

# Realistic Fiction, Experimental Fiction and Culture: A Debate

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## Abstract

*Writing fiction of all sorts basically being based on the time-honoured and universal themes has been the kernel literary trend for several centuries. It has ushered as the trend right from the time human beings innately and/or deliberately were in the pursuit of happiness. In its course, writing fiction emerged as a predominant trend from the seventeenth century as an outlet in expressing their feelings and emotion on the one hand and in outpouring their knowledge and experiences of themselves and the world on the other. At the outset, although it happened to be somewhat a kind of spontaneous expression in a saga way, they soon formed a structure and set some tacit parameters of fiction writing. They enhanced some comprehensive and widely accepted characteristics for characters, plot, setting, themes, point of view, conflict, denouement and tone. If a fiction writer or a novelist follows all or most of these characteristics in a set pattern, such writing is generally regarded as the traditional realistic fiction. Further, it values the value system set by the society and culture and presents the theme in an acceptable manner through the use and application of the decent language. As opposed to the norms, experimental writing deconstructs such norms and express what they feel expressing in a chaotic manner. But the question arises to what extent are they to be licensed and given the liberty. As said by T.S. Eliot, a great work is the apt and milestone conglomeration of the tradition and individual talent. Individual talent is pertinent of experimentalism to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, to what extent, one must, should or ought to assimilate the newness. Several experimental novels are highly acclaimed by critics. However, there are several novels that are not worth-reading and worth-teaching especially in an academia on the ground of the theme, setting, tone, language, etc. The novels entailing taboo and vulgar language, having anarchic form and deviated ideas that degrade the social norms and values, etc. should not be prescribed as reading texts at least in an academic institution because a university is not only a platform for setting and shaping knowledge of young scholars, but also a pioneer platform to promote ideals to form a better society.*

**Keywords:** Prescriptiveness, intrusion, evocation, taboo, culture, de-familiarization

## Introduction

Traditional realistic fiction can be defined as the genre that embeds stories that could have actually occurred to people and or animals in a believable setting and, therefore, plausible and believable, they resemble to real life and the fictional characters of the novel or stories rationally react to real people. They are of two types as historical and contemporary fiction.

However, experimental fiction does not share the features of the realistic fiction. As said by Julie Armstrong in her work, *Experimental Fiction*, that it is to be acknowledged that such fiction is found to have been written throughout the history where writers have intended to experiment and create fiction that sets to break new ground and deviate deliberately from the traditional realistic fiction. As for example, Virginia Woolf had declared in her diary that she wanted to experiment her experiences in a new craft. Thus, she paved the way for a new form for her new novel. Regarding experiment fiction, critics floor their opinion in two distinct ways. A group of critics opines that experimental fiction is the literary work that is written in direct opposition to traditional realistic fiction. But the next group of critics views the experimental fiction that is inherently concerned with innovation and risk-taking. But our concern in the article is how far one should trespass and deviated himself or herself in this regard. Even among the experimental galore, one should create a demarcation of worth prescribing and worth not prescribing.

### **Comparative Study and Analysis:**

The objective of the comparative study done in this article is to compare features of the traditional realistic fiction and the experimental fiction and, thereof, to see if all the novels written as experimental fiction is worth considering and prescribing to scholar students in a university or not.

The title consists of three semantic terms as traditional fiction, experimental fiction and culture but they can be better grouped as two for the convenience of comparison and contrast. That is experimental fiction on the one hand and culture and realistic fiction on the other hand. They are bi-polar in a number of respects. My concern here is to describe the realistic fiction and compare it with the positive and the negative impacts of experimental fiction in the culture, youths and various and varied readers. The article also focuses on how experimental fiction gnaws at the time-honoured civilization and culture and causes wears and tears on it in an insidious and negative way. Further, some experimental are intentionally crude, obscene, bastardly pornographic. Even for the here-stated regards, it is the matter of prime concern: Can the society entertain all sorts of contents, characters and sans structure writing as the subjects of promotion that are foregrounded in the name of experimentalism?, Should they be the subjects of study as the core discipline in the academia?, Can taboos and vulgarity be the docile content of study for the student scholars?, and so on.

