

# Postmodernism in literature assignment

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Postmodern literature The term Postmodern literature is used to describe certain tendencies in post-World War II literature. It is both a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period (relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc.) and a reaction against Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature. Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is difficult to define and there is little agreement on the exact characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature.

However, unifying features often coincide with Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of the " meta-narrative" and " little narrative", Jacques Derrida's concept of " play", and Jean Baudrillard's " simulacra". For example, instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world, the postmodern author eschews, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest. This distrust of totalizing mechanisms extends even to the author; thus postmodern writers often celebrate chance over craft and employ metafiction to undermine the author's " univocal" control (the control of only one voice).

The distinction between high and low culture is also attacked with the employment of pastiche, the combination of multiple cultural elements including subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature. A list of postmodern authors often varies; the following are some names of authors often so classified, most of them belonging to the generation born in the interwar period: William Burroughs (1914-1997) Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007), John Barth (b. 1930), Donald Barthelme (1931-1989), E. L. Doctorow (b. 1931), Robert Coover (1932), Jerzy Kosinski (1933-1991) Don DeLillo (b. <https://assignbuster.com/postmodernism-in-literature-assignment/>

936), Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937), Ishmael Reed (1938), Kathy Acker (1947-1997), Paul Auster (b. 1947). [1] Significant pre-cursors Postmodernist writers often point to early novels and story collections as inspiration for their experiments with narrative and structure: Don Quixote, 1001 Arabian Nights, The Decameron, and Candide, among many others. In the English language, Laurence Sterne's 1759 novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, with its heavy emphasis on parody and narrative experimentation, is often cited as an early echo of postmodernism.

Other significant examples of 18th century parody include the works of Jonathan Swift and *Shamela* by Henry Fielding. There were many 19th century examples of attacks on Enlightenment concepts, parody, and playfulness in literature including Lord Byron's satire, especially *Don Juan*; Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*; Alfred Jarry's ribald *Ubu* parodies and his invention of 'Pataphysics; Lewis Carroll's playful experiments with signification; the work of Isidore Ducasse, Arthur Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, etc.

Playwrights who worked in the late 19th and early 20th century whose thought and work influenced the aesthetic of postmodernism include Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, the Italian author Luigi Pirandello, and the German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht. In the 1910s, artists associated with Dadaism celebrated chance, parody, playfulness, and attacked the central role of the artist. Tristan Tzara claimed in "How to Make a Dadaist Poem" that to create a Dadaist poem one had only to put random words in a hat and pull them out one by one.

Another way Dadaism influenced postmodern literature was in the development of collage, specifically collages using elements from advertisement or illustrations from popular novels (the collages of Max Ernst, for example). Artists associated with Surrealism, which developed from Dadaism, continued experimentations with chance and parody while celebrating the flow of the subconscious. Andre Breton, the founder of Surrealism, suggested that automatism and the description of dreams should play a greater role in the creation of literature.

He used automatism to create his novel *Nadja* and used photographs to replace description as a parody of the overly-descriptive novelists he often criticized. Surrealist Rene Magritte's experiments with signification are used as examples by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Foucault also uses examples from Jorge Luis Borges, an important direct influence on many Postmodernist fiction writers. He is occasionally listed as a Postmodernist though he started writing in the 1920s. The influence of his experiments with metafiction and magical realism was not fully realized until the postmodern period. 2] Comparisons with modernist literature Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from 19th century realism, in which a story was told from an objective or omniscient point of view. In character development, both modern and postmodern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the stream of consciousness styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, or explorative poems like *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot.

In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction. *The Waste Land* is often cited as a means of distinguishing modern and postmodern literature. The poem is fragmentary and employs pastiche like much postmodern literature, but the speaker in *The Waste Land* says, “ these fragments I have shored against my ruins”. Modernist literature sees fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis, or Freudian internal conflict, a problem that must be solved, and the artist is often cited as the one to solve it.

