

Postmodernism literally means 'after modernism'. It is used in critical theory to refer to a point of departure for works of literature, drama, architecture, cinema, journalism and design, as well as in marketing and business and in the interpretation of history, law, culture and religion in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The period of postmodernism's dominance begins early in the Cold War and continues through to the present. Postmodernism can also be understood as a reaction to modernism. Following the devastation of fascism and World War II many intellectuals and artists in Europe became distrustful of modernism. Whereas modernism was often associated with identity, unity, authority, and certainty, postmodernism is often associated with **difference, separation, textuality, scepticism**

Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal.

Postmodernism is "post" because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody - a characteristic of the so-called "modern" mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its skepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning.

What are the characteristics of Postmodernism?

When listing the characteristics of postmodernism, it is important to remember that postmodernists do not place their philosophy in a defined box or category. Their beliefs and practices are personal rather than being identifiable with a particular establishment or special interest group. The following principles appear elemental to postmodernists:

- There is no absolute truth - Postmodernists believe that the notion of truth is a contrived illusion, misused by people and special interest groups to gain power over others.
- Truth and error are synonymous - Facts, postmodernists claim, are too limiting to determine anything. Changing erratically, what is fact today can be false tomorrow.
- Self-conceptualization and rationalization - Traditional logic and objectivity are spurned by postmodernists. Preferring to rely on opinions rather than embrace facts, postmodernists spurn the scientific method.
- Traditional authority is false and corrupt - Postmodernists speak out against the constraints of religious morals and secular authority. They wage intellectual revolution to voice their concerns about traditional establishment.
- Ownership - They claim that collective ownership would most fairly administrate goods and services.
- Disillusionment with modernism - Postmodernists rue the unfulfilled promises of science, technology, government, and religion.
- Morality is personal - Believing ethics to be relative, postmodernists subject morality to personal opinion. They define morality as each person's private code of ethics without the need to follow traditional values and rules.
- Globalization - Many postmodernists claim that national boundaries are a hindrance to human communication. Nationalism, they believe, causes wars. Therefore, postmodernists often propose internationalism and uniting separate countries.
- All religions are valid - Valuing inclusive faiths, postmodernists gravitate towards New Age religion. They denounce the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as being the only way to God.
- Liberal ethics - Postmodernists defend the cause of feminists and homosexuals.
- Pro-environmentalism - Defending "Mother Earth," postmodernists blame Western society for its destruction.

Postcolonialism (postcolonial theory, post-colonial theory) is a specifically post-modern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism. Postcolonialism

comprises a set of theories found amongst philosophy, film, political science, human geography, sociology, and literature. The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing Western way of thinking, therefore creating space for the subaltern, or marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse. Postcolonialism as a literary theory (with a critical approach), deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries, especially of the European colonial powers Britain, France, and Spain; in some contexts, it includes countries still in colonial arrangements. It also deals with literature written by citizens of colonial countries that portrays colonized people as its subject matter. Colonized people, especially of the British Empire, attended British universities and with their access to education, created this new criticism. Furthermore, Postcolonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity (often reclaiming it from and maintaining strong connections with the coloniser); the ways in which the knowledge of the colonised (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the coloniser's interests; and the ways in which the coloniser's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonised as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. Colonized peoples reply to the colonial legacy by writing back to the center, when the indigenous peoples write their own histories and legacies using the coloniser's language (e.g. English, French, Dutch) for their own purposes. "Indigenous decolonization" is the intellectual impact of postcolonialist theory upon communities of indigenous peoples, thereby, their generating postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial Theory - as epistemology, ethics, and politics - addresses matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a post-colonial national identity, of how a colonised people's knowledge was used against them in service of the coloniser's interests, and of how knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests. At the same time, postcolonial theory encourages thought about the colonised's creative resistance to the coloniser and how that resistance complicates and gives texture to European imperial colonial projects, which utilised a range of strategies, including anti-conquest narratives, to legitimise their dominance.

Post-colonial literature (or "Postcolonial literature", sometimes called "New English literature(s)"), is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule. It is also a literary critique to texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Post-colonial literature, finally in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary post-colonial discourse that has been shaped over recent times. It attempts to re-read this very emergence of postcolonialism and its literary expression itself.

Post-colonial literary critics re-examine classical literature with a particular focus on the social "discourse" that shaped it. Edward Said in his popular work *Orientalism* analyzes the writings of Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire and Lautréamont, exploring how they were influenced, and how they helped to shape a societal fantasy of European racial superiority. Post-colonial fiction writers might interact with the traditional colonial discourse by attempting to modify or subvert it. An example of this is Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which was written as a pseudo-prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Here, a familiar story is re-told from the perspective of an oppressed minor character. Protagonists in post-colonial writings are often found to be struggling with questions of identity, experiencing the conflict of living between the old, native world and the invasive forces of hegemony from new, dominant cultures.

Post-colonial literature works through the process of "writing back", "re-writing", and "re-reading". This describes the interpretation of well-known literature from the perspective of the formerly colonized. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the protagonist is shown to be re-named and exploited in several ways.

The "anti-conquest narrative" recasts indigenous inhabitants of colonised countries as victims rather than foes of the colonisers. This depicts the colonised people in a more human light but risks absolving colonisers of responsibility for addressing the impacts of colonisation by assuming that native inhabitants were "doomed" to their fate.