip Tew. As a prominent specialist in post-1900 literature, Tew has brought a wealth of expertise to Brunel, helping to shape the university's academic direction in the field of contemporary literary studies. His contributions have been pivotal in developing innovative research agendas and revitalizing teaching programs that reflect the dynamic and multifaceted nature of modern literature.

At Brunel, Tew's scholarly engagement has spanned both canonical and avant-garde texts, with particular emphasis on postmodernism, narrative experimentation, and the shifting cultural significance of the novel in the 21st century. His work interrogates the boundaries of literary form and genre, illuminating how fiction responds to—and reframes—contemporary social, political, and philosophical questions. Through his deep commitment to intellectual inquiry, Tew has created a space where critical reflection and literary creativity thrive.

In addition to his academic accomplishments, Tew has taken on a crucial role as an academic advisor and mentor. He has mentored numerous PhD students, many of whom have gone on to

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have successful careers in academia and publishing. His mentoring style stands out for being both rigorous and supportive, encouraging young researchers to challenge accepted wisdom and pursue novel research avenues. Tew is also an active facilitator of scholarly discourse, regularly organizing and participating in research collectives, symposia, and seminars that encourage communication across different institutions and fields.

Brunel's reputation as a center for innovative and boundary-pushing literary studies has been significantly enhanced by Tew's contributions. Tew has a significant influence on the academic community outside of the classroom, as demonstrated by the numerous monographs, edited collections, journal articles, and keynote addresses he has authored. His collaborations with academics in the UK and abroad demonstrate a commitment to international discussions in literary criticism, enhancing his standing as a leading authority on the study of modern literature.

Literature Review

Postmodernism has been largely studied and discussed, examined, and analyzed by several critics and writers. Postmodernism represents a multifaceted intellectual movement that materialized in the mid-20th century, distinguished by a critical skepticism towards overarching narratives and claims to objective truths. It fundamentally contests the foundational tenets of modernism, particularly the Enlightenment's valorization of reason, individualism, and the assumption of a reality that exists independently of human perception. Proponents of postmodernism contend that what we comprehend as reality is predominantly a social construct, intricately shaped by linguistic, cultural, and power-related dynamics.

This viewpoint calls into question the premise that scientific and historical narratives can achieve complete objectivity or impartiality, proposing instead that all forms of knowledge are invariably influenced by the contextual frameworks within which they are generated. However, post-postmodern narratives reference fictional texts, real-life people, and authentic historical events that exemplify various models, simulations, and patterns of reality within and beyond the text, creating a mediated experience that enables communication with and understanding of reality (Aljadaani, 2021). Consequently, postmodernism frequently analyzes the legitimacy of traditional institutions and the narratives they disseminate.

Postmodernism asserts that reality is a socially constructed and subjective phenomenon, which results in a multiplicity of interpretations across diverse domains, including art, literature, and philosophy. This discourse will explore the fundamental components of postmodernism, encompassing its metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings, its implications for identity and ethics, as well as its cultural relevance. Furthermore, postmodernism reconfigures the concept of human identity, proposing that individuals are not sovereign entities, but rather products shaped by their social contexts. Identities are perceived as fluid constructs, developed through interactions with a variety of social collectives. This collectivist framework underscores the tensions among disparate identity groups, often situating these conflicts within the paradigms of power relations and oppression (Hicks, 2004).

Additionally, the postmodern emphasis on deconstruction—an analytical process that entails dismantling established meanings and structures—has permeated numerous disciplines. This methodological approach advocates for a rigorous scrutiny of how language and discourse influence our comprehension of reality and identity. Postmodern theorists maintain that language transcends mere communicative function; it serves as a formidable instrument that shapes our perceptions of the world. Much of postmodern theory deals with issues of language and power.

According to many postmodern thinkers, most of the relationships between language and power go unnoticed, as the public usually sees language as a neutral medium within which we can communicate. Nevertheless, language has the power to oppress, the power to assign identities, the power to liberate. (Halvorson-Fried, 2011; Oliveira, 2007). As a result, postmodernism encourages individuals to critically interrogate the assumptions that underpin their beliefs and to acknowledge the malleability of identity and meaning.