Postmodernists, however, often demonstrate that this chaos is insurmountable; the artist is impotent, and the only recourse against “ ruin” is to play within the chaos. Playfulness is present in many modernist works (Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* or Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, for example) and they may seem very similar to postmodern works, but with postmodernism playfulness becomes central and the actual achievement of order and meaning becomes unlikely. [3] Shift to postmodernism As with all stylistic eras, no definite dates exist for the rise and fall of postmodernism’s popularity. 1941, the year in which Irish novelist James Joyce and British novelist Virginia Woolf both died, is sometimes used as a rough boundary for postmodernism’s start. The prefix ‘ post,’ however, does not necessarily imply a new era. Rather, it could also indicate a reaction against modernism in the wake of the Second World War (with its disrespect for human rights, just confirmed in the Geneva Convention, through the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, the bombing of Dresden, the fire-bombing of Tokyo, and Japanese American internment). It could also imply a reaction to significant post-war events: the beginning of the Cold War, the

civil rights movement in the United States, postcolonialism (Postcolonial literature), and the rise of the personal computer (Cyberpunk fiction and Hypertext fiction). [4][5][6] Some further argue that the beginning of postmodern literature could be marked by significant publications or literary events. For example, some mark the beginning of postmodernism with the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* in 1953, the first publication of *Howl* in 1956 or of *Naked Lunch* in 1959.

For others the beginning is marked by moments in critical theory: Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" lecture in 1966 or as late as Ihab Hassan's usage in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* in 1971. Post-war developments and transition figures Though Postmodernist literature does not refer to everything written in the postmodern period, several post-war developments in literature (such as the Theatre of the Absurd, the Beat Generation, and Magical Realism) have significant similarities.

These developments are occasionally collectively labeled "postmodern"; more commonly, some key figures (Samuel Beckett, William S. Burroughs, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar and Gabriel Garcia Marquez) are cited as significant contributors to the postmodern aesthetic. The work of Jarry, the Surrealists, Antonin Artaud, Luigi Pirandello and so on also influenced the work of playwrights from the Theatre of the Absurd.

The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin to describe a tendency in theatre in the 1950s; he related it to Albert Camus's concept of the absurd. The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd parallel postmodern fiction in many ways. For example, *The Bald Soprano* by Eugene Ionesco is

essentially a series of clichés taken from a language textbook. One of the most important figures to be categorized as both Absurdist and Postmodern is Samuel Beckett. The work of Samuel Beckett is often seen as marking the shift from modernism to postmodernism in literature.

He had close ties with modernism because of his friendship with James Joyce; however, his work helped shape the development of literature away from modernism. Joyce, one of the exemplars of modernism, celebrated the possibility of language; Beckett had a revelation in 1945 that, in order to escape the shadow of Joyce, he must focus on the poverty of language and man as a failure. His later work, likewise, featured characters stuck in inescapable situations attempting impotently to communicate whose only recourse is to play, to make the best of what they have.

As Hans-Peter Wagner says, “ Mostly concerned with what he saw as impossibilities in fiction (identity of characters; reliable consciousness; the reliability of language itself; and the rubrication of literature in genres) Beckett’s experiments with narrative form and with the disintegration of narration and character in fiction and drama won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. His works published after 1969 are mostly meta-literary attempts that must be read in light of his own theories and previous works and the attempt to deconstruct literary forms and genres. ... ] Beckett’s last text published during his lifetime, *Stirrings Still* (1988), breaks down the barriers between drama, fiction, and poetry, with texts of the collection being almost entirely composed of echoes and reiterations of his previous work [... ] He was definitely one of the fathers of the postmodern movement in fiction which has continued undermining the ideas of logical coherence in <https://assignbuster.com/postmodernism-in-literature-assignment/>

narration, formal plot, regular time sequence, and psychologically explained characters. [7] “ The Beat Generation” is a name coined by Jack Kerouac for the disaffected youth of America during the materialistic 1950’s; Kerouac developed ideas of automatism into what he called “ spontaneous prose” to create a maximalistic, multi-novel epic called the Duluoz Legend in the mold of Marcel Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past. “ Beat Generation” is often used more broadly to refer to several groups of post-war American writers from the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance, and so on.

