

John Wain as a postmodern novelist: An evolution

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Abstract

Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid to late 20th century across philosophy, the arts, architecture and criticism which marked a departure from modernism. It is an attitude of skepticism irony or rejection toward grand narratives, ideologies and various tenants of universalism. The term Post-modern was first used around the 1880s. John Wain was a postmodern novelist, central themes of post-modernism as the theme of anger, the theme of focalization of the marginalized people, the countervailing pulls of love and sex a central issue of post-modernism are main themes in the novels of John Wain. The present research paper highlights the evolution of John Wain as a postmodern novelist.

Keywords: post-modernism, skepticism, marginalized, focalization

Introduction

John Barrington Wain was born on March 14, 1925, in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, an industrial city. Wain belonged to a family of artisans which had a good collection of books and this helped Wain much in his career as a novelist, poet and critic. Wain, from his childhood, lived in certain circumstances congenial to his growth as a writer. He was particularly concerned about the dwindling countryside and the advancement of industrialisation. John Wain had a great fondness for the countryside and enjoyed the sights and the sounds of rural nature. Even when he grew older this deep impact of nature and the countryside was almost indelible. With his family, Wain often went to Wales and admired the landscape there too. We find elaborate descriptions of Wales in his novel *A Winter in the Hills*.

Wain spent his childhood in an industrial town where he got ample opportunity to study the lives of the working class people. He knew their problems well and so in his fiction there is great sympathy for human beings as well as concern for the waning away of dignity and decency in society.

John Wain received his early education at Froebel's Preparatory School and later at Newcastle-under-Lyme High School. He learnt much about life from his experiences at these institutions. He also came to the conclusion that life was competitive in which man had to make a perpetual effort to survive. Wain also discovered that he was disliked because he belonged to a more prosperous family; so he developed a sense of defensiveness. In his autobiography entitled *Sprightly Running*, Wain wrote that his contact with school bullies and authoritative schoolmasters taught him three very significant lessons. To quote him:

(1) that the world was dangerous;

(2) that it was not possible to evade these dangers by being inoffensive, since (he) was surrounded on all sides by those who hated (him)...; (3) that, although the natural reaction to all this was fear (he) could not admit to feeling fear or (he) should be disgraced ^[1].

Wain was so sympathetic towards the suffering lot of the poor that he began to identify himself with them. He writes often, about their problem of survival. The theme finds ample place

in his novels *The Contenders* and *Hurry on Down*, also showing protest against the callousness of society. Sometimes Wain makes use of humour in order to present the sufferers. But all along the moral undercurrent is obvious. The heroes use mockery and ridicule to survive in their unjust world.

Thus the provinces, the industrialism, the class distinction, school competitiveness, and his interest in music and literature left a lasting influence on his personality and later on his art. The sympathetic attitude, compassion and understanding for those who suffer in life were derived from Wain's early experiences in life.

In 1943, Wain went to St. John's College, Oxford for higher education. This was the second major period in his life, the first one being his childhood; and it exercised considerable influence on his development as a writer. Dale Salwak writes:

This is the period in which he grew, with remarkable speed, into the world of literature and scholarship. At St. John's he shaped his identity as a writer: the books were there to be read, and the learned men were there to talk with ^[2].

Writing was a source of comfort for Wain specially when he saw life around him crumbling down. At the same time he learnt that being a writer meant insecurity. It required a great deal of courage to be a writer. During this period Wain was considerably influenced by C.S. Lewis, his tutor and Charles William. Lewis helped shape Wain's literary attitudes while Charles William encouraged in Wain the love of poetry. Wain was deeply conscious of this debt. Similarly, Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis too, influenced him as a writer. Infact he drew a lot of inspiration from these two friends.

In 1950 John Wain was appointed as a lecturer in English Literature at Reading University. He met more people who helped and encouraged him. Wain wished to be a full time novelist and three years later in 1953 he brought out his first novel, *Hurry on Down*. Simultaneously, Wain suffered a great setback due to some family problems. Perhaps this was the worst period of his life. He was seriously ill, followed by divorce and a long spell of depression and discouragement.