In the realm of epistemology, postmodernism repudiates the effectiveness of rationality as a mechanism for the acquisition of objective knowledge. It posits that knowledge is fundamentally contingent upon social constructs, which exhibit substantial variability across diverse groups delineated by factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. This perspective engenders a conception of knowledge as intrinsically pluralistic and incommensurable, thereby contesting the premise of universal truths. "Postmodern Philosophy is concerned with the revolt against the absoluteness, essentialism, foundationalism, and meta-narratives of the enlightened modernism. It attempts to deconstruct the notions of truth, language, power, knowledge, and emphasizes the variety of reasons, pluralism, difference, deconstruction, and contextualizing knowledge" (Ali, 2023). Nevertheless, from an ethical standpoint, postmodernism frequently aligns itself with the interests of marginalized populations, championing social justice and equity. It underscores the necessity of recognizing and rectifying the power disparities that pervade society. This ethical perspective is anchored in the conviction that conventional moral frameworks are insufficient for addressing the intricacies of contemporary social dilemmas.

In terms of culture, postmodernism has had a major impact on a variety of literary and creative movements, leading to a notable shift away from conventional forms and techniques (Albright, 2018). Pastiche, sarcasm, and fun are all embraced, reflecting the fragmented nature of modern life. This cultural transformation carries notable implications for the creation and interpretation of art and literature, frequently blurring the distinctions between high and low (Holmes, 2017). In opposition to the postmodernist viewpoint, some proponents advocate for the existence of objective truths and universal values, asserting that a re-engagement with Enlightenment principles might offer a more stable foundation for knowledge and ethics. This discourse continues to shape contemporary dialogue, accentuating the persistent relevance of postmodernism in comprehending the complexities of modern society.

A significant paradigm shift that challenges the foundations of modernist ideology is represented by postmodernism. Postmodernism makes it easier to explore new avenues for comprehending culture, art, and education by contesting the existence of objective facts and highlighting the importance of context in forming knowledge. It continues to have an impact on a wide range of academic fields, sparking continuous discussions about the nature of reality and the complexity of the human condition.

In literature and the arts, postmodernism can be expressed through a variety of modalities, including pastiche, plagiarism, and intertextuality. The lines separating various genres and stylistic approaches, as well as between elite and popular culture, are made hazier by these methodologies. To reflect the turbulent nature of modern life, postmodern artistic expressions usually embrace disjunction and ambiguity. Contrary to the modernist emphasis on coherence and originality, this artistic paradigm embraces the idea that meaning is essentially fluid and open to interpretation rather than static. Additionally, when examined through the prism of critical pedagogy, postmodernism has important ramifications for teaching methods. This framework for instruction pushes students to challenge prevailing narratives and acknowledge

how power relations influence the creation of knowledge. Curriculum that incorporates a wide range of viewpoints and experiences is something that postmodern educators support to eliminate historical biases that have disadvantaged particular groups. With the promotion of critical thinking and political consciousness, postmodernism seeks to enable students to actively participate in both their academic endeavors and the larger social fabric.

A significant philosophical movement that interrogates the foundational principles of modernist thought is postmodernism. By contesting the notion of objective truths and emphasizing the contextual influences on knowledge, postmodernism engenders novel interpretations of culture, art, and education. Its ramifications continue to be palpable across numerous academic disciplines, inciting ongoing debates regarding the essence of reality and the intricacies of the human experience.

Postmodernism, a philosophical and cultural movement emerged during the latter half of the 20th century as a counter-response to the doctrines of modernism. It is characterized by a pervasive skepticism towards grand narratives and ideologies that claim to convey universal truths. In contrast, postmodernism underscores the inherently subjective nature of reality and how social contexts and individual perspectives shape meaning. This movement encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, literature, art, architecture, and education.

As it is stated above, there are many studies about postmodernism from different detentions. However, concerning the novel *Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck* the researchers found that no previous studies have been taken on it, which means that the topic is original, new, and motivating.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this research is to examine the thematic and stylistic components of postmodernism in Tew's "*Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck*," especially concerning the socio-political backdrop of the Falklands War. This inquiry aspires to reveal how Tew employs narrative strategies such as metafiction, fragmentation, and intertextuality to subvert traditional literary conventions and portray the intricate nature of identity within a postmodern context. Furthermore, the research seeks to evaluate how the interactions among characters reflect the tensions between intimate relationships and the larger socio-political landscape, particularly regarding masculinity and emotional openness.