These writers have occasionally also been referred to as the “ Postmoderns” (see especially references by Charles Olson and the Grove anthologies edited by Donald Allen). Though this is now a less common usage of “ postmodern”, references to these writers as “ postmodernists” still appear and many writers associated with this group (John Ashbery, Richard Brautigan, Gilbert Sorrentino, and so on) appear often on lists of postmodern writers. One writer associated with the Beat Generation who appears most often on lists of postmodern writers is William S. Burroughs. Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* in Paris in 1959 and in America in 1961; this is considered by some the first truly postmodern novel because it is fragmentary, with no central narrative arc; it employs pastiche to fold in elements from popular genres such as detective fiction and science fiction; it’s full of parody, paradox, and playfulness; and, according to some accounts, friends Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg edited the book guided by chance. He is also noted, along with Brion Gysin, for the creation of the “ cut-up” technique, a technique (similar to Tzara’s “ Dadaist Poem”) in which

words and phrases are cut from a newspaper or other publication and rearranged to form a new message.

This is the technique he used to create novels such as *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*. Magical Realism is a technique popular among Latin American writers (and can also be considered its own genre) in which supernatural elements are treated as mundane (a famous example being the practical-minded and ultimately dismissive treatment of an apparently angelic figure in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"). Though the technique has its roots in traditional storytelling, it was a center piece of the Latin American "boom", a movement coterminous with postmodernism.

Some of the major figures of the "Boom" and practitioners of Magical Realism (Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortazar etc. ) are often listed as postmodernists. Many postmodernists not from Latin America (Salman Rushdie, Italo Calvino, Gunter Grass, etc. ) commonly use Magical Realism in their work. [8] Along with Beckett and Borges, a commonly cited transitional figure is Vladimir Nabokov; like Beckett and Borges, Nabokov started publishing before the beginning of postmodernity (1926 in Russian, 1941 in English).

Though his most famous novel, *Lolita* (1955), could be considered a modernist or a postmodernist novel, his later work (specifically *Pale Fire* in 1962 and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* in 1969) are more clearly postmodern. [9] The scope Postmodernism in literature is not an organized movement with leaders or central figures; therefore, it is more difficult to say

if it has ended or when it will end (compared to, say, declaring the end of modernism with the death of Joyce or Woolf). Arguably postmodernism peaked in the 60s and 70s with the publication of *Catch-22* in 1961, *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968, *Slaughterhouse Five* in 1969, *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973, and many others. Some declared the death of postmodernism in the 80's with a new surge of realism represented and inspired by Raymond Carver. Tom Wolfe in his 1989 article "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast" called for a new emphasis on realism in fiction to replace postmodernism. [10] With this new emphasis on realism in mind, some declared *White Noise* in 1985 or *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 to be the last great novels of the postmodern era.

However, with the continuing publication of many of the above mentioned authors, the success of younger postmodern writers (such as David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, Noah Cicero, Zadie Smith, Chuck Palahniuk, Jonathan Lethem), and with publications such as *McSweeney's*, *The Believer*, and *The Onion*, the declaration of the death of postmodernism is arguably premature. [11][12] Amazon.com even described the Mark Z. Danielewski novel *House of Leaves*, published in 2000 as "post-postmodern" [1] Common themes and techniques All of these themes and techniques are often used together.

For example, metafiction and pastiche are often used for irony. These are not used by all postmodernists, nor is this an exclusive list of features. Irony, playfulness, black humor Linda Hutcheon claimed postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterized by the ironic quote marks, that much of it can be taken as tongue-in-cheek. This irony, along with black humor and the general concept of "play" (related to Derrida's concept or the ideas <https://assignbuster.com/postmodernism-in-literature-assignment/>

advocated by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*) are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism.

Though the idea of employing these in literature did not start with the postmodernists (the modernists were often playful and ironic), they became central features in many postmodern works. In fact, several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled black humorists: John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, Bruce Jay Friedman, etc. It's common for postmodernists to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way: for example, the way Heller, Vonnegut, and Pynchon address the events of World War II.

A good example of postmodern irony and black humor is found in the stories of Donald Barthelme; "The School", for example, is about the ironic death of plants, animals, and people connected to the children in one class, but the inexplicable repetition of death is treated only as a joke and the narrator remains emotionally distant throughout. The central concept of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the irony of the now-idiomatic "catch 22", and the narrative is structured around a long series of similar ironies.

Thomas Pynchon in particular provides prime examples of playfulness, often including silly wordplay, within a serious context. *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, contains characters named Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks and a radio station called KCUF, while the novel as a whole has a serious subject and a complex structure. [13][14][15] Pastiche To combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. In Postmodernist literature this can be an homage to or a parody of past styles. It can be seen as a representation of

the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society.