Wain was forced to leave his job at the University. He went to the Swiss Alps and there he wrote his second novel, *Living in the Present*. The novel has a rather pessimistic outlook in which Wain highlights the loneliness of man. Later this became the major theme of his novels.

The writings of John Wain are directly related to his experiences of life. He closely studied contemporary life in England but the result was a long lasting disillusionment. He found that man had to struggle constantly to survive in this world. His personal experiences also substantiated his view. The novels which followed namely, *The Contenders*, *Strike The Father Dead*, *The Young Visitors* and *A Winter In The Hills* reflect his personal struggle, the acute sense of loneliness and lack of love. At the same time he writes about corruption in society as he saw it. The outcome was that Wain developed the tendency to look at the dark side of life.

Wain began writing at a time when the European life was badly shattered by the after effects of the Second World War. Like other literary writers of the time he, too, used his work as a medium of protest against the political opportunists, social hypocrites and the rising decadence in the religious life. This theme of social protest runs through all his novels.

His first novels, *Hurry on Down* invited diverse comments by the critics and the reviewers and the writer felt that it was necessary to explain the circumstances under which the novel was conceived and composed. But it was only after two decades that he could justify his stand to the reading public.

In the 1977 edition of *Hurry on Down*, John Wain added a brief Introduction recollecting how he gave up his job as a Lecturer in English Poetry at the University of Reading and devoted himself fully to writing. He was passionately involved with his profession as a teacher but otherwise, he wrote:

Outside my work I am discontented and restless, something of a *mauvais sujet*. This is partly for personal reasons, but it is also related to the social atmosphere. I am dissatisfied with what I take to be the shape of English society. Like many people I am looking for profound changes and not finding them ^[3].

The reason for his restlessness is apparent—a concern for society and a deep desire to find a solution to contemporary problems which became more intricate after the Second World War.

Incidentally, Wain was actively involved in World War II but had to quit due to poor eyesight. He felt a part of those young servicemen who had served the nation. He closely shared their attitudes as well, when he wrote:

During the five years of combat, in which social and political arrangements have necessarily been stalemated, an undercurrent of discontent with the England of the thirties, with its lukewarm snobberies and social fossilizations, its dolequeues, its slumbering Empire, the general feeling that the country is like a gutter choked with dead leaves, of basically sound construction, but full of obsolete matter. So many of the people I know seem intent on only one thing to get back as fast as possible to the England of 1939 ^[4].

Wain was frantically waiting for the age old conventions, specially those related to class distinctions to be wiped out

completely. He wanted the young people of England to enjoy freedom, creativity and adventure. As an amateur in the field of fiction Wain felt confident that the theme of his novel would remain popular with the younger generation because he was actually representing their ideas of reaction and protest.

Hurry on Down was published in the autumn of 1953. At this time the movement of the so called *Angry Young Man* was absolutely unknown in literature. It was only in 1956 when John Osborne brought out his play *Look Back in Anger* that people began to talk about this new *movement*. But John Wain feels that the *movement* had actually its roots in his own novel *Hurry on Down*. In the introduction he mentions:

So if there was a *movement* at all, which I am inclined to doubt, I cannot be accused of tagging along behind it. I might even be credited-or blamed, if you will-for having started it ^[5].

Wain still feels that his first novel is his best. The picaresque adventures of the young protagonist are endearing and enjoyable.

The novelist was a little surprised when he was asked to write the Introduction to his novel *Hurry on Down* which had already been read for a quarter of a century. The indication was that there was definitely something outstanding about the novel which had kept it alive. It was certainly the *concern for the young generation of England*. Not only Wain but several other English writers sympathised with the lost and misguided younger generation who were in reality:

Living between two worlds, one dead, The other powerless to be born ^[6].

The most outstanding of the postwar English writers who have dealt with the problems of survival in the decaying English society is John Osborne, the playwright. His very first-play *Look Back in Anger* created the image of 'an angry young man' in the 1950's which continued to inspire many playwrights and novelists for at least the next two decades. It also created a renewed interest in the familial and societal significance of literature. The anger which Osborne has written about in his first play *Look Back in Anger* is in no way destructive but it is, in fact an affirmation of the finer values of life towards which the older generation had become blind. A superficial reading of the play may suggest that the invectives of the hero Jimmy Porter against the elders and leaders of the society and his verbal abuses fired against the religious leaders are an expression of his frustration, his anger and reveal the perversity of his mind; but actually it is not so. His reactions and protest are not so much a quarrel with the world at large but a plea for reiterating and re-establishing all that is good and meaningful in human life. He craves to reinstate the positive norms such as human honesty and vitality for people to live emotionally as fully and as deeply as they can.