Another goal is to explore how Tew's representation of male characters mirrors the shifting concept of masculinity in postmodern Britain. By concentrating on the protagonist's challenges with disillusionment and his connections with figures like Connie and Kay, the research intends to shed light on how these relationships reflect the societal transformations occurring during the Falklands War. Similarly, this study aspires to enhance the conversation surrounding postmodern literature by illustrating how Tew not only engages with historical narratives but also reviews the moral complexities and ethical limits that shape modern male identities.

Research Methodology

This research utilizes a literary analysis method, concentrating on detailed textual examinations of Philip Tew's "*Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck*." The study leverages postmodern literary theory and critical frameworks to analyze the narrative form, thematic elements, and stylistic decisions made by Tew. By applying concepts from postmodern theory, the analysis seeks to

position Tew's work within the wider realm of postmodern literature while also exploring its distinct socio-political ramifications.

It also adopts a critical analysis framework to analyze Tew's novel from the perspective of postmodern theory. The primary texts will consist of "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck," with close readings emphasizing thematic aspects like identity, fragmentation, and the socio-political ramifications of the Falklands War. The analysis might additionally integrate secondary sources, including critical essays and theoretical writings on postmodernism, masculinity, and narrative structure, to place Tew's work within the larger literary context.

Furthermore, the research will include an intertextual analysis that identifies references to historical events and cultural symbols within the narrative. This methodology emphasizes the ways Tew's text interacts with and challenges conventional narratives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the implications of postmodernism in modern literature. By amalgamating insights from both primary and secondary sources, the study aspires to deliver a thorough analysis of how Tew conveys the particulars of identity and sociopolitical transformation through his inventive narrative techniques.

Result and Analysis

1. Post Modernism and Clark Gable and his Plastic Duck

The novelist Philip Tew employs a third-person narrative voice throughout the novel, allowing for a degree of narrative distance and a multifaceted exploration of characters and events. This choice of narration serves not only to shape the reader's perspective but also to underscore the novel's complex thematic structure. The novel, *Clark Gable and his Plastic Duck* is densely layered with allusions to postmodern theory, drawing on key ideas such as fragmentation, metafiction, and the instability of meaning. Interwoven into the fabric of the text are numerous references to cultural icons, ranging from pop culture figures to historical personalities, as well as evocative artistic symbolism that reinforces the novel's engagement with questions of identity, representation, and the nature of reality. These intertextual elements function both as critical commentary and as playful homage, situating the novel firmly within a postmodern literary tradition while also challenging the reader to decode and interpret its rich tapestry of signs and symbols.

Postmodernism is a broad intellectual and cultural movement that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, gaining momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. Jean-François Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984). Grand narratives (such as Enlightenment rationalism, Marxism, or religious doctrines) are distrusted for their claim to universal truth. It arose partly as a reaction against the ideals of modernism, which emphasized progress, rationality, and universal truths. In contrast, postmodern theory is characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives, irony, fragmentation, and a deep suspicion of objective meaning or stable identity. Postmodern theory and the postmodern literary tradition are two rich and overlapping areas of thought that have reshaped how we understand literature, art, and culture since the mid-20th century.

Postmodernism reflects a world marked by fragmentation and discontinuity, where the concept of identity is no longer perceived as fixed or unified, but rather as fluid, shifting, and constituted through language, cultural narratives, and social constructs. In contrast to the Enlightenment ideal of a coherent, rational self, postmodern theory posits that identity is not innate or essential but is continuously produced and renegotiated through discourses and power relations (Hall,

2011). The postmodern subject is thus decentered—shaped by external forces such as media, institutions, and ideology—suggesting that the self is always in flux, plural, and context-dependent. This reconfiguration of identity challenges traditional notions of authenticity or originality, underscoring the performative and constructed nature of the self in late capitalist and postindustrial societies (Bauman, 2013; Jameson, 2003, 340).

Postmodernism has profoundly shaped British literature, particularly the novel, by challenging traditional narrative structures, questioning absolute truths, and embracing metafiction, fragmentation, and intertextuality. Emerging in the mid-to-late 20th century, postmodernist literature represents a reaction against the rigid formalism and grand narratives of modernism, instead favoring playfulness, self-reflexivity, and skepticism toward objective reality.

Any attempt to define the word will necessarily and simultaneously have both positive and negative dimensions. It will aim to say what postmodernism is, but at the same time it will have to say what it is not. Perhaps this is an appropriate condition, for postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political (Hutcheon, 2002, 1).