In the general term, any sort of new trend, practice, deviated presentation, approaches, writing, etc. can be taken as experimental. It is a sort of deliberate departure from the established norms and terms. In this plain sense, it is so wide that any new practice can be experimental. In other words, if such a definition is kept in mind, every new venture in literature will be experimental. Therefore, it is necessary to be more precise to level any work as experimental.

Although experimental is a very debatable and historically contingent term, we need to draw a border line between the conventional and experimental fiction vis-a-vis cultured cum traditional writing to a great extent. In this context, it is to be acknowledged that several writers intentionally try to write differently either in terms of the context or form or both. They want to break the old and set a new ground by deviating themselves, or by growing innovative

or by the dream and desire of identity. Still some other may become experimental because it is always not so easy to follow the established norms of writing and become an acclaimed writer.

Critics opine in two ways with reference to experimental fiction. Some think that any fiction in direct opposition to traditional realist works can be regarded as experimental fiction. We can take *Emma* by Jane Austen against *The Passion of New Eve* by Angela Carter. The two works are each other's antithesis in terms of both content and form. On the other hand, some critics assert that innovativeness and risk-taking are the inherent features of experimental fiction. Moving on to the characteristics of the traditional realist fiction and that of the experimental fiction, as stated by Julie Armstrong, it is very relevant and manifesting to state here the marked differences between the two:

From the afore-stated points, we can fairly grasp the differences, demarcations, stress

S.No.	Traditional Realist Fiction	S.No.	Experimental Fiction
1.	Reproduces the real world in the imagined world of fiction	1.	Destabilizes the real world
2.	Creates an authenticity of the experience the fiction is attempting to portray	2.	Subverts the sense of normality
3.	Conveys a recognizable time scheme	3.	Introduces a debate about the status of the text and the act of writing
4.	Evokes a sense of place or setting	4.	Presents a different world views
5.	Have a clear hierarchy of discourses controlled be a privileged central voice	5.	Has a free playing voices and none of which is privileged
6.	Displays a coherent explanation of actions	6.	Engages with the moving play of signifiers to construct endless cycles of meaning
7.	Demonstrates immediacy	7.	Employs intrusion into the text by the narrator and/or author
8.	Entertains the reader	8.	Experiments with form and topography
9.	Sets out a plausible sequence of events	9.	Develops new ways of seeing
10.	Develops credible characters	10.	Applies multiple discourses
11.	Produces convincing dialogue	11.	Mixes and/or subverts genres
12.	Utilizes steadily rising tension and conflict	12.	Provokes the reader to consider ideas and concepts
13.	Engages a reader's emotions and brings about empathy	13.	Provokes the reader to consider ideas and concepts
14.	Brings about closure	14.	Imagines alternative realities
15.	Events usually move on the linear motion. It is sequential and orderly.	15.	Moves on the non-linear or stream of conscious or beyond motion

16.	Uses the standard and civil language	16.	Engages the reader on an intellectual or philosophic level
17.	Established and universal subjects	17.	Abnormal, idiosyncratic and erotic subjects
18.	Offers a moral or a lesson	18.	Does not bother about the moral or regards fiction per se
19.	Comprehensive narration and easy to understand.	19.	Usually very complex narrative with underlying meanings
20.	Dominantly focuses high culture	20.	Focuses low and depraved culture
21.	Social orientation	21.	Individual and taboo orientation and self-focused
22.	Thematic domination rather than formative orientation	22.	Extreme de-familiarization
23.	Has the comprehensive ending	23.	Denies closure
24.	Less metaphoric features	24.	Uses metaphoric qualities
25.	Author-oriented and prescriptive	25.	Reader-oriented and can have multiple meanings
26.	Focuses the center	26.	Focuses the margin
27.	Emphasis on the beauty, serenity, mannerliness and on integration	27.	Over-emphasis on ugliness, grotesque, tableau elements and disintegration