Jimmy Porter's statements about love and life are more or less akin to those expressed by many characters in the novels of John Wain such as, George Links in *A Travelling Woman*, Tom and Catherine in *Living in the Present*. Both Osborne and Wain view love as a basic human emotion which does not require a saint like rejection of the world but must have a full human involvement of togetherness and sympathy. Jimmy Porter remarks in the course of a conversation in the play:

They all want to escape from the pain of being alive. And, most of all, from love. I always knew something like this would turn up--some problems, like and ill wife—and it would be too much for those delicate, hot-house feelings of yours. It's no good trying to fool yourself about love. You can't fall into it like a soft job, without dirtying up your hands. It takes muscles and guts. And if you can't bear the thought of messing up your nice, clean soul, you'd better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint. Because you'll never make it as a human being. It's either this world or the next ^[7].

The above outburst of Jimmy clearly indicates that the young protagonist is *sane* and his acerbity against his wife and the society is a reflection of his positive frame of mind for the general weal of society. John Wain's Charles Lumley has the same type of mission in life, though he moves around in a larger canvas of time and space where as Jimmy Porter is confined to his own household.

Wain's *Hurry on Down* precedes *Look Back in Anger* by three years and as such Jimmy culminates, in a way, Lumley's picaresque search for an identity to survive in the complex postwar English society. Commenting on this kind of attitude James Gindin writes:

The existential attitude also has a public corollary in the constant iconoclasm directed against the established religious, political, and commercial order so evident in the work of Amis, Wain, Allan Sillitoe, and many others. Iconoclasm, to be sure, has a long intellectual history and is not simply the province of *angry youngmen*, but an existential attitude gives this kind of iconoclasm particular support. The reigning society represents, for many of these contemporary writers a pretentious and fallacious essence. In order to perpetuate itself, the reigning society strives to appear as if it were based on some hallowed principles of right or value, to refuse to acknowledge that it, like any other society, is really a partial knowledge. The reigning society comes to believe that its values are essential. Therefore, the writer with both awareness and an existential attitude tries to puncture the society's bloated self-estimation, to portray, with or without anger, the folly of human beings acting as if they were knowledgeable cosmic forces. Yet the destruction of the reigning society cannot be carried too far cannot itself become a principle. Again, the existential man chooses, and some societies are better, less pretentious, less restrictive, than others ^[8].

The critic is justified in saying so for the existential attitude has provided fresh usable images before the contemporary English novelists.

Thus it is obvious that the impact of John Wain's fiction was far reaching. It influenced dramatists as well as novelists of the post war period alike. The plays of Osborne and Wesker were altogether reactionary to the existent pattern in fact, these new plays were *sociological statements* which presented how a large chunk of British society heretofore neglected, lives, thinks and struggles for survival. These writers did not write about the *genteel class* but concentrated on the emotional side of the neglected class in which the younger generation was the worst sufferer. Arnold Wesker's plays are, to be precise, sociological documents which begin with references to some

external historical fact relevant to the action. Thus Wesker tries to use social and political events to illustrate striking points about individuals. For instance his play *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* (1960) does not attempt to reveal the failure of a social ideal; rather it presents the failure of two individuals to shape their lives. They are apparently defeated in the end. Consequently anger surfaces and there is frustration because they are unable to communicate meaningfully with others. The theme of communication has been picked up by Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett as well. Like the protagonists of John Wain's fiction, the characters of these playwrights belong to the ordinary strata of society and to be precise.

Through the terms of the lower class intellectual or the adolescent girl from manchester or the London tramp, each of these writers is dealing with the perplexities of the human being, the creature not strong enough to stand alone and stronger than he needs to be to follow mindlessly whatever mass rampage he sees around him. The individual needs to find out what he is an where or how he can connect with what is going on about him ^[9].