In addition, "The advent of modernism and postmodernism in the 20th century brought about significant shifts in narrative techniques, structures, and perspectives" (Almaarof, 2019). Furthermore, "fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel" (Hutcheon, 2003, 40).

Several British novelists exemplify the postmodern condition by blurring the boundaries between history and fiction, experimenting with language, and deconstructing conventional notions of authorship and authority (Waugh, 2013). A defining characteristic of postmodern British fiction is its interrogation of historical narratives. Linda Hutcheon (2003), introduced the concept of "historiographic metafiction," which describes novels that blend historical fact with imaginative storytelling, highlighting the subjectivity of historical interpretation. Rather than merely signaling an authorial mellowing, a decline in literary skill, or a conscious rejection of previously upheld artistic and philosophical values, British novels of this period can instead be seen as actively engaging with and extending the ongoing postmodern debate.

These works do not simply conform to established postmodern conventions but critically interrogate them, pushing the boundaries of narrative experimentation and thematic exploration. In doing so, they attempt to chart a path beyond postmodernism, seeking new modes of representation and meaning-making that address the evolving cultural, social, and intellectual landscape. As David S. Gutterman writes in his outline of postmodern interrogations of masculinity: 'Postmodern theories of subjectivity, identity, and agency ... can be useful not only for rethinking governing cultural values but also as a framework for actively seeking social change' (Horlacher, 2015, 35; Gutterman, 1994, 224). Such "novels do not rank as masterpieces only confirms the difficulty of evolving a voice that can articulate realist, post-ironic constructs of identity, love, agency, and family while preserving subjectivist postmodernist critiques of media, textuality, contingency, and motivation" (Keulk, 2006, 176).

Writers and critics employ this technique to challenge official historical accounts by intertwining personal memory with national history. In England, Barnes analyzes the commodification of history, suggesting that national identity is a construct rather than a fixed reality, thus

questioning the authenticity of historical narratives (Ziani et al., 2023; Poggensee, 2022). Another hallmark of postmodern British fiction is its subversion of narrative authority. The novel embodies "feminine writing," which deconstructs patriarchal narratives and promotes female self-consciousness, enabling Jeanette to challenge male authority and societal expectations (Tian et al., 2022).

Furthermore, in postmodernist literature, the traditional relationship between the author, the reader, and the literary work undergoes a significant transformation compared to classical literature. This shift is particularly evident in how the role and function of the author are redefined. Unlike in classical literature, where the author often serves as a guiding figure who imparts personal values, teaches moral lessons, or offers direct advice to the reader, postmodernist literature challenges this notion. In postmodernist works, the author no longer assumes the role of a didactic figure or a moral authority. Instead of presenting their own beliefs or shaping the reader's perspective, the author refrains from imposing interpretations or guiding the audience toward a predetermined conclusion. The emphasis shifts from authorial control to reader participation, allowing multiple interpretations and subjective experiences to emerge.

As a result, the author in postmodernist literature often adopts the position of an observer rather than an instructor. They may present fragmented narratives, unreliable narrators, or metafictional techniques that question the very nature of storytelling and authorship. This transformation reflects the broader postmodernist skepticism toward absolute truths and singular perspectives, embracing ambiguity, irony, and playfulness instead. "So if the author's aim is not to dictate his values to the reader, it means his hero also changes. It deals with it that heroes in postmodernist literature do not possess model behavior. The borders among values, rules, and bans disappear, fictional imagination and reality mixture" (Yegane, 2018). In addition, the intertextual strategies underscore the postmodernist belief that all texts are interconnected, with no work existing in isolation.

As British novelists continue to explore postmodernist themes, they contribute to an ongoing literary discourse that challenges the boundaries of fiction and reality. By embracing irony, metafiction, and non-linear storytelling, postmodern British fiction not only reflects the uncertainties of contemporary society but also redefines the purpose and function of the novel itself. This essay will explore the key features of postmodernism in British literature, examining how authors employ narrative experimentation, historiographical metafiction, and intertextuality to question traditional literary and cultural conventions.