they lay on and departures between them. We fairly know that both the trends have their own privileges and predilections. Writers can suit themselves as their bend of mind, expectations, familiar subject matter, trend, the search for the identity and so on. Several writers prefer penning on the realist fiction by incorporating the afore-stated features whereas others find experimentalism as their comfort zone from various perspectives. The trend of experimentalism is looming large among the new generation.

Why is innovativeness required and why do they take the risk of experimentalism? There can be several causes behind the screen. But one of the causes can be the search for the identity because new-fangled objects are usually catchy and appealing at least at the first sight like a lady driving a sedan car in the South-Asian sub-continent. Everybody wants to create the space of the identity. When the conventional route may not be befitting and goes more challenging, they resort to experimentalism as the stepping stone in terms of the form as well as the content as the emergence of the existentialism as opposed to the previous philosophies and ideologies. Next plausible reason is none other than their dream and desire to respond to the socio-political, economic, technological and cultural changes that are going on and up by leap and bound and the lion's share of the experimentalism goes to the occidental countries.

As yet another significant reason for the experimental fiction is the frustration of writers in the existing socio-political, economic and cultural structures prevalent in the society. No system in the world has been absolute in giving peace and satisfaction to the people. No -ism has been up to the mark to address the problems of the youths in spite of the material and

technological prosperity. They, basically the westerners, have been able to own the luxurious bed but not the peaceful sleep at all. There has occurred the unfathomable ditch between the materialism and spiritualism. All these frustrations, loss of hope, and anger and irritation are expressed through the experimental writing.

Still some other writers might be opting for experimentalism to revolt against the central hegemony of grand narratives, classicisms, royal populace literature and the synchrony of the culture. Further, they are against the centripetal thoughts and they want to be centrifugal and egalitarians by writing on the marginalized sects or individuals. In others words, they dream to become the voice of the voiceless. The writers prefer telling the story of the outcast and the outcasts, druggists, criminals, the marginalized, the underprivileged, the suppressed, and the depraved. Additionally, taboo themes and subject-matters like gays, lesbians, trans-genders, etc. are recurrent. Not only such themes, even the very open and straight presentation of the sex and other supposedly restricted themes are out there in the fiction. It is quite relevant to state here that such presentation of the ostracized and the tabooed community of the psychedelic characters in the name of becoming the experimental is like what Jean Paul Sartre in his lecture of 1946, entitled as, "Existentialism is Humanism," said about existentialism:

The essential charge laid against us is, of course, that of the over-emphasis upon the evil side of human life. I have been lately told of a lady who, whatever she lets slip a vulgar expression in a moment of nervousness, excuses herself exclaiming. 'I believe I am becoming an existentialist.' So it appears that ugliness is being identified with existentialism. (1)

In the name of being experimental, they tend to drag all the topics and present them in a very pornographic manner as opposed to the civility, culture and decorum of the society. Several such writers intentionally use the debased and mean language that is not spoken in the civil society. We can take *The Passion of the New Eve* by Angela Carter and *Crash* by J. G. Ballard as a few examples of such representative novels. The novel, *The Passion of New Eve* has permeated with such vulgar and obscene passages, "We can all be happy in the happy world. But Old Adam's happiness is necessarily dysfunctional. All Old Adam wants to do is to kill his father and sleep with his mother. 'The reintegration with the primal form,' said the black goddess, opining her thighs, the ramparts of darkness upon me' (16). Carter further mentions:

Her flesh seemed to be molten, burning. I caught one glimpse of her gaping vagina as I went down; it liked like the crater of a volcano on the point of eruption. Her head reared up to kiss me and, for a hallucinatory instant, I thought I saw the sun in her mouth, so that I was momentarily blinded and retain no memory of the texture of her tongue, although it seemed to me the size of a sodden bath-towel. Then her Virginia-smoked ham of a fist grasped my shrinking sex; when it went all the way in. Mother howled and so did I. So I was uncereemoniously raped. . . . (64)

Thus, the sex contents are presented in the novel. It might be appealing to raw youths, teen agers and indiscriminate people. If such works form the part of the academic course, will it not be the derailing topic to the university youths? Should such works be the part of curriculum? Are we not supposed to hold a demarcation between the decent and the indecent elements as the social being? Are we not supposed to discourage such works as a threat to the

civilization? It is verily true that experimentalism is the conveyance of change. It brings forth new, innovative and inventive ideas to the forth and enhances new dimension. But we do not think that such innovativeness and experimentalism are to be practised by opening up sex as in the sex videos and movies in a straight and vulgar cum tabooed way. We further need to hold a demarcation between the private and the public content. It is not necessary and justifiable at all that the reality should come forth as it is without garb and with nudity in the mass.

Here are further questions, Can somebody who resorts to fornication as the part of pleasure in life as we think of deriving it from sports, adventure and sight-scene, be the central character of fiction even from the perspective of the art for art's sake as outlined by Oscar Wilde? Shouldn't there be a demarcation between the decent and indecent elements? What about the borderline between aestheticism and ugliness? And so on.

Whenever we admit such fiction as the part of curriculum in the academia, can it be accepted positively? Then, it is very likely that such admission in the academia will derogate students further and will forget what is cultured and what is vulgar. Moreover, students take the elements prescribed by the university as the guideline and at time a model accepted as the established trend. Resultantly, it will create such fluidity that everyone may lose the sense of the good and the bad in writing and reading demolishing all the time-honoured traditions, norms and values sooner or later. There will not be any optimistic legacy to hand over to the posterity. In the name of the advancement, rights, and freedom and on its top, experimentalism, it may not be justifiable to accept even the taboos. Here is a further point of contention: whether we need to opt for the revolution or the evolution, slow and steady progress or radical change: everything that emerges out of the evolution is positive and acclimatized and thereof adjustable and adaptable and gets assimilated with sustainability. It is urgent that we must learn a lot from the rapid and irrevocable degradation of the environment the universe has suffered from. We need to learn from the extinction of dinosaur, dodo, passenger pigeon and thousands of species that have effaced from the earth and are still disappearing alarmingly.

Civilization and barbarism are the each other's antithesis. It is very fair to state here that if realistic fiction is symbolic of civilization, experimental fiction connotes to barbarism, lawlessness, anarchy and savagery. If we all expect ideas and emotion to be expressed in a civil manner with each other, shouldn't they be presented in a more civil manner in fiction as it is more permanent and is read by a wide and varied circle of people. Further, like many people and critics, I do feel that fiction is not mere an art of presentation but it is the platform for the expression of ideas and emotion. A writer usually becomes acclaimed on the basis of his/her ideas and emotion presented in his/her work in the given format and in a descent manner. He/she, a reputed writer, does not resort to vulgarity and uncanny structure. A good creator composes a drama not a tableau.

It is true that we need to establish new values and norms as per the need and requirement and sentiment of the people. It is also true that if there is anything that is permanent in the world, it is the change itself. But we need to know that everything done through process



and given time will be acceptable, adaptable, adoptable and sustainable. Regarding this, it is contextual to state here what Warren Buffet has said, "No matter how great the talent or efforts, some things just take time. You can't produce a baby in one month by getting nine women pregnant." Change is a must but it needs to be positive and gradual and not radical. Further, radicalism is not rewarding in most of the cases except for the emergency and at the time of war. Buffet further says:

But, then, why should I have thought it was a punishment to be transformed into a woman? Sophia may have been sorry to see my pain but she never pitied me because she knew I felt that I was being punished. . . .