While writing about society the writer mentions class changes, distinctions and judgements and then he begins to sympathise with the neglected one's who have to struggle for existence.

The problem of existence and survival is once again the nodal point of another contemporary of Wain, Doris Lessing. The novelist has consciously sought the socially rejected. When she came to England in 1949 from Southern Rhodesia, she felt a social responsibility towards the working class who were dominated by the other higher sections of society. She searched for literary material among the working class of London and consequently wrote the novel *In Pursuit of the English*. This documentary of Doris Lessing deals with the superficial aspects of the lower middle class in war torn England. Later, in novels like *Retreat to Innocence*, *The Golden Note Book* and *Summer Before the Dark* she takes up the dilemma faced by the educated English younger generation who are unable to find any suitable direction in an apparently selfish and decadent society.

The quest for an alternative which would provide an established way of life for the protagonist is shown by Lessing in the same picaresque style as we find in the novels of John Wain. It is interesting to realize that Mrs. Lessing had migrated to England from Southern Rhodesia with the hope of finding a democratic set up based on equality for all. She was soon disillusioned to realize that the chasm between the different classes in England was wider than the distance between the whites and the blacks in South Africa. John Wain is conscious of this problem too, and his approach is more realistic because he was born and brought up in that very environment about which he is writing.

The common point in Lessing and Wain is that both begin with emphasizing the value of education to break the harmful class structure. They find that the class consciousness is a concern preventing the growth of the nation and harming the organic life of the basic social structure and hence it must be rooted out with the sharp knife of education.

Hardly out of the shock of the Second World War which left a permanent scar on the face of humanity in the form of atom bombs diffused on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the English

people had to bear a greater bombshell when the nation's political leadership decided to make the Hydrogen Bomb in 1956. The great Aldermaston March to protest against this decision is, of course, a part of English history; but it will continue to remain significant for the students of post-war English literature. Most of the contemporary creative writers, philosophers and intellectuals joined the great March and Doris Lessing and John Wain were also among the group. Not only this, but the Hydrogen Bomb issue has also been used by the two novelists as the subject matter for their works during this period. Doris Lessing has used a narrower universe, that is the family of Mark Coleridge to show the after effect of the Nuclear Warfare. Infact she carries the holocaust imagery to a decisive conclusion through a dram sequence of the protagonist where most of the inhabitants of Europe are exterminated. Wain's reaction to the next decade's situation in England after the end of the Second World War is presented in one of his most powerful novels *The Contenders*.

The struggles of the individual and the problems of the society have parallel situations in Lessing's *The Four Gated City* and Wain's *The Contenders*. But Wain confines himself to search for a solution within the frame work of the existing human and societal relationships, whereas Lessing's approach is Utopian. In this way though contemporary writers like Osborne and Lessing write about the same society, the same individuals, the same opportunities and similar emotions like Wain has done yet we find that Wain's approach is the most realistic and pragmatic. Like Doris Lessing, as we can locate easily, Wain's novels also take up some burning issues, such as, the generation gap, the sexual maladjustments and the struggle of the members of the lower class to raise their social position.

Though Lawrence Durrell started writing about two decades earlier than John Wain yet his novels represent the same kind of cynicism, hypocrisy, futility, frustration, decay, death and meaningless pursuit of physical love. Durrell has rightly used the term "a scenario of despair"^[10] for the contemporary scene of life in England. Durrell's reaction to the dismal state of moral degeneration has been given full expression in his novel *The Black Book*. The novel belongs to the years between the first World War and the second World War and vividly depicts how the war proved a fatal blow to some traditional values of life. The two World Wars also shook the social structure of England. Most of the characters in *The Black Book* suffer from a lack of real love in life. They desire to escape from the decadent and the sterile world seeking peace and solace in love. They fail here too because their love is destructive. Durrell has successfully depicted the emptiness of the soul and the emotional sterility through some of his characters. Yet the novel becomes a quest of a youngman whose ardent desire is to safeguard mankind from the present disintegration and spiritual vacuity.