It can be a combination of multiple genres to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in postmodernity: for example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns; Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales; Umberto Eco uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction, and so on. Though pastiche commonly refers to the mixing of genres, many other elements are also included (metafiction and temporal distortion are common in the broader pastiche of the postmodern novel).

For example, Thomas Pynchon includes in his novels elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction; songs; pop culture references; well-known, obscure, and fictional history mixed together; real contemporary and historical figures (Mickey Rourke and Wernher Von Braun for example); a wide variety of well-known, obscure and fictional cultures and concepts. In Robert Coover's 1977 novel *The Public Burning*, Coover mixes historically inaccurate accounts of Richard Nixon interacting with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker.

Pastiche can also refer to compositional technique, for example the cut-up technique employed by Burroughs. Another example is B. S. Johnson's 1969 novel *The Unfortunates*; it was released in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it however they chose. [16][17][18] Metafiction  
Metafiction is essentially writing about writing or " foregrounding the

apparatus”, making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the reader and generally disregards the necessity for “ willful suspension of disbelief”.

It is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, for unexpected narrative shifts, to advance a story in a unique way, for emotional distance, or to comment on the act of storytelling. For example, Italo Calvino’s 1979 novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler* is about a reader attempting to read a novel of the same name. Kurt Vonnegut also commonly used this technique: the first chapter his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse Five* is about the process of writing the novel and calls attention to his own presence throughout the novel.

Though much of the novel has to do with Vonnegut’s own experiences during the firebombing of Dresden, Vonnegut continually points out the artificiality of the central narrative arc which contains obviously fictional elements such as aliens and time travel. Similarly, Tim O’Brien’s 1990 novel/story collection *The Things They Carried*, about one platoon’s experiences during the Vietnam War, features a character named Tim O’Brien; though O’Brien was a Vietnam veteran, the book is a work of fiction and O’Brien calls into question the fictionality of the characters and incidents through out the book.

One story in the book, “ How to Tell a True War Story”, questions the nature of telling stories. Factual retellings of war stories, the narrator says, would be unbelievable and heroic, moral war stories don’t capture the truth.

Historiographic metafiction Linda Hutcheon coined the term “ historiographic metafiction” to refer to works that fictionalize actual historical events or

figures; notable examples include *The General in His Labyrinth* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (about Simon Bolivar), *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes (about Gustave Flaubert), and *Ragtime* by E.

L. Doctorow (which features such historical figures as Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Booker T. Washington, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung). John Fowles deals similarly with the Victorian Period in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In regards to critical theory, this technique can be related to *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes. [19] Temporal distortion This is a common technique in modernist fiction: fragmentation and non-linear narratives are central features in both modern and postmodern literature.

Temporal distortion in postmodern fiction is used in a variety of ways, often for the sake of irony. Historiographic metafiction (see above) is an example of this. Distortions in time are central features in many of Kurt Vonnegut's non-linear novels, the most famous of which is perhaps *Billy Pilgrim* in *Slaughterhouse Five* becoming "unstuck in time". In *Flight to Canada*, Ishmael Reed deals playfully with anachronisms, Abraham Lincoln using a telephone for example. Time may also overlap, repeat, or bifurcate into multiple possibilities.

For example, in Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" from *Pricksongs & Descants*, the author presents multiple possible events occurring simultaneously — in one section the babysitter is murdered while in another section nothing happens and so on — yet no version of the story is favored as the correct version. [20] Technoculture and hyperreality Fredric Jameson

called postmodernism the “cultural logic of late capitalism”. “Late capitalism” implies that society has moved past the industrial age and into the information age.

Likewise, Jean Baudrillard claimed postmodernity was defined by a shift into hyperreality in which simulations have replaced the real. In postmodernity people are inundated with information, technology has become a central focus in many lives, and our understanding of the real is mediated by simulations of the real. Many works of fiction have dealt with this aspect of postmodernity with characteristic irony and pastiche. For example, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* presents characters who are bombarded with a “white noise” of television, product brand names, and clichés.

The cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and many others use science fiction techniques to address this postmodern, hyperreal information bombardment. [21][22][23] Paranoia Perhaps demonstrated most famously and effectively in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* and the work of Thomas Pynchon, the sense of paranoia, the belief that there’s an ordering system behind the chaos of the world. For the postmodernist, no ordering system exists, so a search for order is fruitless and absurd. *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon has many possible interpretations.

If one reads the book with a particular bias, then he or she is going to be frustrated. [24] This often coincides with the theme of technoculture and hyperreality. For example, in *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, the character Dwayne Hoover becomes violent when he’s convinced that everyone else in the world is a robot and he is the only human. [25]

Maximalism Dubbed maximalism by some critics, the sprawling canvas and fragmented narrative of such writers as Dave Eggers has generated controversy on the “ purpose” of a novel as narrative and the standards by which it should be judged.

The postmodern position is that the style of a novel must be appropriate to what it depicts and represents, and points back to such examples in previous ages as *Gargantua* by Francois Rabelais and the *Odyssey* of Homer, which Nancy Felson-Rubin hails as the exemplar of the polytropic audience and its engagement with a work. Many modernist critics, notably B. R. Myers in his polemic *A Reader’s Manifesto*, attack the maximalist novel as being disorganized, sterile and filled with language play for its own sake, empty of emotional commitment??? and therefore empty of value as a novel.

Yet there are counter-examples, such as Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, or James Chapman’s *Stet*, where postmodern narrative coexists with emotional commitment. [26][27] Different perspectives John Barth, the postmodernist novelist who talks often about the label “ postmodern”, wrote an influential essay in 1968 called “ Literature of Exhaustion” and in 1979 wrote “ Literature of Replenishment” in order to clarify the earlier essay. “ Literature of Exhaustion” was about the need for a new era in literature after modernism had exhausted itself.

In “ Literature of Replenishment” Barth says, My ideal Postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century Modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without

lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naivete, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-Modernist marvels as Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*...

The ideal Postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction... [28] Many of the well-known postmodern novels deal with World War II, one of the most famous of which being Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Heller claimed his novel and many of the other American novels of the time had more to do with the state of the country after the war: The antiwar and anti government feelings in the book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the cold war of the Fifties.

A general disintegration of belief took place then, and it affected *Catch-22* in that the form of the novel became almost disintegrated. *Catch-22* was a collage; if not in structure, then in the ideology of the novel itself ... Without being aware of it, I was part of a near-movement in fiction. While I was writing *Catch-22*, J. P. Donleavy was writing *The Ginger Man*, Jack Kerouac was writing *On the Road*, Ken Kesey was writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Thomas Pynchon was writing *V.*, and Kurt Vonnegut was writing *Cat's Cradle*. I don't think any one of us even knew any of the others.

Certainly I didn't know them. Whatever forces were at work shaping a trend in art were affecting not just me, but all of us. The feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22* are very strong in Pynchon and in *Cat's Cradle*.

[29] Novelist and theorist Umberto Eco explains his idea of postmodernism as a kind of double-coding: I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her “ I love you madly”, because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland.

Still there is a solution. He can say “ As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly”. At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to talk innocently, he will nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence. [30] Novelist David Foster Wallace in his 1990 essay “ E Unibus Pluram” makes the connection between the rise of postmodernism and the rise of television with its tendency toward self-reference and the ironic juxtaposition of what’s seen and what’s said.

This, he claims, explains the preponderance of pop culture references in postmodern literature: It was in post-atomic America that pop influences on literature became something more than technical. About the time television first gasped and sucked air, mass popular U. S. culture seemed to become High-Art-viable as a collection of symbols and myth. The episcopate of this pop-reference movement were the post-Nabokovian Black Humorists, the Metafictionists and assorted franc-and latinophiles only later comprised by “ postmodern. The erudite, sardonic fictions of the Black Humorists introduced a generation of new fiction writers who saw themselves as sort of avant-avant-garde, not only cosmopolitan and polyglot but also technologically literate, products of more than just one region, heritage, and theory, and

citizens of a culture that said its most important stuff about itself via mass media.