Postmodern texts are characterized by a high degree of intertextuality, frequently referencing, imitating, or incorporating other texts, genres, and cultural artifacts to destabilize the notion of originality and to question traditional literary hierarchies. As Julia Kristeva (1980), first articulated, intertextuality implies that any text is a "mosaic of quotations" and meaning is produced not in isolation but through a network of other texts. This postmodern strategy collapses distinctions between original and copy, challenging the modernist ideal of the autonomous, inventive author. Furthermore, postmodern literature deliberately erodes the boundaries between "high" culture and "low" culture by integrating elements from mass media, pop culture, advertising, and television alongside canonical literary references.

"Postmodern pastiche often blurs the boundaries between high art and popular culture, incorporating elements from both realms" (Fiveable, 2024). Jameson (2002), remains skeptical about the political potential of art and considers practices such as collage, a pastiche, a symptom of postmodern fragmentation derived from late capitalism and commodity culture. In

contrast, Dyer (2007), considers pastiche as a divergent way of thinking with strong creative potential since it disrupts the borders between high and low culture by mixing artefacts from both realms (Lazo, 2020). This blending or pastiche serves not only as aesthetic play but also as cultural critique, revealing how texts participate in larger systems of ideology, commodification, and identity construction.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, or speech in a dead language. However, it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is a blank parody, a parody that has lost its humor (Butler, 2002, 176; Jameson, 1983, 114). Furthermore, pastiche is a hallmark of postmodern aesthetics, defined as a collage or patchwork of disparate styles, genres, and historical references, employed simultaneously and often indiscriminately, without privileging one over the other.

Unlike parody, which imitates styles or texts with a degree of critical distance or satirical intent, pastiche imitates without critique, celebrating stylistic multiplicity and surface play (Jameson, 2003). In addition, as Fredric Jameson (1991) argues, pastiche in the postmodern era reflects the "cannibalization of all the styles of the past," resulting in an aesthetic that is marked by depthlessness, cultural recycling, and the erosion of originality (18). It is a symptom of what he calls the "waning of historicity," where cultural production becomes detached from historical context and turns into a series of references and simulations. Pastiche thus reflects the postmodern condition of cultural fragmentation, where traditional boundaries between life and art, reality and dream, or between historical periods, are flattened into an endless present (Hutcheon, 2013). It often serves not to comment on these forms, but to mimic them for their stylistic or nostalgic effect, reflecting the commodified, image-saturated reality of late capitalism.

Postmodern literature reflects and dramatizes these theoretical principles through formal experimentation and thematic ambiguity. Postmodern literature reflects the philosophical concerns of postmodern theory, often challenging literary conventions and embracing experimental forms. It blurs the lines between fiction and reality, author and narrator, and often confronts the reader with ambiguity, irony, and unresolved narratives. Postmodern literature offers readers a way to critically reflect on the complexities of modern life—especially in a media-saturated, globalized world. It refuses easy answers, celebrates multiplicity, and forces us to consider the constructed nature of reality, language, and self. Postmodern theory challenges the assumptions of modernism, particularly its emphasis on rationality, objectivity, and linear progress. There are several principles outline core elements of postmodern thought such as Fragmentation & Identity Crisis, Skepticism toward Grand Narratives, Metafiction, Intertextuality, and Hyperreality.

In addition, metafiction is a distinctive feature of postmodern literature that foregrounds the constructedness of narrative, drawing attention to its own fictional status. Rather than presenting a seamless illusion of reality, metafiction disrupts the narrative flow by breaking the fourth wall, acknowledging the presence of the reader, or commenting on the act of writing itself. As Patricia Waugh (1984) explains, metafiction is "fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own" (14) processes of composition, its own language, and its status as narrative. This technique not only blurs the boundaries between author, narrator, and reader but also challenges conventional assumptions about storytelling, realism, and truth. Authors such as Italo Calvino, John Barth,

and Kurt Vonnegut have employed metafictional strategies to interrogate literary conventions and to question the capacity of language to represent reality (McHale, 2003, 43, 198.). In doing so, metafiction becomes both a narrative device and a philosophical commentary on the limits of representation, aligning closely with the broader postmodern suspicion of grand narratives and fixed meanings.

2. **Social-political changes in Clark Gable and his Plastic Duck**

Several hints of this autobiographical narrative unfold during a transformative and politically tense backdrop—the Falklands War of 1982. However, the author intricately entwines this broader geopolitical conflict with personal social turmoil, relationships, and reflections on masculinity, betrayal, and emotional dislocation. The chapter functions as a critique of both political and personal instability, subtly suggesting how macro events echo within the microcosm of private lives. The Falklands War functions as a metaphor for the narrator's inner and social-political upheavals.

