

# Modernism and Postmodernism


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# Introduction


Modernism and postmodernism are two movements •  
in literature and art; the distinction between the two is  
hazy; there is no well – defined boundary between  
them in chronological, aesthetic or political terms.

# MODERNISM

MODERNISM As a literary movement, modernism flourished in Europe and America in the 1920's and 1930's. Modernist writers experimented with forms, devices and styles. They made use of the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung. Their works reflected a sense of loss, disillusionment and even despair; writers like T.S.Eliot and James Joyce saw a fragmented world, but hoped that fragmentation could be countered through their works.




Modernism experimented with a number of literary • endeavors and styles. Modernist works are often called Avant-garde (i.e. advance-guard). The modernist writers regarded themselves as alienated from the established order. Their purpose in writing was to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader so as to lead him in the march ahead. ‘Modern’ and ‘modernist’ are not synonymous. The former term broadly refers to that which is contemporary or pertains to the present.




Modernist' refers to the complex of characteristics •  
shared by those who participate in or follow the  
modernist movement. It involves a radical break with  
some of the traditional modes.

# POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism refers to certain radically • experimental works in literature and art. It is distinguished from modernism in that it is a term applied to the literature and art after the Second World War, especially in the wake of the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination of the Jews.



The postmodernists like the modernists, experiment with new literary devices, forms and styles. Their themes are similar to those of the modernists. They too view art and literature as a potentially integrating restorative force. Postmodernism can be seen to define itself against modernism. ●



Postmodernism, according to Peter Brooker, gives rise to “a mood or condition of radical indeterminacy”. It is very difficult to classify postmodernist works; this is because they combine aspects of diverse genres. Their works include such genres as the Absurd, the antinovel, concrete poetry ,etc; all of which challenge the ideological assumptions of contemporary society. •



# POSTMODERNIST CRITICAL SCHOOLS


Post structuralism Deconstruction Poststructuralists • undertake to subvert the foundations of language and show that its seeming meaningfulness does not result in the communication of any definitive meaning.

# Two prominent postmodernist

Two prominent postmodernist theorists Francois •  
Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard Both bring the boundary  
between high and popular culture, between fact and  
fiction .

# Francois Lyotard


His main work is “The Postmodern Condition”. To him •  
the postmodernism is undoubtedly part of the  
modern. He defines postmodernism as 'incredulity  
towards metanarratives(super-narratives) like  
Christianity, Marxism or the Myth of scientific  
progress.




Lyotard's point of view is that meta-narratives do not • govern or control mininarratives (individual postmodernist literary texts) which are the products of present day culture born out of the postmodern experience stemming from a profound sense of existential uncertainty. Postmodernist novels, plays and poems reflect this uncertainty, this angst. The American authors John Barth and Ishmael Reed, the European writers Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco and the Indian writer Salman Rushdie, are examples.

# Jean Baudrillard


- Major theorist of postmodernism • French writer • Simulations (1981) is his famous book • His name is associated with what is known as 'the loss of the real'.



In his essay “Simulacra and Simulations”, he explains •  
this loss and sets forth his propositions . [?] He speaks  
of a past era of ‘fullness’; in this era a sign was a surface  
indication of the underlying depth or reality-’an  
outward sign of inward grace’.




He goes on to ask whether a sign can merely be an index of other signs, and not of an underlying reality. If so, the whole system becomes a simulacrum (i.e. any image or representation of something or a vague resemblance of something). [?] He brings in the notion of simulation, and substitutes it for representation.



He then speaks of four stages of representation of reality by means of signs. The representation of basic reality. Misrepresentation and distortion of reality. Disguising the fact of the absence of reality underneath. The total lack of relationship of the sign to any reality at all. •





Baudrillard's argument leads him to the conclusion •  
:"within postmodernism, the distinction between what is real and what is simulated collapses: everything is a model or an image, all is surface without depth". He calls this "the culture of hyper reality " in which models determine yet undermine the real.