

P.G SEM-II
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UNIT-V

POST MODERNISM

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CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM

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An emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity in writing (and in visual arts as well);

- An emphasis on HOW seeing (or reading or perception itself) takes place, rather than on WHAT is perceived. An example of this would be stream-of-consciousness writing.
- a movement away from the apparent objectivity provided by omniscient third-person narrators, fixed narrative points of view, and clear-cut moral positions.
- Faulkner's multiple narrated stories are an example of this aspect of modernism.
- A blurring of distinctions between genres, so that poetry seems more documentary (as in T.S. Eliot or E.E Cummings) and prose seems more poetic (as in Woolf or Joyce).
- An emphasis on fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives, and random-seeming collages of different materials.
- A tendency toward reflexivity, or self-consciousness, about the production of the work of art, so that each piece calls attention to its own status as a production, as something constructed and consumed in particular ways.
- A rejection of elaborate formal aesthetics in favor of minimalist designs (as in the poetry of William Carlos Williams) and a rejection, in large part, of formal aesthetic theories, in favor of spontaneity and discovery in creation.
- A rejection of the distinction between "high" and "low" or popular culture, both in choice of materials used to produce art and in methods of displaying, distributing, and consuming art.

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POST MODERNISM VS MODERNISM

- Postmodernism, like modernism, follows most of these same ideas, rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, rejecting rigid genre distinctions, emphasizing pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony, and playfulness.
 - Postmodern art (and thought) favors reflexivity and self-consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity (especially in narrative structures), ambiguity, simultaneity, and an emphasis on the de-structured, decentered, dehumanized subject.
 - While postmodernism seems very much like modernism in these ways, it differs from modernism in its attitude toward a lot of these trends.
- Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history (The Wasteland, for instance, or Woolf's To the Lighthouse), but presents that fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss.
 - Many modernist works try to uphold the idea that works of art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which has been lost in most of modern life; art will do what other human institutions fail to do.
 - Postmodernism, in contrast, doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that. The world is meaningless?

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WHAT IS POST MODERNISM?

- Postmodernism is a broad range of:
 - a. Responses to modernism, refusals of some of its totalizing premises and effects, and of its implicit or explicit distinction between “high” culture and commonly lived life
 - b. Responses to such things as a world lived under nuclear threat and threat to the geosphere, to a world of faster communication, mass mediated reality, greater diversity of cultures and mores and a consequent pluralism
 - Re-conceptualizations of society, history and the self as cultural constructs, hence as rhetorical constructs Postmodern literature
- Postmodernism is a term that encompasses a wide-range of developments in philosophy, film, architecture, art, literature, and culture.
 - Originally a reaction to modernism, referring to the lack of artistic, intellectual, or cultural thought or organized principle.
 - Started around 1940s, exact date is unknown.
 - Peaked around the 1960s and 1970s with the release of Catch 22 and Slaughterhouse Five

WHAT IS POST MODERN LITERATURE?

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Postmodern Literature

- There are a few similarities to modernist literature.
- Like modernist literature, both are usually told from an objective or omniscient point of view.
- Both literatures explore the external reality to examine the inner states of consciousness of the characters
- Both employ fragmentation in narrative and character construction

- Postmodernist Literature contains a broad range of concepts and ideas that include:

- RESPONSES TO MODERNISM AND ITS IDEAS
- RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES
- GREATER DIVERSITY OF CULTURES THAT LEADS TO CULTURAL PLURALISM. (SMALL GROUPS WITHIN A LARGER SOCIETY MAINTAIN THEIR CULTURE IDENTITY).
- RECONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SOCIETY AND HISTORY

POST-MODERN THEORY AND THEORISTS

Jean-Francis Lyotard (1924-1998)

