

Fiction and post-modernism

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



Post-Modernism is similar to Modernism because in many respects the two movements are similar. Post-Modernism simply means that a new generation concluded, as its elders had done, that there are no certainties and that life has no meaning beyond what we can impose upon it. It is in technique that Post-Modernism distinguishes itself from Modernism and it started in Europe and Latin American in 1945 and in North America in 1960. In Post-Modernism, there was a notion that it was absurd that literature could see life steadily and see it whole.

Instead, fragments, individual perceptions, incoherence and even drug-induced hallucinations seemed more real and in touch with the times than any claim of stability or unity. The stories I will be looking further in to, to see how they represent Post-Modernism, are: “ The Babysitter,” by Robert Coover, “ The Balloon,” by Donald Barthelme, and “ Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot,” by Robert Olen Butler, Jr. “ The Babysitter” is a fragmented story about a babysitter taking care of two children while their parents attend a cocktail party.

The story has many elements of sexuality in it and the same storyline included different endings, such as the babysitting being raped by her boyfriend and his friend, the children’s father seducing the babysitter, and even the possibility of the young child drowning in the bathtub. The babysitter is watching television shows and switches back between a drama and a mystery, and this mirrors the fragmented situation that is given to the reader.

This story represents Post-Modernism because Post-Modernism does not look for a unified sense of self in the individual; like the world the individual is a random collection or collage of miscellaneous pieces of the external culture. In this story, the reader can be very confused as to what is truly happening. Did she actually get raped by her boyfriend and his friend? Or did she get seduced by the children's father? At the end of the story, we don't know what happened and it is hinted that there was a murder, but there is no way to confirm this. This story has over 100 paragraphs, and they do not connect with each other.

Going back to try to piece them together to make different plots is impossible because some paragraphs don't even indicate which plot they are a part of. Along the same lines, this work of fiction embraces all aspects of the present culture and puts them in a fantastic combination as a way of conveying the fragmentation of contemporary life. Events in life aren't always neat and in order; we can live scattered lives and this story represents how we see things in our everyday life. There is no chronological narrative, but instead scattered fragmentations that do not always make sense, just like how a person's true life is.

Lastly, this story represents Post-Modernism because it is metafiction; the "point" of the story is about the process of making fiction. I felt this story had a mixture of different fiction stories in it, and as a reader we are not sure which one is the truth, or if any of them even happened for that matter. A device of metafiction is the story addressing specific conventions with the story itself, and "The Babysitter" accomplished this by using the

conventions of paragraph and plot, and portraying them in an unconventional way.

There were many elements of Post-Modernism used in “ The Balloon” as well. This story is about a seemingly purposeless balloon that suddenly appeared in NYC. It seems the narrator inflated the balloon one night while people were sleeping and covers almost the entire southern half of Manhattan. Everybody is mesmerized by this balloon and are so fascinated as to where it came from and what it means. By the end of the story, it is unsure as to whether there really was a balloon there or whether it was just part of the imagination of the narrator.

In Post-Modern thought, any sense of a unifying idea or philosophy or even the notion of scientific progress is rejected. In this story, there was no logical reasoning as to what the balloon represented. It appeared there and people were amazed by it, but there was no real explanation as to how it appeared and what the purpose of it was for. Imagination seemed to be used more than logic and reason. Also, a characteristic of Post-Modernism is that art cannot provide any explanation or unity for experience; it cannot explain or unify experience.

To me, the balloon was an artistic representation. People were trying to figure out what it was meant for, but it seemed to provide no purpose for them. The only person it might've provided purpose for was the narrator, but I find it odd how he would inflate this big balloon and put it in a place where half of NYC can see, only to use it for his own purpose. Just like with “ The Babysitter,” the point of the story is more about the process of metafiction

rather than telling a story. I feel the narrator was using the balloon as a symbol in his own story.

The balloon represented a time of unhappiness for him because his love was away; and when she came back the balloon was removed and reserved for another time of unhappiness. Lastly, there are elements of Post-Modernism in “ Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot. ” This story is about a parrot that supposedly used to be a man, but had died and was now a parrot. The parrot was bought by his widow, and now he could look around and see how her life is now and to reflect on his previous life and the way he is now.

Post-Modernism does not look for a unified sense of self in the individual; like the world the individual is a random collection or collage of miscellaneous pieces of the external culture. This story really did not have much unity and it wasn't certain whether the parrot was supposed be like a reincarnation of the man, or just a symbol of what he had become. Most people in life don't believe that a man could die and then become a parrot, and when the parrot is exploring the world around him, it is a random collection. All of the miscellaneous things he sees around him now, he sees in a different light.

Similarly, art itself is a collage, a collection of fragments that create no unity. It isn't certain whether the parrot was only alive after the man had died, or if the man's soul was transformed in the parrot. The pieces of the story do not always fit together so the reader can be confused as to what truly happened and at the end the fate of the bird is unknown. Also, a characteristic of Post-Modernism is that satire, parody, jokes, and black humor often dominate the tone of a work of fiction. This story had some funny elements in it.

There is a scene where the man, in the form of the parrot, is mocking the man that his widow is with. He struggled to say words, and is able to call the man a “cracker” and also makes a comment when the man is nude and says “peanut,” and this goes without saying that he is mocking the man’s manhood size. He figured there is no way he can get his widow back, so he resorts to name calling in order to make the man who is loving his wife feel less superior. Post-Modernism was very similar to Modernism, but there is no unified sense of self in the individual.

In most of these stories, the individual, like the world, is a random collection or collage of miscellaneous pieces of the external culture. I enjoyed reading these stories because they make you think a lot about what the point of the story is, if there even is one; or the author could be using the metafiction for the story. Either way, these short stories challenge the reader to figure out why the author portrayed the characters and plot the way they are, and what we as readers can take away from the story.