Durrell was a journalist and travelled far and wide, so his universe is broad and unconventional. With a journalistic eye for minutest detail, he has been able to represent the realities of life vividly no doubt but his heroes and heroines are passive participants in life's turmoil failing at the crucial moment in finding the right solution. Thus the idea of social protest as a creative means for social and human welfare is absent from his novels. This is where John Wain as a realist presents a better novelistic vision in comparison to Durrell. Social protest and social realism are never separated in the works of Wain and are developed together. These provide his novels a

speciality of being significant social documents of struggle and survival.

William Golding is more akin to Wain in his moral statements about man and life. But these novelists began writing almost at the same time. Golding's first novel *Lord of the Flies* came exactly one year after Wain's maiden effort, *Hurry on Down*. The period as we have already seen disturbed by the effects of the second World War and Golding, Wain, as well as many other literary writers of Europe can be observed to be busy in analysing the sudden decline in the general way of life--social, political, religious and familial. Some appear to be contented with merely a superficial analysis of *things* happening around where as many use their critical insight to offer ethical observations. Doris Lessing, for example preaches a life of forbearance and tolerance and advocates an ultimate Utopian golden era. Durrell also believes in a better future but his advice to the struggling man is more militant. He prefers the individual to resist all forces of evil and sometimes this revolt may turn out to be even violent. Durrell's vision is not quite apt because his early novels dealing with spiritual sterility and moral depravity hover around situations arising out of the first World War. His novels written after the Second World War are more mystical and autobiographical rather than practical.

William Golding treats the postwar English degeneration of social and moral values with the same down to earth reality that we witness in the novels of John Wain. The focal point of Golding's various themes is the eternal clash between good and evil in which the sea-saw battle appears to be swinging heavily in favour of the evil most of the time but suddenly there is a final effort on the part of the better *conscience* of the man and the good is the ultimate victor. Golding's statements about life are tinted with his Christian faith. He deals with the problem of human survival no doubt, but all his ideas tend to peter out into one single fact that is the Christian doctrine of the idea of the original sin. Thus Golding believes that evil is inherent in man; it is a part of Jehovah's curse to the human life. But man can pull himself out of the bog of evil by a conscious effort just like a lotus grows beautifully against the filthy background of mud and mire.

This is where the basic difference between Golding and Wain lies. Golding begins with the preconceived notion that man is evil and hence he must fall a prey to outward pitfalls. In this way the author absolves society and external environment of playing any negative or destructive role in shaping the human life. John Wain discusses more or less the same problems and deals with almost similar situations as can be noticed in the novels of Golding. But Wain has used the entire social set up as the basis of his analysis of human life. In this way the novels of John Wain are a sort of continuous journey of the protagonist through the labyrinthine paths of the family, the peer group, the community, the city and ultimately the nation. The central character, male or female is shown to be moving through myriad experiences of life in order to attain his goal—an aim and a purpose which is very much human and realistic. He does not envisage a Utopian golden future.

Therefore, Wain's novels do not have a cosmic appeal but at the same time, they are more life-like and comprehensive. If we read the works of Wain, we are in a better position to understand the postwar Western social setup in general and the English life in particular. Similar type of comprehensive approach can be seen in the works of Allan Sillitoe though his

novels are cruder in their plots. His characters, mostly taken from the working class and the factory workers, defy authority, resort to violence and feel themselves to be the enemies of politicians, policemen and other *pillars of society*. This approach is highly destructive. Society cannot be reformed or bettered by a stubborn negative reaction. We must, as the novels of Wain reveal, react against injustices, raise our stern voices against the corrupt prelates. But simultaneously we must continue to fulfil our respective duties and also make conscious efforts to reconstruct the crumbling walls of society rather than give it a greater push.

The aforesaid brief resume of the post second World War English life and how it affected the contemporary novels reveals that different writers have dealt with the same sterility, decadence and degeneration in a variety of ways, whether it be Lessing's vision of the *New Jerusalem* or Durrell's idealistic state of *Heraldic Universe* or Golding's purgatorial repentance leading to the ultimate salvation or uncompromising angry reaction of the protagonists in Osborne or Allan Sillitoe or the stoic forbearance of the suffering leading not to rejection but encouraging the protagonist to work for the betterment of society in the novels of John Wain -- all these themes represent the real postwar England that is a society struggling to get up on its tottering feet. Thus, as already observed, John Wain holds a very significant place among the contemporary English novelists. To be more precise he is the most realistic of all postwar English fiction writers.