In this regard one thinks particularly of the Gaddis of *The Recognitions* and *JR*, the Barth of *The End of the Road* and *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and the Pynchon of *The Crying of Lot 49* ... Here's Robert Coover's 1966 *A Public Burning*, in which Eisenhower buggers Nixon on-air, and his 1968 *A Political Fable*, in which the Cat in the Hat runs for president. [31] Hans-Peter Wagner offers this approach to defining postmodern literature: Postmodernism ... can be used at least in two ways ??? firstly, to give a label to the period after 1968 (which would then encompass all forms of fiction, both innovative and traditional), and secondly, to describe the highly experimental literature produced by writers beginning with Lawrence Durrell and John Fowles in the 1960s and reaching to the breathless works of Martin Amis and the "Chemical (Scottish) Generation" of the fin-de-siecle.

In what follows, the term 'postmodernist' is used for experimental authors (especially Durrell, Fowles, Carter, Brooke-Rose, Barnes, Ackroyd, and Martin Amis) while "post-modern" is applied to authors who have been less innovative. [32] Postmodernism (literature), term used to denote a multitude of styles and attitudes which exist partly as a response to high Modernism, and partly as a result of post-industrial mass production and late capitalism.

Postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define; indeed, a central tenet is that certain experiences and concepts resist any sort of representation in writing or art. However, one of its most recognizable attributes is a certain self-consciousness with regard to the methods of production and to the

social contexts of any work, together with a playful incorporation of, or gesture towards, previous styles and modes of thought.

In philosophical terms, Postmodernism is part of a general attack on Enlightenment truth-claims and values, and displays a preoccupation with language as an inadequate vehicle for expressing any sort of “ reality”; this mode of thought is sometimes called “ the linguistic turn”, and includes the language-games of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the “ ordinary language” philosophy of John Langshaw Austin. Structuralism and Post-Structuralism are closely related to Postmodernism: this relationship is particularly notable in the analyses of society as a system of signs and codes conducted by Roland Barthes, and the origination of deconstruction as a method of reading texts and identifying tacit hierarchies within discourses by Jacques Derrida. Michel Foucault also proposed several major theories about the nature of power and repression, and the marginalization of certain groups throughout history. Important Postmodernist theorists are Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; trans. 1983) is an influential, if arcane, explication of Postmodernism’s central concerns, and Jean Baudrillard, whose extreme form of nihilism and theories about the mass media and hyper-reality led him to assert that the Gulf War did not happen, and was only a televised simulation of a war. In literary theory, Postmodernism refers in part to the crisis in determining meaning and signification highlighted by Post-Structuralism and deconstruction.

It also refers to the process of examining the canon of literary “ authorities”, that is, the writers who are most commonly studied in schools and universities, and attempting to discern the ideological and social currents

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that have shaped that canon. For example, much recent work in literature studies has remarked on the preponderance of DWEMs (Dead White European Males) in Western culture and has concentrated on uncovering the work of marginalized and oppressed groups, such as women and ethnic minorities.

Influential critics include Fredric Jameson (*Postmodernism or The Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991), Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, a psychoanalyst and semiotician whose work on gender rejects the notion of traditionally constructed “ male” and “ female” identity. In the practice of fiction and poetry, Postmodernism has manifested itself in an experimentation and eclecticism which has focused on the nature of fictionality and of writing itself.

The term “ Postmodernist” can be attached to almost any work that questions the boundaries and possibilities of the fictional enterprise; that attempts to collapse arbitrary borders between genres and to question what constitutes the nature of genre; that refers, directly or by allusion, to other texts; and that makes problematic the idea of “ characters” and of a narrative that can lead to a fixed point and convey a fixed meaning. Many novelists and poets writing today incorporate these themes and approaches in their work.

*The Name of the Rose* (1980) by Umberto Eco and *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* (1979) by Italo Calvino both combined different forms of fictional genre and assimilated many of Postmodernism’s theories about the nature of reading. Other writers who experiment in this fashion include Salman

Rushdie and Angela Carter. Martin Amis stands out as a writer who has experimented with form as well as portraying much of Postmodern popular culture, especially American popular culture.

Lyotard has identified contemporary culture as “junk Postmodernism” or “eclectic Postmodernism” because of its willingness to absorb a variety of styles regardless of their provenance or status. The growing popularity of “camp” and “kitsch” bears witness to this general trend. The explosion of information technology, and in particular cyberculture and virtual reality, has increased a sense of the possible diversification of experience.