- ▶ French post-structuralist philosopher, best known for his highly influential formulation of postmodernism in *The Postmodern Condition*. Despite its popularity, however, this book is in fact one of his more minor works. Lyotard's writings cover a large range of topics in philosophy, politics, and aesthetics, and experiment with a wide variety of styles. His works can be roughly divided into three categories: early writings on phenomenology, politics, and the critique of structuralism, the intermediate libidinal philosophy, and later work on postmodernism and the "differend." The majority of his work, however, is unified by a consistent view that reality consists of singular events which cannot be represented accurately by rational theory. For Lyotard, this fact has a deep political import, since politics claims to be based on accurate representations of reality. Lyotard's philosophy exhibits many of the major themes common to post-structuralist and postmodernist thought. He calls into question the powers of reason, asserts the importance of nonrational forces such as sensations and emotions, rejects humanism and the traditional philosophical notion of the human being as the central subject of knowledge, champions heterogeneity and difference, and suggests that the understanding of society in terms of "progress" has been made obsolete by the scientific, technological, political and cultural changes of the late twentieth century. Lyotard deals with these common themes in a highly original way, and his work exceeds many popular conceptions of postmodernism in its depth, imagination, and rigor. His thought remains pivotal in contemporary debates surrounding philosophy, politics, social theory, cultural studies, art and aesthetics.

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)

- ▶ The term "poststructuralism" refers to a critical perspective that emerged during the seventies which has dethroned structuralism as the dominant trend in language and textual theory. In order to understand poststructuralism, we need to examine it in relation to structuralism. Deconstructionist criticism subscribes to the poststructuralist vision of language, wherein the signifier (the form of a sign) does not refer to a definite signified (the content of a sign), but produces other signifiers instead. Derrida (1978, 278) takes issue with the centre inherent in the "structurality of structure". Turning to Claude Lévi-Strauss as a representative of structuralist theory, Derrida uses the prohibition of incest and the oppositions nature/culture and universal/prescriptive to show that this structure can no longer withstand scrutiny: "The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural" (Derrida, 1978, 283).
- ▶ Derrida thus rejects all of metaphysical history with its hierarchies and dichotomies that have survived to this day, the foundation upon which all of *logic* (*logos*, which means language) was laid. Derrida has rejected structuralism, and as a result, the Saussurean schema (the signifier/signified relationship) has been rethought.

POST-MODERN THEORY AND THEORISTS

Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007)

- ▶ According to Baudrillard, what has happened in postmodern culture is that our society has become so reliant on models and maps that we have lost all contact with the real world that preceded the map. Reality itself has begun merely to imitate the model, which now precedes and determines the real world: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory". According to Baudrillard, when it comes to postmodern simulation and simulacra, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real". Baudrillard is not merely suggesting that postmodern culture is artificial, because the concept of artificiality still requires some sense of reality against which to recognize the artifice. His point, rather, is that we have lost all ability to make sense of the distinction between nature and artifice. To clarify his point, he argues that there are three "orders of simulacra": 1) in the first order of simulacra, which he associates with the pre-modern period, the image is a clear counterfeit of the real; the image is recognized as just an illusion, a place marker for the real; 2) in the second order of simulacra, which Baudrillard associates with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the distinctions between the image and the representation begin to break down because of mass production and the proliferation of copies. Such production misrepresents and masks an underlying reality by imitating it so well, thus threatening to replace it (e.g. in photography or ideology); however, there is still a belief that, through critique or effective political action, one can still access the hidden fact of the real; 3) in the third order of simulacra, which is associated with the postmodern age, we are confronted with a *precession* of simulacra; that is, the representation *precedes* and *determines* the real. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum.

Fredric Jameson (1934-)

- ▶ FREDRIC JAMESON, in his magisterial work, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), has offered us a particularly influential analysis of our current postmodern condition. Like Jean Baudrillard, whose concept of the simulacrum he adopts, Jameson is highly critical of our current historical situation; indeed, he paints a rather dystopic picture of the present, which he associates, in particular, with a loss of our connection to history. What we are left with is a fascination with the present. According to Jameson, postmodernity has transformed the historical past into a series of emptied-out stylizations (what Jameson terms pastiche) that can then be commodified and consumed. The result is the threatened victory of capitalist thinking over all other forms of thought.
- ▶ Jameson contrasts this postmodern situation with the modernist situation that has been superceded. Whereas modernism still believed in "some residual zones of 'nature' or 'being,' of the old, the older, the archaic" and still believed that one could "do something to that nature and work at transforming that 'referent'" (ix), postmodernism has lost a sense of any distinction between the Real and Culture. For Jameson, postmodernity amounts to "an immense dilation of [culture's] sphere (the sphere of commodities), an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real" (x). Whereas "modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself," postmodernism "is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (x). That apparent victory of commodification over all spheres of life marks postmodernity's reliance on the "cultural logic of late capitalism."

