



THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTMODERNISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: The article refers to Postmodernism in American literature, which emerged in the mid-20th century as a reaction against the ideals of modernism, embracing complexity, ambiguity, and skepticism toward universal truths. Characterized by fragmented narratives, metafiction, pastiche, and irony, postmodern American writers challenge traditional storytelling conventions and question established cultural and social norms

Keywords: Postmodernist literature, metafiction, fragmentation, sceptecism, narrativeness, irony, storytelling, Intertextuality, literary styles, literary trends.

A New Shift in the Value Paradigm researchers recognize the United States as the birthplace of postmodernist literature -- it was from here that postmodernism spread across Europe. The theory of postmodernism began skepticism to take shape in the United States on the wave of interest in the intellectual-philosophical, post-Freudian and literary concepts of the French poststructuralists. Postmodernism in American literature is a literary movement that developed after World War II, roughly beginning in the late 1940s and flourishing from the 1960s onward. It arose as a reaction to Modernism, questioning traditional values, literary forms, and the concept of objective truth.

The key features of postmodernism are the following: Metafiction (Writing that is self-aware; the text draws attention to itself as a work of fiction.)

Fragmentation (Nonlinear narratives, broken timelines, and disjointed plots reflect the chaos and disillusionment of modern life.) Intertextuality & Pastiche (Mixing different genres, cultural references, and literary styles.)

Irony, Parody, and Dark Humor (A common tool for critiquing culture, politics, and media.)

Skepticism toward "Grand Narratives" (Challenges overarching ideologies or truths (e.g., religion, nationalism, historical objectivity).

Simulacra and Hyperreality (Reality is seen as constructed or simulated, often through media and technology (influenced by Jean Baudrillard).

American soil turned out to be the most favorable for the perception of new trends for a number of reasons. Here, there was a need to comprehend those tendencies in the development of art and literature that had made themselves known since the mid-1950s (the emergence of pop art, which made quotation the leading artistic principle) and were increasingly gaining strength, which led to a change in the cultural paradigm in the mid-1970s: modernism gave way to postmodernism. The time did not inspire hope, it left no way out. The way out was the exciting path of literary play, daring experiment, parody. These two moments: first, the sense of the absurdity of social life and history, and second, the taste for literary play, -- in various combinations, determined the essence of American postmodernism, which was the main trend of US literature in the 60-70s, remained an important factor in its development until the mid-80s and largely influenced its future fate. As is known, literary postmodernism is not specific to American literature alone. And therefore, the words of some critics sound paradoxical, asserting: "Unlike modernism, which appeared in Europe, postmodernism is a purely American phenomenon." Meanwhile, there is a large grain of truth in this paradox. Indeed, unlike European postmodernism, postmodernism in the USA is not genetically connected with the "high" modernism of the beginning of the century.

Virtually devoid of a literary basis, postmodernism in the USA arose exclusively on a socio-cultural basis. Modern America, with its purely technological superiority, cultural heterogeneity and rapid erosion of moral and political convictions from modern American life, was a country of a distinctly postmodern culture. This tendency characterizes the works of the emerging postmodernist literature, in which the gap between "art for the educated" and its simplified version "for the uneducated" is overcome, an exit beyond the established boundaries of literary trends, genres, reader expectations, etc. is outlined. The act of trampling boundaries is considered by Fiedler as an act of gaining freedom. The harbingers of the latter are John Barth and Norman Mailer, who were the first to combine the mass and the elite in their works. The American theologian Harvey Cox in his works of the early 70s, devoted to the problems of religion in Latin America, widely uses the concept of "postmodernist theology". However, the term "postmodernism" gained popularity thanks to the architect and theorist Charles Jencks. In his book, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, he noted that although the word itself was used in American literary criticism in the 1960s and 1970s to denote ultramodernist literary experiments, the author gave it a fundamentally different meaning. In his article, *The Rise of Postmodern Architecture*, Jencks proposes ideas about the pluralism of art and the rejection of templates: the more options for reading the meaning (the image of a building), the more significant the meaning itself. (Jenkins, 2004) The ideas of French poststructuralists, and especially Jacques Derrida (who worked at Yale University for some time), that migrated to the United States helped to better understand the processes taking place in American art and gave new impetus to discussions about postmodernism. In 1975, the magazine "October" began to be published, edited by Rosalind Krauss, which played a major role in promoting the discoveries of representatives of the new French philosophy, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, literary criticism and in uniting the efforts of American intellectuals to understand the phenomenon of postmodernism. The theory of postmodernism received a systematic design in the works of the American scientist I. Hasan. Over time, the conceptual paradigm of postmodernism in the United States influenced not only literature and art, but also the entire complex of humanities, including psychoanalysis, criminology, psychology, law, sociology, business and management.

