

## THE EVOLUTION OF FEMALE ARCHETYPES IN 20TH AND 21ST-CENTURY BRITISH NOVELS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18315717>

**Abstract.** *The evolution of female characters in British novels from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries is examined in this study. It shows how women's literary roles have evolved from strictly defined, socially enforced identities such as the obedient wife, submissive daughter, or moral ideal to more complex, varied, and intersectional representations by drawing on archetype theory, feminist literary criticism, and historical analysis. Texts from the early 20th century, such as E. M. Forster's A Room with a View, show how women's choices and self-expression were constrained by social norms, class structures, and moral expectations. Later fiction, on the other hand, offers different portrayals of women and increasingly challenges these limitations. This paper examines novels from both centuries to demonstrate how changes in political movements, cultural values, and ideological frameworks have altered how women are portrayed, leading to more realistic, dynamic, and psychologically complex characters in modern British literature.*

**Keywords:** *female archetypes, feminist criticism, British novels, twentieth century, twenty-first century, identity, literary change, A Room with a View, gender representation, cultural transformation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last hundred years, the portrayal of women in British literature has changed significantly. Female characters in early twentieth-century fiction were often expected to adhere to traditional gender norms and portrayed within strict social boundaries. Women were frequently portrayed as submissive, limited to household duties, or primarily defined by their interactions with male characters. Writers started portraying women as unique people with agency, emotional depth, and the ability to make their own decisions as literary and social attitudes changed.

A Room with a View by E. M. Forster is a prime example of how social graces, moral standards, and class differences shaped and constrained women's lives. But over time, historical events like the First and Second World War, the rise of feminist movements, and the expansion of women's rights led writers to produce more nuanced female characters. By the late 20th century, women were more frequently depicted in fiction as thinkers, defenders of social norms, and strong people dealing with social and personal challenges. Female characters are frequently positioned within larger conversations about race, migration, sexuality, mental health, and identity in British novels from the twenty-first century. These depictions capture the complexity of modern womanhood by reflecting intersectional and postmodern viewpoints.

### LITERATURE REVIEW.

Character types and recurrent symbolic patterns in literature are identified by archetype theory, which was first put forth by Carl Jung and later developed by academics like Northrop Frye.

The mother, the heroine, and the rebel are examples of persistent female roles that can be analyzed using this theoretical framework. In order to highlight the social and psychological limitations imposed on women, feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar have studied how literary texts both support and challenge gender norms.

The shift from Victorian ideals to modernist innovation is frequently discussed in research on twentieth-century British literature, with a focus on writers who examined women's inner experiences and social constraints.

Postfeminist, postcolonial, and intersectional perspectives are used in more recent research, which suggests that modern depictions of women are more varied, flexible, and intricate.

While individual studies have focused on specific periods, relatively little research has traced the continuous development of female archetypes from the twentieth to the twenty-first century.

This study seeks to fill that gap by comparing representations across both eras and linking literary changes to broader historical and cultural contexts.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS.**

Several qualitative literary techniques are employed in this study:

- Comparative textual analysis: looks for changes in the representation of women in novels from the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Archetypal analysis: uses Jungian theory to find symbolic patterns and recurrent female roles.
- Feminist literary criticism analyzes how women's identities in texts are shaped by societal power structures.
- Contextual and hermeneutic analysis places novels in their cultural, social, and historical contexts.
- Narrative analysis: examines how writers' decisions about plot, characterization, and narration affect how women are portrayed. E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, which highlights the constraints and social expectations faced by women in that era, is the main twentieth-century text examined.

#### **RESULT.**

Several important conclusions are revealed by the study:

1. Traditional archetypes, such as the innocent girl, obedient daughter, moral woman, and romantic heroine, were largely used in early twentieth-century novels to reflect societal norms.
2. More independent and critical female characters, such as intellectuals, rebels, survivors, and psychologically complex heroines influenced by feminist discourse, were introduced in mid and late twentieth-century fiction.
3. Women with hybrid, intersectional identities who deal with issues like race, migration, sexuality, autonomy, trauma, and self-creation are portrayed in novels from the twenty-first century.
4. In general, female archetypes change from rigid, symbolic roles to adaptable, multifaceted, and realistic characters, reflecting larger shifts in society, culture, and ideology.

### **DISCUSSION.**

Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, female archetypes underwent a complex and multifaceted transformation. In addition to questioning patriarchal conventions, modern literature also offers fresh interpretations of classic archetypes. For instance, the romantic heroine reappears as a postfeminist character juggling desire, autonomy, and social expectations.

In a similar vein, domestic roles develop into psychologically complex characters with internal conflict and agency.

Literature from the 20th and 21st centuries depicts women transitioning from identities that are imposed by others to identities that they define for themselves. Feminist movements, the increasing cultural diversity of Britain, and postmodern storytelling methods all have an impact on this shift. In addition to being more self-reliant, contemporary female characters also better reflect the social and psychological complexity of real life.

### **CONCLUSION.**

Over the past century, there has been a significant expansion of female archetypes in British literature. Novels from the early 20th century portray women as constrained by society, whereas those from the 20th and 21st centuries show women as autonomous, multifaceted, and capable of directing their own lives. The literature of the twenty-first century offers a more comprehensive understanding of female identity by emphasizing intersectionality, cultural hybridity, and diverse experiences.

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