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THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DUALISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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Abstract. This article examines the conceptualization of dualism as a sustained and evolving literary phenomenon in English literature, tracing its trajectory from the metaphysical binaries of the seventeenth century to the fragmented subjectivities of the modernist period. Drawing on canonical texts — including John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* — this study argues that dualism operates not merely as a thematic motif but as an organizing epistemological framework through which English writers interrogate identity, morality, power, and selfhood. The article contends that English literary dualism ultimately resists resolution, positioning the divided self as the most authentic and enduring figure of human experience.

Keywords: Dualism, English Literature, Binary Opposition, The Double, Gothic, Romanticism, Modernism, Identity

Introduction. Few conceptual frameworks have proven as generative, as contested, or as persistently unsettling in English literary history as dualism. From the theological antinomies that structure Milton's cosmos to the psychological fissures that animate Woolf's stream of consciousness, English literature returns again and again to the opposition of irreconcilable forces — body and soul, reason and passion, civilization and savagery, the rational and the irrational — as a means of mapping the contradictions inherent in human existence. Yet dualism in English literature is neither a stable philosophical doctrine nor a fixed rhetorical convention. It is, rather, a living and historically contingent framework, one whose manifestations shift in response to the theological anxieties of the Reformation, the rational imperatives of the Enlightenment, the Gothic fascination with the unconscious, and the modernist dissolution of stable subjectivity.

This article advances three principal arguments. First, that dualism in English literature is historically contingent — its forms and intensities evolving across centuries in response to specific cultural, philosophical, and political pressures. Second, that the binaries characteristic of English literary dualism are not symmetrical oppositions but hierarchically structured tensions, in which one term consistently suppresses, haunts, or destabilizes the other. Third, and most fundamentally, that English literary dualism resists resolution: the texts examined here do not reconcile their oppositions but dramatize the



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impossibility of synthesis, positioning the divided self as the most authentic and enduring figure of human experience.

Methodology. This study uses a qualitative, text-based research design within the framework of historical-comparative literary criticism. To examine the representation of dualism in English literature, the research combines three main analytical methods: close reading, historical contextualisation, and intertextual analysis.

Close reading is used to explore how dualistic ideas are expressed through language, imagery, characters, and narrative structures in selected literary works. Historical contextualisation helps place these texts within their social, cultural, and intellectual backgrounds, allowing for a better understanding of how contemporary beliefs and philosophical ideas shaped literary representations of dualism. Intertextual analysis is employed to identify connections between texts from different periods and to trace how dualistic themes have been adapted, challenged, or reinterpreted over time.

By combining these approaches, the study provides a comprehensive examination of dualism as both a philosophical concept and a literary technique across five centuries of English literature.

Result. The analysis of the selected literary texts revealed four major patterns in the representation of dualism across English literature. The study found that dualistic ideas are represented differently depending on the historical period in which a text was written. In John Milton's "Paradise Lost", dualism appears primarily as a religious conflict between God and Satan, Heaven and Hell, and obedience and rebellion. These oppositions are presented as absolute and grounded in Christian belief. In Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway", traditional dualistic oppositions become increasingly unstable. Conrad questions the distinction between civilization and savagery, while Woolf challenges clear divisions between self and other, past and present, and inner and outer reality.

Binary oppositions are unequal and unstable another important finding is that the binary oppositions in these texts are usually organized hierarchically. One side of the opposition is often presented as more valuable or powerful than the other. For example, God is placed above Satan in "Paradise Lost", civilization is portrayed as superior to savagery in "Heart of Darkness". However, the analysis also revealed that these hierarchies are rarely stable. In each text, the supposedly weaker or subordinate term challenges the authority of the dominant one. Satan attracts considerable reader attention, Conrad exposes the weaknesses of European civilization. As a result, the texts repeatedly question the reliability of the hierarchies they initially establish. Moreover, the study found that dualism is expressed not only through themes but also through narrative structure and literary technique. In "Paradise Lost", the contrast between God's authority and Satan's rebellion is reinforced through the poem's structure and language. In "Frankenstein", the multiple narrative layers create a pattern of doubling that mirrors the relationship between Victor and the Creature. In "Mrs Dalloway", Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique blurs boundaries between characters, memories, and experiences, reflecting the breakdown of



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traditional dualistic thinking. These examples demonstrate that literary form plays an important role in shaping and communicating dualistic ideas.

A final finding is that the major dualistic tensions in the selected texts are rarely fully resolved. Although the narratives often move toward some form of conclusion, the central oppositions remain open and unresolved. In “Paradise Lost”, the conflict between theological doctrine and the reader's sympathy for Satan remains unsettled. In “Frankenstein”, the deaths of Victor and the Creature do not answer the ethical questions raised throughout the novel. Across the corpus, the texts suggest that human experience is shaped by contradictions that cannot be completely reconciled. Rather than offering simple solutions, the works encourage readers to confront and reflect on these tensions.

