

**FROM MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNISM: LITERARY  
FRAGMENTATION AND THE CRISIS OF MEANING IN TWENTIETH-  
CENTURY LITERATURE.**

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**Abstract.** Postmodernism cannot be fully understood without a solid understanding of modernism, particularly its development in literature. Modernism emerged in the early twentieth century and gained significant influence after the First World War, reflecting the rapid social, technological, and industrial changes of the time. Modernist writers grappled with a fragmented and unstable world in which traditional values and predictable structures had collapsed. As a result, modernist literary works often expressed feelings of alienation, despair, and absurdity, while simultaneously seeking to restore meaning to human existence. These works were frequently characterized by fragmented narratives, incoherent meanings, and a crisis of personal identity. An additional and significant aspect of modernism is its ambiguous relationship with colonialism.

**Introduction.** In literary studies, postmodernism is often approached as a reaction against modernism; therefore, a comprehensive understanding of postmodernism requires prior knowledge of modernist literature. Modernism developed as a literary and artistic movement in the early twentieth century and became especially influential in the aftermath of the First World War. This period was marked by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and social transformation, which disrupted long-standing cultural norms and systems of meaning.

**Main body.** Modernist writers sought to represent a world that had become unstable and fragmented. The sense of certainty that once defined human experience was replaced by feelings of disillusionment, anxiety, and meaninglessness. Consequently, modernist literature often portrays psychological depth, inner conflict, and a profound struggle to rediscover meaning in an increasingly chaotic world. Fragmentation, narrative discontinuity, and the loss of a coherent personal identity are among the defining characteristics of modernist texts. Another important dimension of modernism is its complex and often controversial engagement with colonialism. While some

modernist works appear to expose the moral ambiguities of imperial expansion, modernism has been criticized for not fully questioning colonial power structures. Instead, colonialism was sometimes portrayed as a force that contributed to Europe's sense of order and stability. Modernism continued to dominate literary discourse until the end of the Second World War, when postmodernism began to emerge, challenging modernist ideals of coherence, meaning, and authority. Understanding these modernist foundations is essential for analyzing the philosophical and aesthetic shifts that define postmodern literature. Although modernist texts, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, sometimes questioned colonial practices, modernism has been criticized for failing to fundamentally challenge colonial ideologies and for implicitly supporting Europe's stabilizing self-image. Modernism remained dominant until the end of the Second World War, after which postmodernism began to emerge as a response to and critique of modernist assumptions. This thesis examines modernism as a necessary foundation for understanding the development and characteristics of postmodernism. After the modernist movement of the twentieth century, a new era emerged in American poetry namely, postmodernism, a radical and revolutionary movement grounded in the principles of deconstruction and decentering. Deconstruction involves the complete rejection of established structures and meanings in order to create new ones, while decentering refers to the dispersion of fixed or stable meanings within any given phenomenon. In postmodern thought, the center of any system is considered fictional; centralized authority is dismantled, and meaning becomes dependent on multiple, shifting factors rather than a single dominant source.

A postmodern interpretation is unlikely to lead to a unified or elevated poetic worldview. As noted by Ulugbek Hamdam, postmodernism follows modernism (with "post" meaning "after") and represents an extremely complex and multifaceted literary phenomenon. Although it is referred to as a literary movement, postmodernism like modernism has deeply influenced human consciousness and worldview, making it a broad, contradictory, and unresolved phenomenon. Critical perspectives on postmodernism remain incomplete because the movement itself is still ongoing. It is often argued that wherever chaos exists, postmodernism is also present and chaos, in the contemporary world, is pervasive.

Postmodern literary works are highly diverse and may differ significantly in terms of plot structure, national origin, and genre. Literary critics frequently disagree on which works should be classified as postmodern. Despite these differences, several texts are commonly cited as representative examples of postmodern literature. These include *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, *The Blind Assassin*

by Margaret Atwood, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Italo Calvino, *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

**Conclusion.** Postmodern literature represents a distinctive literary mode characterized by stylistic and ideological fragmentation, paradox, and a deliberate rejection of traditional narrative conventions. It frequently employs unreliable narrators, unrealistic or entirely impossible plots, and relies on techniques such as playfulness, parody, paranoia, and black humor to challenge established literary norms. Central to postmodern writing is the emphasis on authorial self-awareness and experimentation, which destabilizes the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Rather than offering fixed or singular meanings, postmodern authors intentionally resist direct interpretation. Their novels, short stories, and poems often present multiple, competing meaning or, in some cases, celebrate the absence of meaning altogether. Through this rejection of narrative certainty and interpretive closure, postmodern literature invites readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning. Ultimately, postmodernism reshapes literary discourse by questioning authority, coherence, and truth, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of contemporary human experience.

#### **List of used literature:**

1. Beckett, S. (1953). *Waiting for Godot*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
2. Calvino, I. (1979). *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
3. Conrad, J. (1899). *Heart of Darkness*. London: Blackwood's Magazine.
4. Ellis, B. E. (1991). *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage Books.
5. García Márquez, G. (1967). *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.
6. Heller, J. (1961). *Catch-22*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
7. Vonnegut, K. (1969). *Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York: Delacorte Press.
8. Wallace, D. F. (1996). *Infinite Jest*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.