COMMON THEMES AND TECHNIQUES USED IN POSTMODERNISM

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- **Irony, playfulness, black humour** - although the idea of employing these in literature didn't start with the postmodernists (the modernists were often playful and ironic), they became central features in many postmodern works. Postmodern novelists labeled as black humorists were John Barth, Joseph Heller, Bruce Jay Friedman.
- **Pastiche** - pastiche means 'to combine' or 'to paste' together multiple elements. In postmodernist literature this can be an homage to or a parody of past styles. It can be a combination of multiple genres to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in postmodernity.
- **Metafiction** - is writing about 'writing' or 'foregrounding the apparatus'. Metafiction is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, to advance the story in a unique way or to comment of the act of the storytelling.
- **Intertextuality** - is actually the relationship between one text (a novel) and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history. Intertextuality in postmodern literature can be a reference or parallel to another literary work, an extended discussion of a work or the adoption of a style.
- In postmodern literature this manifests as references to fairy tales. example of intertextuality which influenced later postmodernists is "Pierre Menard Author of the Quixote" by Jorge Louis Borges, a story with significant references to *Don Quixote* which is also a good example of intertextuality with its references to Medieval romances.
- Another examples of intertextuality in postmodernism are *The Sot - Weed Factor* by John Barth, *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco.

COMMON THEMES AND TECHNIQUES USED IN POSTMODERNISM

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- ***Fabulation*** - is a term sometimes used interchangeably with metafiction and relates to pastiche and Magic Realism. It is rejection of realism which embraces the notion that literature is a created work and not bound by notions of mimesis and verisimilitude. Fabulation challenges some traditional notions of literature—the traditional structure of a novel or role of the narrator, for example—and integrates other traditional notions of storytelling, including fantastical elements, such as magic and myth, or elements from popular genres such as science fiction. The term was coined by Robert Scholes in his book *The Fabulators*.
- ***Paranoia*** - The sense of paranoia or the belief that there is an ordering system behind the chaos of the world is another recurring postmodern theme. For the postmodernists, no ordering is extremely dependent upon the subject so paranoia often straddles the line between delusion and brilliant insight.
- ***Poioumena - Poiuomenon*** (plural: poioumena from Ancient Greek meaning product, a term coined by Alastair Fowler to refer to a specific type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation. It offers opportunities to explore the boundaries of fiction and reality - the limits of narrative truth.
- ***Temporal Distortion*** - a common technique in modernist fiction: fragmentation and non-linear narratives are central features in both modern and postmodern literature. In postmodern fiction was used in a variety of ways often for the sake of irony.

COMMON THEMES AND TECHNIQUES USED IN POSTMODERNISM

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- **Magic Realism** - may be literary work marked by the use of still, sharply defined, smoothly painted images of figures and objects depicted in a surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects are often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality. Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction are the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable.
- Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez is also regarded as a notable exponent of this kind of fiction—especially his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
- **Fragmentation** - another important aspect of postmodern literature. Various elements, concerning plot, characters, themes, imagery and factual references are fragmented and dispersed throughout the entire work.
- In general, there is an interrupted sequence of events, character development and action which can at first glance look modern, it purports, however, to depict a metaphysically unfounded, chaotic universe.
- Fragmentation can occur in language, sentence structure or grammar.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

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- John Barth , wrote an influential essay in 1967 "The Literature of Exhaustion" where he stated about the need for the new era in literature after modernism had exhausted itself.
- Many of the well - known postmodern novels deal with WWII, one of the most famous was Joseph Heller's "Catch 22". The antiwar and anti government feelings in the book belong to the period following the WWII.
- The general disintegration of belief took place then and it affected Catch 22 in that the form of the novel almost disintegrated.
- The novelist Umberto Eco explains his idea of postmodernism as a kind of double coding and as a transhistorical phenomenon in his book "The Name of the Rose". Barbara Cartland thinks that postmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined but as a ideal category or a way of operating.
- Postmodernism can be used at least in two ways – firstly, to give a label to the period after 1968, and secondly to describe the highly experimental literature produced by writers beginning with Lawrence Durrell and John Fowles in the 1960.
- Examples of postmodern literature:
 - Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes

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