Some of the most notable Postmodernist authors include:

Thomas Pynchon: Known for his complex, paranoid narratives, Pynchon is a key figure in Postmodernist literature. His novels, such as 'Gravity's Rainbow', are characterized by their complexity, playfulness, and experimentation with form and style.

Don DeLillo: DeLillo is a prominent Postmodernist author known for his exploration of the intersection of politics, media, and culture. His novels, such as 'White Noise', are characterized by their playfulness with language and narrative structure, as well as their blurring of boundaries between high and low culture.

Toni Morrison: Morrison is a Nobel Prize-winning author known for her use of magical realism to explore the African American experience. Her novels, such as 'Beloved', are characterized by their experimentation with form and style, as well as their rejection of grand narratives and metanarratives. (Lee, 2025) One of the most prominent American writers of postmodernistic era is Jonathan Franzen.

Jonathan Franzen turns to the genre of social / family novel at the beginning of the 21st century, which in the modern literary process looks no less than strange. On the one hand, the novels "The Corrections" and "Freedom" create the impression of a long and endless series - a product for the masses. But Franzen declares: I wanted to write a Great Social Novel. For the author, it is not the game with a bizarre pattern of form, not the eccentricity of style, not the performance that is of great importance, his attention is riveted to the social subtleties of the family way of life in the USA. Franzen amazes with his deep encyclopedia and meticulousness of the characters of all the heroes - central and episodic. Franzen shocks the reader with the naked truth of life: a detailed description of Albert's illness, Richard Katz's carnal thoughts, Harry's dreams and desires, Walter's mania on the issue of overpopulation. However, Franzen gives us the opportunity to classify his works as postmodernism. The author uses such techniques as

discreteness of narration, pluralism of genres (letters, autobiography of the hero), intertext. Franzen strives to destroy the stereotyped perception of modern American society: they also suffer, they are the same as us. The only thing that prevents him from remaining firmly within the framework of postmodernism is axiology. Jonathan Franzen offers the reader not just to immerse themselves in the epicenter of the events of September 11 or the atmosphere of a steamship cruise. The writer insistently asserts: something is wrong with this world, something is missing. The absence of values sucks in all the best in human life like a black hole, leaving one alone with a sense of guilt, depression and anger. They are the ones that come when faith in the triumph of truth and the desire for it disappear in the souls of the heroes. Franzen's novels are acutely social, psychological and, in their own way, life-affirming. The author has fulfilled his duty - he writes the truth of life in the language of life itself, he does not put a cross on this life, the writer appeals to the enduring values of life: love, kindness, loyalty and honor.