But I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself, for this one was only a lyrical abstraction of femininity to me, a tinted arrangement of curved lines. I touched the breasts and the mound that were not mine. . . . ' (74)

The given passages tell the reader about the sex transformation. The character is against the forced transformation. It is an acceptable and laudable instance of experimentalism. Even the author's idea on the breaking of the family structure and substituting it by the group-living presented is yet another example of experimentalism. But the acceptance of the group living tacitly may not be acceptable to many of us and can be regarded as the anti-social feature. The question is: if the group-living had been the binding factor, how would the family come into existence and continue persistently all through and all over both from the vertical and horizontal or temporal and spatial perspectives irrespective of the geography, caste, culture, creed, philosophy, colour and so on? Family can be defined and described as the primordial, primo and instinctual foundation of the human life and culture. Even in the name of the experimentalism, efforts to do away with it will be beyond imagination.

J. G. Ballard is regarded as the powerful and original writer. His novel, *Crash*, is known as a very powerful and original work that reflects the obsession of the central characters' for car and sex, and car-crash. It is understood and agreed that the theme is new and thereof experimental. Is the obsession of car and sex worth presenting in the vulgar way as it is presented in the novel? Our concern is whether we need to vulgarize the theme in course of presentation or not. Let's take an illustration from the same novel, *Crash*, by J. G. Ballard:

"Do you like Vaughan?"

I moved my fingers to her nipple again and began to erect it. Her buttocks moved on to my penis. Her voice was pitched on a low, thick note.

'In what way?' I asked.

'He fascinates you, doesn't it?'

'There is something about him. About his obsession.'

'His ashy car, the way he drives, his loneliness. All the women he's fucked. It must smell of semen...'

'It does.'

'Do you find him attractive?'

I drew my penis from her vagina and paced the head against her anus, but she pressed it back into her vulva with a quick hand." (93)

The given extract is just the tip of the iceberg. The complete novel is profusely filled with the vulgar expression. Even the content in which a friend allows his wife to be sexed just in his presence in the car is so gruesome a presentation. Let's imagine what impact young mind will have by going through such a content? It does not seem better that a cheap commercial vulgar word picture that may appeal the depraved youths, psychedelic and obsessed mind of Peeping Tom mind-set but not worth-reading at all by the average being with or above fundamental common sense. Such elements should not be the content of encouragement in the name of experimentalism. I do not think the world even including the west, which is relatively free and liberal, can be so loose and licentious or promiscuous to admit vulgar things in any pretext like the representation of the obsessed mind, minority, etc., even in the name of experimentalism.

As to the living in the cluster as expressed in the novel, *The Passion of New Eve*, it is not admissible at all because the society does not accept it all. A man living with so many wives is the complete degradation and humiliation of women that is not accepted anywhere in the world. As it is in the novel, it is worse than even polygamy. People, even from the prehistoric time, used to live in the group by forming the cluster. But in due course of time, they learnt the formation of the family as the better and more polished and civilized social structure that brings two families together through the bond of marriage and through it, it cements the relation between two families that do not have the blood relation and thereof make them more tolerant, liberal, patient, human and builds up a larger community. To get into further positive note, several ancient and medieval kingdoms and states held very good relations among them and could avoid the subsequent wars through the marital relation.

## Conclusion

In the nutshell, it is to be stated here that experimentalism is fair from the point of view of a number of parameters stated above in the table. It opens up a lot of new avenues and dimensions to look into the content and form and even title justification. But direct, vulgar and unpolished expression in the name of experimentalism should not be accepted at all even for the creation of a better and civil world. To admit such work as a subject of study is like promoting and welcoming it even in our era and locale. Such an entry and admission means we are breaking the barrage between the good and the evil and are accepting everything without any filtration. Additionally, prescription of such texts in the academia ought to be discouraged for the refinement and civility of one and all.

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