The narrator recalls teaching at a failing boys' comprehensive school and living in a dilapidated house in Stoke Newington, symbolic of his dissatisfaction and sense of decay—personal and institutional. "In London the atmosphere of impending conflict was surreal... I taught nearby across Hackney Downs, a grim comprehensive boys' school where any semblance of discipline had been abandoned" (239). This echoes the broader sense of disorder, both in global politics and personal relationships, with the narrator's romantic entanglements and friendships—especially with the disruptive Connie—complicating his life much like the British government's entanglement in a colonial remnant conflict.

In his *Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck* (2020), Philip Tew creates a version of Britain where key historical events are subverted. Most prominently, Margaret Thatcher is diminished to “a minor political figure” (308), and the Falklands War—one of the transitive episodes in modern British history—has been lost. Yet, amid this political rupture, privatization persists and becomes the engine of a fragmented society, one “destined to become a postmodern slavocracy” (304). This revisionist impulse is also dramatized when the 37-year-old protagonist, William Xavier Pugh (known as Bill), encourages his friend J.J., “to write [an] alternative history where muddler Maggie wins the Falklands War [, and so] she'd become an unlikely international political superstar” (307). The novel, therefore, teases out the historicization and (re)imagination of such events and public figures, who have been broadly mediated and politicized.

Thatcher remains Prime Minister and Britain wins the Falklands War. Bill comments: “It all seems to work in the novel at least, and so Thatcher survives in this world.” J.J. responds, “Yes, for about ten more years, but in the end, I think, she must be betrayed, whatever her successes. I thought that would be a nice twist, and of course that's the nature of politics” (311). The novel thereby underscores the performative and contingent nature of Thatcher's legacy, not by destabilizing her symbolic authority entirely, but by revealing how such figures are preserved or betrayed according to the shifting demands of political narrative. Her survival—even in fictional form—is portrayed as provisional, a legacy maintained only as long as it serves the ideological fantasy of stability, and discarded when the narrative no longer requires her.

This broader ideological destabilization also maps onto Bill's interior world, where his personal disorientation becomes a reflection of the political collapse around him. This is most sharply illustrated in his first encounter with two enigmatic figures: a disheveled man resembling Clark Gable and his companion, described as a “plastic duck.” The encounter occurs in a playground—

Bill's place of work—a space traditionally associated with innocence and community. Yet, the scene unfolds as surreal and menacing. Bill senses the absurdity and threat in their presence, walking toward them “cautiously,” and later feeling “used in some undefinable fashion.” This reaction suggests the invasive effect of the encounter itself because of the symbolic charge carried by the figures he meets.

Although the encounter's impact by the figures' disruptive presence, the destabilization of space remains significant. As Bill recounts, Long Will—the site manager of the playground—shares a passage from a book he recently brought in, one that documents the politically charged origins of such spaces. According to the text, the first so-called “junk playground” was established in 1943 in Copenhagen, during the German Occupation, as part of the broader resistance movement. Far from being a neutral recreational site, it served as a political gesture – localized response to occupation that evolved into an emblem of collective defiance. The book maintains that this act of creating play areas continued to embody that legacy, rooting them within a communitarian ethos described as “local in scope and origin, international in ambition” (72). Thus, a space once symbolizing grassroots defiance and shared agency is now the stage for confusion, alienation, and symbolic violence. Slavoj Žižek's (2009), psychoanalytic theory of ideology helps frame this transformation. For Žižek (2009), “ideology is not simply imposed on ourselves. Ideology is our spontaneous relationship to our social world, how we perceive its meaning and what we find ‘natural’ in it” (13). Thus, a space once symbolizing grassroots defiance and shared agency is now the stage for confusion, alienation, and symbolic violence—its radical history overwritten by the very forces of disorientation it once resisted.

Connie, a recurring character, embodies a kind of post-political hedonism and opportunism. He is both manipulative and magnetic, representing the charismatic yet corrupt male archetype of late-20th-century Britain—mocking the Falklands campaign and seducing underage or inappropriate women with ease. “His great heroes were Hurricane Higgins, Jimmy Greaves and Lester Piggott OBE, all talented but fundamentally flawed human beings” (241). He serves as a counterpoint to the narrator, who appears increasingly disillusioned and morally anguished. Connie thrives in chaos, operating as a symbol of societal desensitization to ethical boundaries, echoing Thatcher-era individualism.