Discussion. According to the analysis, we have figured out that, dualism has remained a significant feature of English literature, but its meaning and function have changed considerably across different historical periods. Rather than presenting a fixed understanding of binary opposition, the selected texts reveal an ongoing process of reinterpretation that reflects broader intellectual and cultural developments.

One of the most significant findings is the historical transformation of dualistic thinking. In early texts such as *Paradise Lost*, dualism is largely rooted in Christian theology, where the opposition between good and evil is presented as absolute and divinely ordained. However, as the literary tradition develops, these clear distinctions become increasingly questioned. By the modernist period, Woolf challenges the very possibility of stable binary categories. This progression suggests that English literature reflects a broader shift from religious certainty toward psychological complexity and philosophical uncertainty.

The study also highlights the unstable nature of binary oppositions. Although many texts initially establish hierarchical relationships between opposing concepts, these hierarchies are repeatedly undermined throughout the narratives. This finding supports the argument that literary texts often expose the limitations of rigid dualistic thinking. The dominant term in a binary opposition frequently depends upon the subordinate term for its meaning, making complete separation impossible. As a result, the texts reveal the interconnectedness of concepts that initially appear opposed.

Another important contribution of the study is the recognition that dualism operates not only as a thematic concern but also as a structural principle. The selected authors use narrative form, characterization, and literary technique to embody the tensions they explore. For example, the layered narrative structure of *Frankenstein* mirrors the novel's exploration of doubling and divided identity, while Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narration challenges traditional distinctions between self and other. These formal strategies demonstrate that literary form actively participates in the construction and critique of dualistic ideas rather than simply representing them.

Perhaps the most significant finding is the persistent lack of resolution within the texts. None of the works examined offers a complete reconciliation of the oppositions it presents. Instead, the texts leave readers with ambiguity, tension, and unanswered



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questions. This suggests that English literature treats dualism not as a problem that can be permanently solved but as a fundamental aspect of human experience. The continued presence of unresolved conflict reflects the complexity of individual identity, morality, and social reality.

These findings contribute to existing scholarship by demonstrating that dualism should be understood as a dynamic and evolving literary framework rather than a static philosophical doctrine. The selected texts reveal how writers across different periods adapted dualistic structures to address the concerns of their own historical moments. At the same time, they consistently challenge the possibility of absolute divisions between opposing concepts. In this way, English literature provides a unique space for exploring the ambiguities and contradictions that characterize human existence.

Conclusion. This study has shown that dualism in English literature is not a fixed idea or a stable philosophical concept. Instead, it is a flexible framework that has changed over time in response to different historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts. From Milton's religious vision of the universe to Woolf's exploration of human consciousness, English writers have repeatedly used binary oppositions to examine the complexities and contradictions of human life. However, these oppositions rarely remain clear or stable. As the texts develop, the boundaries between opposing concepts become blurred, challenged, and often impossible to fully resolve.

The findings of this study reveal four key characteristics of literary dualism. First, dualistic representations are shaped by the historical period in which they are produced. Second, binary oppositions are usually organized as hierarchies, yet these hierarchies often undermine themselves. Third, dualism is expressed not only through themes but also through narrative structure and literary form. Finally, the tensions created by dualistic thinking are rarely resolved. Together, these findings suggest that English literature does not seek to provide definitive answers to questions about identity, morality, or human nature. Instead, it explores these questions from different perspectives, allowing readers to engage with their complexity.

The persistence of dualism throughout the English literary tradition points to a deeper understanding of human experience. The texts examined in this study repeatedly portray individuals as divided beings, caught between competing forces such as body and soul, reason and emotion, public identity and private self. Rather than offering a solution to these conflicts, literature presents them as an unavoidable part of what it means to be human. In doing so, it encourages readers to reflect on the contradictions that shape both personal identity and social life.

Ultimately, the significance of English literary dualism lies not in its ability to resolve human tensions but in its willingness to confront them. By acknowledging uncertainty, ambiguity, and internal conflict, the literary tradition offers valuable insights into the complexity of human existence. This enduring engagement with dividedness remains one of the most important contributions of English literature to broader discussions of selfhood, morality, and the human condition.



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Future research could expand this study in several ways. Comparative investigations might explore how dualism is represented in other European literary traditions and how these representations differ from those found in English literature. Further studies could also examine postcolonial and feminist critiques of binary thinking, particularly in relation to issues of power, identity, gender, and cultural difference. Finally, future research may consider how contemporary English literature continues to engage with dualistic ideas in an era increasingly influenced by postmodern and post human perspectives.

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