In his autobiography *Sprightly Running* Wain writes about the predicament of man in society full of contradictions where man finds it difficult to make a place for himself and adjust. He writes:

To me life is tragic, because humanity is made up of contradictions. Even the most ruthlessly selfish of men cannot go from the cradle to the grave doing just as the like because there is never one clear, undisputed thing that he likes. Each of us wants contrary things, and some of our hopes will come to nothing, some of our powers will lie idle, whatever we do we can never follow up all the possibilities that life indicates to us: if we try to, we destroy ourselves, and if we choose our path and follow it resolutely, we hanker inwardly after the paths we have neglected^[11].

The novelist's frustrations with life have been vividly brought out in his autobiography. Man can never be entirely happy because there are so many external forces which influence his life. He must bring about a balance and an adjustment. The result is that man becomes a victim of his own unfulfilled desires.

As a writer of the twentieth century, John Wain, was conscious of the fact that not only he but other contemporary writers were also disturbed by the sordid state of modern life. He admits that the approach of the other writers in tackling the problems may be different. For instance he compares himself with the novelist Kingsley Amis thus:

.....his novels deal with people who are fairly gay and don't have sores; and mine deal with people who are gay and have sores. My vision of life is more extreme than his, both darker and brighter; his work is based on a steady common sense, a real hatred of imbalance and excess;

mine, by comparison, is apocalyptic^[12].

Amis too feels that it is difficult to find one's way in a world which is so fragmented and incongruous. Still a person can make his way through the world as best as he can by a comic acceptance of the contemporary ways of life. Perhaps to be comic is the best way an individual can represent himself in the world, deal with problems and get the most out of life.

John Wain was not only a novelist he was poet, critic and short story writer too. As a writer he felt that it was his moral duty to write about the *decadence and sterility of modern life* and to offer a possible solution. But he did not want to be confined by any particular form of writing, like poetry or drama or short story or the novel. He adopted these forms as and when it suited his mood and the theme which he was going to deal with. He takes up this question of form in his autobiography *Sprightly Running*:

For myself the only thing that interests me, professionally, is the attempt to express my reactions to life in words. My medium is not the novel, or the poem, or the play, or the short story: it is the *vocabulary*. And the decision as to which form to mould the words into must be the decision of the moment. There is some material that cries out for the novel or the play. There is no sense in tying oneself down^[13].

For Wain the thought or the subject matter is of prime importance. Words are a means of expressing his thoughts and the medium does not count. He adopts only that form which would give him ample freedom and facility to express his seating thoughts.

The question of language and form occupied the mind of Wain, for in his collection of critical essays, *A House For the Truth* he wrote:

One thing that language can do better than any other form of communication is to liberate the individual by setting his imagination to work^[14].

He emphasizes that for him, as a writer, the individual is of vital importance. So much so that many a time his ideas tend to become outdated when he attempts to segregate the individual from a group:

My values are based on an obsolete regard for the individual. In an age of collectivism, here am I, quaintly, still making the unargued assumption that it is better for human beings to think and feel as individuals than as a mass... And the mere fact that the spirit of individualism, the assumption that the unique personality in each of us is valuable because of its uniqueness and not in spite of it, has found beautiful and memorable expression in literature, will surely act as a continuing force^[15].

John Wain was convinced that the subject matter, that is the individual and his place in society is of prime concern to a writer. A writer's works will remain fresh and alive forever because he has written of men, his problem and the question of survival. The character should have the desire at one and the same time to stand away from society and yet to find a niche in it. This is Wain's concept of social protest.

The ideas of John Wain were influenced by the Renaissance ideals; in which greater emphasis was laid on individualism and the development of an individual even against the existing forces of society. Wain, in one of his critical pieces mentions that from the time of Chaucer and later Shakespeare the individual has moved to the centre of the stage. He also mentioned that the protagonists of Shakespeare's great tragedies are actually *strong headed men clashing with society* in a kind of social protest because of their uniqueness. As a writer, Wain opines that poetry does not allow full scope to a writer to discuss in detail about individualism whereas drama and novels are better equipped to do so. Moreover, narrative method of writing is more individual because each writer has his own way of telling a story.