The Corrections in the autobiography and in the plot of the novel Jonathan Franzen's novel "The Corrections" was published in 2001 and brought the forty-two-year-old writer worldwide fame. The book instantly became a bestseller and received the prestigious National Book Award in the USA, was translated into 35 languages. The idea for the novel came to the writer in 1993, during a period of difficult relations in marriage and family: the threat of divorce loomed, the father was terminally ill, the deplorable financial situation oppressed the spouses. By the end of 1994, the marriage finally fell apart, affecting the author's worldview, but not depriving him of faith in the sacredness of marriage: "This change could have become a source of joy and liberation for me, but I still experienced a terrible sense of guilt. Loyalty, especially to one's family, has been and remains one of my core values. Loyalty to the grave has always given my life meaning. I suspect that writers, less burdened by notions of loyalty, find writing easier, but every serious writer has to some extent, at some point in their lives, experience an internal struggle between two desires: to write well and to be good." Franzen comes to the realization that the inclusion of autobiographical details in the plot does not interfere with the plot at all, on the contrary, it makes it real. The inevitable feeling of guilt for a writer is embodied in the leitmotif of the novel: all the characters in The Corrections experience guilt to one degree or another, and strive not only to understand its causes, but also to overcome it. Initially, the main plot line was supposed to be the life of a young Midwesterner, Andy Eberant, who goes to prison for twenty years for the murder committed by his wife. The hero underwent many transformations during the work on the novel, but in the end he was awarded a gravestone and an epitaph: "quotes from the second part of Faust: "Den können wir erlösen"". Andy was the embodiment of depression and guilt - "above all towards women, especially in terms of the age limits of motherhood". However, changes in the author's life did not allow such a hero to become the face of the novel: "I still felt very guilty, but I had distanced myself from my wife enough to see that I was not the source of all the troubles". It was important for Jonathan Franzen to write a Great Social Novel, a real one, without false notes and, especially, without heroes, which Andy turned out to be. Therefore, Franzen honestly admits to himself: "I will succeed in a new novel only if I change as a writer. And that means I change as a person". In parallel with the image of Andy, the author writes the story of Enid and Lambert, arranging for himself a "long and pleasant vacation. Franzen comes to the conclusion that the main thing is to remain true to yourself, then the story becomes real. For almost ten years, Jonathan Franzen worked on the novel "The Corrections", simultaneously making corrections to his personal life and the lives of the characters. The main characters of the novel are Alfred and Enid Lambert, an elderly married couple, and their three children - Gary, Chipper and Denise. Franzen writes an image of a modern American family, detailing the characters and the setting, the time itself and the world around the characters.

Postmodernism represents a significant shift in American literature, marking a departure from the certainties and conventions of earlier literary movements such as modernism. At its core, postmodernism is characterized by its deep skepticism toward grand narratives and universal truths, embracing instead fragmentation, paradox, and ambiguity. This movement challenges the

traditional boundaries of storytelling by experimenting with form, structure, and language—often blurring the lines between fiction and reality, author and reader, text and context.

The postmodern literary landscape reflects the complexities and uncertainties of the contemporary world, where identities are fluid, histories are contested, and meaning is constantly constructed and deconstructed. Through techniques like metafiction, pastiche, and unreliable narration, postmodern writers invite readers to participate actively in the creation of meaning, highlighting the subjective nature of experience and truth. This approach not only destabilizes fixed interpretations but also encourages a critical engagement with the text and the cultural conditions it emerges from.

Authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Kathy Acker, and Toni Morrison exemplify the diverse voices within postmodern American literature, each bringing unique perspectives to questions of identity, power, race, and technology. Their works demonstrate how postmodernism serves as a lens through which to interrogate the socio-political realities of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Moreover, postmodernism's influence extends beyond literature, impacting philosophy, art, and cultural criticism, making it a pivotal movement in understanding contemporary thought and culture.

While some critics have viewed postmodernism as nihilistic or excessively relativistic, its contribution lies in its ability to open new avenues for exploring the fragmented nature of reality and the multiplicity of human experience. It challenges readers and writers alike to rethink the role of narrative, question authority, and embrace complexity without resorting to simplistic answers. In doing so, postmodernism enriches American literature by expanding its formal possibilities and deepening its thematic concerns.

In conclusion, postmodernism in American literature is not merely a stylistic trend but a profound cultural response to the conditions of modern life. It compels us to confront uncertainty, ambiguity, and the constructed nature of meaning, ultimately reshaping how stories are told and understood.

As American literature continues to evolve, the legacy of postmodernism remains central to its ongoing dialogue with history, identity, and the ever-changing landscape of human experience.

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