

# Essay on postmodernism in modern literature

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Post-modernism is a literary construct wherein actual modernism is critiqued – modernism being the Enlightenment-like idea that one needs only to be confident in oneself in order to accomplish anything, from life goals to wealth. In the books *Blood Meridian* and *The Fountainhead*, post-modernist viewpoints allow the authors to deconstruct this confidence, demonstrating how immaterial and ineffective it can be. The short stories “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot” and “Jackson is Only One of my Dogs” also use postmodernism to deconstruct what it means to be normal and modern.

Cormac McCarthy’s novel *Blood Meridian* follows an unnamed teenage protagonist in the 19th century who ends up following a group of scalp hunters. The book is an extremely postmodern one, in that the character of Judge Holden (the villain of the piece) is decidedly too just, providing an ever-encroaching sense of danger for the protagonist and his colleagues, who simply want to live free. Time is fleeting in the book, most of the dialogue and prose being ambiguous in scope and subject, the reader never really having a full grasp of what the kid is going through.

In Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark goes through his architectural career seeking to remain true to his own artistic beliefs rather than sell out or compromise them for money. However, from a postmodern viewpoint, Howard Roark’s confidence meant to be satirized, as he feels as though he knows everything and can do anything, when the reality of his situation is far less ideal. There are often strict divisions between social constructs (man and woman, individual versus corporation) in the book, which only work as a parody of modernism; in the end, despite any obstacles he encounters, Roark is exonerated for his crimes and he gets the love of his

life, whom he had raped earlier in the book. Things are far too cut and dry in *The Fountainhead* to be a strictly postmodernist work; therefore, it must be considered a parody of modernism to work in this context.

In the short story “Jealous Husband returns in Form of Parrot,” reality is shown to be fragmented and individual for each person or animal. One of the opening lines from the titular man (reincarnated into a parrot) is, “I look at other parrots and I wonder if it’s the same [experience] for them, if somebody is trapped in each of them paying some kind of price for living their life a certain way.” This demonstrates the ambiguous and illusory nature of life, as everyone has different experiences – also, the reason for the man’s transformation is never made quite clear, leaving it up to the audience.

“Jackson Is Only One of My Dogs” portrays a similar situation – the relationship between man and animal. In this, the protagonist provides a fractured narrative, wherein we jump in and out of her life and relationship with her animals (and lovers) at varying points, focusing on themes more than a linear narrative. This takes us through more of an emotional, character-driven journey than a narrative one, making it nearly impossible to gather a strict timeline from it. However, we gain an insight into how the protagonist thinks, in the finest postmodern tradition. All of these works use postmodernism to great effect, either playing with time or theme, or even providing a strict parody of the emptiness of modernism, as the genre itself is a reaction to modernism.

## **Works Cited**

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