

The Main Characteristic Features of Postmodernism Period in Literature

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Abstract:

This article explores the emergence and development of postmodernism in literature, a movement that arose in the mid-20th century as a reaction to modernism. It highlights postmodernism's rejection of absolute truth, its embrace of fragmented narratives, and its challenge to the boundaries between high and low culture.

The study applies literary and theoretical analysis to examine the key stylistic and philosophical features of postmodern literature. Prominent works by major British and global authors are analyzed to identify common themes and narrative strategies characteristic of the postmodern period.

The findings reveal that postmodern literature is marked by fragmentation, metafiction, intertextuality, unreliable narrators, paradox, and a focus on the instability of meaning. Authors such as J.G. Ballard, Salman Rushdie, and Zadie Smith exemplify these features in their writings, often blending cultural identities and questioning traditional narratives of truth and representation. The article concludes that postmodernism redefined the relationship between author, text, and reader by blurring traditional literary boundaries. It introduced a more pluralistic, self-reflective, and critically engaged approach to storytelling, reflecting broader socio-political shifts and intellectual skepticism toward grand ideologies and rigid cultural hierarchies.

Keywords: Phenomena of Existence, Reality and Representation, Subjectivity of Truth, Fragmented Narratives, Meaning and Reality, High and Low Culture, Cultural Identities

Introduction

The main principles of the postmodern movement go as follows: (1) Text and language become the most important aspects of life, (2) Any aspect of life can be understood through literary analysis, (3) Reality and its representations are questioned, (4) Long educative stories are challenged and (5) The usefulness of using a particular method is disputed. In Western philosophy, postmodernism appeared in the late 20th century and stood for broad suspicion, focusing on the individual's own viewpoint and being aware that ideology plays a major part in supporting political and economic control.

Postmodernism in British literature, like elsewhere, emerged as a reaction to modernism and its emphasis on grand narratives and objective truth. It's characterized by a skeptical approach to culture and art, often embracing fragmentation, paradox, and unreliable narrators [1]. British postmodern literature also explores themes like the social construction of gender, sexuality, and power, and the subjectivity of truth.

Postmodernism poetry naturally followed the counterculture and is usually marked by a few important stylistic and thematic features. These kinds of poems are often written in a way that makes it tricky for readers to grasp which is intentional to reflect the message back at them.

Here we are going to state other essential features of postmodernism period: postmodernists reject the idea of a single, overarching explanation for history or society, instead embracing a plurality of perspectives and interpretations [2]. Postmodern works often feature fragmented narratives, unreliable narrators, and paradoxical situations, challenging readers to question the stability of meaning and reality. Postmodern literature frequently references and engages with other texts and literary conventions, often drawing attention to the artificiality of storytelling itself. Postmodernism blurs the lines between high and low culture, as well as between different genres and forms of writing [3-4]. Postmodern authors explore the ways in which our personal experiences and cultural backgrounds shape our understanding of the world, challenging the notion of objective truth. Postmodern literature often addresses issues of power, inequality, and social justice, reflecting a critical stance towards established institutions and norms.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis method, grounded in poststructuralist and postmodern critical theory, to examine the defining stylistic and thematic features of postmodern literature. A comparative and interpretive approach was used to analyze selected works of key postmodern authors from Britain and beyond. Primary texts by J.G. Ballard, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, and other notable figures were examined to identify recurring motifs such as fragmentation, metafiction, narrative unreliability, and cultural hybridity [5]. The analysis also draws on secondary sources in the fields of literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural studies to contextualize the findings within broader theoretical frameworks. Emphasis was placed on understanding how postmodern literary strategies question traditional narrative structures, destabilize meaning, and reflect the complexities of identity, power, and social discourse in a postmodern context. The study does not rely on empirical data but rather textual interpretation and critical synthesis to develop its conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Here we are going to point out the most prominent British postmodern authors: J.G. Ballard - known for his dystopian and experimental fiction, exploring themes of technology, space, and the human condition [6-7]. Salman Rushdie - a prominent voice in post-colonial literature, often blending magic realism with social commentary. Nadine Gordimer - a Nobel laureate who explored the complexities of race, colonialism, and apartheid in South Africa. Monica Ali - a Bangladeshi-born author whose novels, like "Brick Lane," examine immigrant experiences and cultural identities in Britain. Zadie Smith - a contemporary novelist known for her insightful and engaging portrayals of multicultural

London. David Lodge - an influential literary critic and novelist, often exploring themes of language, literature, and academia [8].

The World War II impacted postmodernism authors. The horrors and anxieties of these periods significantly impacted postmodern thought, leading to a skepticism towards grand narratives and a focus on the fragmented nature of reality. Postmodernists often critique the pervasive influence of consumerism and its impact on individual identity and social relations [9]. Postmodernism's emphasis on the instability of meaning and the deconstruction of traditional structures is closely linked to deconstructionism, a philosophical movement that challenges the foundations of Western thought. Postmodern literature is informed by critical theories, such as feminist theory, post-colonial theory, and psychoanalytic theory, which explore power relations, cultural representations, and the construction of identity [10].

Fundamentally, postmodern literature depends on fragmentation, paradox, figuring narrators, unusual or impossible storylines, games, mocking of other writings, fear and uncertainty about the world, dark humor and references to themselves [11]. Some see postmodernism as an answer to the values and principles of modernism, as well as a way to describe the time after modernism shaped cultural theory and practice in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century [12-13]. The Modernists aimed to show a new way of looking at things; Postmodernism's central belief is based on mixing together different ideas. Things made during Modernism seemed to picture a world of perfection, while objects from Postmodernism hinted at some kind of dystopian future [14].

Overall we can state that postmodernism destabilized the relationship among author, text, and reader by highlighting fictive methods through metafiction, when a work deliberately draws attention to its artificiality; the sprawl, excess, and fragmentation of maximalism; and the stripping to the bone of minimalism. It also made no distinction between so-called high and low culture through pastiche, parody, and intertextuality, with texts commenting upon each other and existing within their own literary continuum [15].

Conclusion

Postmodernism in literature marks a significant departure from traditional narrative forms and philosophical assumptions of modernism. Through techniques such as fragmentation, metafiction, intertextuality, and the use of unreliable narrators, postmodern literature challenges fixed meanings, absolute truths, and hierarchical cultural distinctions. This study demonstrates that postmodern writers, particularly in the British literary context, actively question dominant ideologies and explore the multiplicity of identity, reality, and representation. By analyzing the works of authors such as J.G. Ballard, Salman Rushdie, and Zadie Smith, the research underscores how postmodernism transforms literature into a space for critical reflection and cultural resistance. The destabilization of authorial authority and the merging of high and low cultural references highlight the pluralistic and self-conscious nature of postmodern literary discourse. In conclusion, postmodernism not only reshapes the structure and style of literature but also redefines its function—shifting it from a vehicle of absolute meaning to a dynamic site of ideological, cultural, and aesthetic negotiation.

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