Kay and Sara-Jane (formerly Bébé) serve as narrative devices to explore female agency, romantic competition, and the narrator's discomfort with emotional vulnerability and power dynamics. Kay represents a possibly stabilizing influence, though her flirtation with Connie and later emotional withdrawal mirror the collapse of idealism. The narrator's relationship with Kay deteriorates, partly due to Connie's interference and partly due to unspoken class and cultural divisions, evident when he reflects on feeling out of place in Ipswich. “In Ipswich too, I felt increasingly supernumerary... the local accent grating on me, unfamiliar ways of saying stuff clogging my brain” (246). There is a quiet but potent class commentary here—the narrator does not feel at home among Kay's middle-class family or Connie's morally lax circle, highlighting his alienation in post-industrial Britain.

A recurring motif is the home as a compromised, unsafe space. From his shabby shared house to the upper-middle-class home in Ipswich, and finally his own room being usurped by Connie, the narrator's lack of sanctuary underscores a loss of control. “What the fuck are you doing in my room, you twat!”... “You stole my fucking keys” (248). This moment parallels the national anxiety about sovereignty and invasion during the Falklands War—a personal invasion that metaphorically aligns with Britain's threatened claim over the Falklands. The narrator's memoir-

like narrative is a masterful interlacing of personal disillusionment and socio-political anxiety. The protagonist's plans with a new romantic interest are derailed by betrayal, intoxication, and the reappearance of a manipulative friend. The novel interrogates how the macrocosm of national identity and decline is mirrored in the microcosm of social relationships, working-class male identity, and romantic disenchantment.

Recommendations

The researchers believe that by examining other contemporary British novels or other significant postmodern writers who similarly explore postmodernism and societal and political shifts, future research could expand on the concepts presented in Philip Tew's work. Comparative studies could examine the ways in which different authors employ narrative innovation to examine the enduring effects of historical events, particularly with regard to gender portrayal and identity construction. The involvement of female characters in postmodern literature could also be highlighted by this kind of study, which looks into how these characters challenge and reinterpret conventional gender norms in stories that are mostly about men.

Moreover, additional research could look into the way Tew's work is received amidst current cultural and political discussions. Exploring how Tew's stories influence ongoing conversations about identity, representation, and social change could offer important perspectives on the lasting significance of postmodernism for today's issues. Additionally, using interdisciplinary methods could be advantageous in studying the connections between literature, history, and cultural studies, particularly regarding the Falklands War and its effects on national identity. Examining how literature reflects and influences public discussions about historical events may provide crucial understanding about the continuing importance of postmodern narratives in modern society. By placing Tew's work in a wider literary and cultural context, future research can deepen the comprehension of the intricacies involved in postmodern literature and its connection to social and political challenges.

Conclusion

Philip Tew's "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck" presents a deep examination of postmodern themes intricately linked with the socio-political backdrop of the Falklands War. Philip Tew's "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck" stands out as a vital addition to postmodern literature, skillfully intertwining personal and political stories that mirror the tumultuous socio-political environment of late 20th-century Britain. The narrative deftly connects the personal and political, displaying how historical occurrences resonate in the lives of individuals. Through inventive narrative techniques, Tew challenges traditional storytelling by utilizing metafictional elements and intertextual allusions that encourage readers to thoughtfully engage with the text. The novel's investigation of fragmented identities and the fluidity of meaning echo the postmodern condition, uncovering how individual experiences are influenced by broader political and cultural dynamics.

The analysis emphasizes the importance of Tew's groundbreaking narrative techniques in constructing a postmodern critique of both political power and personal autonomy. By delving into themes of alienation, betrayal, and the evolving nature of identity, Tew prompts readers to rethink the intricacies of modern existence and how socio-political transformations shape personal experiences. "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck" not only exemplifies the traits of postmodern literature but also acts as a critical reflection on the socio-political circumstances of its era. By challenging historical narratives and scrutinizing the role of figures like Margaret

Thatcher, Tew provides a nuanced viewpoint on the intricacies of identity, representation, and authority. "Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck" serves as a testament to the lasting significance of postmodernism in contemporary literary discussions and its ability to shed light on the complex relationships between personal and political narratives.

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