G.S. Fraser has praised John Wain's mode of presentation of situation and theme in his novels. Fraser writes:

It would be said that one of Wain's chief gifts as a novelist is for evoking, or expressing, violent feelings and for one contriving situations that will justify the explosion of these feeling, rather than for cool observation of externals or a gift for ready, sympathetic or humours, identification with a range of characters; his plots, after his first two picaresque novels have tended to be very neat and very artificial. The eloquent expressions of strong connection, are gifts of the dramatist rather than the novelist, and the drama, to which Wain's now turning his attention, may be his real medium. But the novels as they stand are not negligible. The sense running through them of the author's driving energy, *lacerated amusement, and scornful rage* compensates for implausibilities and the two dimensional characters. But even through parody and exaggeration, Wain, like Amis, is one of the few living novelists who give a sense of actual contemporary life ^[16].

Wain has done what other great writers have attempted in the past. For instance, Shakespeare in his plays has dramatised the nature of human conflict, specially when man was trying to emphasize the superiority of the individual over social norms. Wain too has depicted similar themes and situations through his novels.

John Wain was much influenced by the theories propounded and advocated by T.S. Eliot. Wain stated:

I belong to the generation of men of letters formed in the era of T.S. Eliot and I still accept Eliot as an important authority in matters that concern me professionally ^[17].

Wain then goes on to explain that he found much sense in Eliot's famous essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) in which Eliot says that the *past influences the present*. To this Wain adds another statement that the present also influences the past:

If a new artist arises whose work modifies our way of looking at his particular art, we then apply that modified vision to the masterpieces of our tradition, and we may have to do some adjusting of reputations. The backward look alters the object ^[18].

Thus a useful artist is one who is aware of the past because this awareness certainly enables him to illumine the problems of the present.

Wain sees the modern age as an *age of collectivism* where man works in unison. But Wain till advocates the absolute regard for the individual. In a modern society where the basis is collectivism if a person puts forward his individual ideas then it is termed as protest. Innovation of any sort is considered to be fierce hostility. Unfortunately, Wain could not ignore the past traditions completely where emphasis was laid on development of individual even if he has to protest against the fixed norms and conventions of society. In this first four novels-*Hurry on Down* (1953), *Living In The Present* (1955), *The Contenders* (1958) and *The Travelling Woman* (1959), Wain observes though commically, the *problems of surviving in a demanding and fearful world*. Either they seek to compromise with or to escape from the various evils of society such as class distinction, boredom, hypocrisy and the dangers of success. But finally, each hero attempts to preserve himself. In *Hurry on Down* Charles Lumley rebels by assuming a variety of roles; Edgar Banks in *Living In The Present* decides to commit suicide but at the same time wants to take one despicable should with him; in *The Contenders* Joe Shaw recalls the history of Ned Roper and Robert Lamb who are dehumanized by their ardent struggle for success. George Links (*A Travelling Woman*) turns to adultery in order to relieve his boredom. But in the end each character compromises, Lumley becomes a comedy writer. Banks resumes his original job, Shaw returns to London and Links attempts to go back to his wife. Dale Salwak comments on the dignity of an individual as seen by Wain:

Although each novel carries a serious moral interest, Wain's wit, sharp observations, and inventiveness keep the plot moving. His comedy exaggerates, reforms and criticizes to advocate the reasonable in social behaviour and to promote the value and dignity of the individual ^[19].

Between 1953 and 1978 Wain wrote nine novels at a fairly regular interval except for *The Pardoner's Tale* which was published eight years after *A Winter in The Hills*. The total output in terms of number of novels is not much but this, in no way presents a wrong reflection on the creative power of Wain. The limited number of novels is due to the obvious reason that John Wain was a downright realist and preferred to write about things, situations and people only when he had a first hand knowledge.

Thematically these novels are able to present before the readers a complete picture of the English society from the fifties to the seventies. His works are not merely meant for entertainment and personal pleasure but as the following study reveals they are documents of social realism about postwar English society

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