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**THE ASCENT OF POSTMODERNISM.
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE PHENOMENON**

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Abstract: *This article aims to illustrate the emergence and ascent of Postmodernism, considering its similarities and differences with Modernism. The research enumerates and explains a series of principles, devices, and attitudes promoted by Postmodernism as a process and a cultural phenomenon, illustrating literature written on the topic, its artistic endeavours, and its political and social contexts.*
Key words: *intertextuality, deconstruction, metanarratives, Modernism, Postmodernism.*

1. Introduction

Postmodernism, a process that originated on the European continent in the aftermath of World War II, continues to be described as a phenomenon resistant to the very idea of fixed definition and complete elucidation: Postmodernism represents a topic that has been subject to debate regarding its emergence, traits, and terminology. While the phenomenon is diverse in its manifestations across the world and different societal boundaries, when considered in terms of its temporal dimension, it is generally agreed that it manifests differently from Modernism, in the second half of the twentieth century, from 1949 to 1980 and beyond, with contemporaneity included. The selected sources include widely acclaimed Postmodernist theoreticians and scholars in order to portray the gradual representation of this process. The article does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the phenomenon, as it runs counter to the very principles of Postmodernists, who value scepticism and oppose grand narratives in discourse and culture. For this current article, I selected books and articles belonging to researchers such as Jacques Derrida (1997), Jean-François Lyotard (1987), Fredric Jameson (1984), Eva Brann (1992), Linda Hutcheon (1988, 2002), Nicholas Royle (2003), Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (2006), D. M. Hossain and M. M. Shariful Karim (2013), and Ramachandran Gnanasekaran (2015). Throughout their analyses, the scholars provide various approaches to the phenomenon of Postmodernism, its devices, and its cultural and non-cultural endeavours, thereby contributing to the description and understanding of this *ongoing process*.

In terms of cultural manifestations, according to Childs and Fowler (2006), Postmodernism describes a shift to emerging forms of expression that debuted in architecture, followed by other artistic endeavours that present similarities or differences compared to Modernism. With a desire to change, reshape, and reinterpret the present discourses (cultural or not) at work, Postmodernists include pop culture and daily life in their artistic preoccupation, distancing themselves from the high Modernist elitist direction (Childs and Fowler 2006:185-186). The authors also indicate that Postmodernists displace and re-select their central subjects of art and discourse. To explain, marginality achieves momentum and is seen, celebrated, and debated. In their efforts, artists synchronise with civil rights movements and policies, claiming that the silenced ought to be given a voice to tell their

stories. (Childs and Fowler 2006:186-187).

Eva Brann (1992) highlights a greater role for creators and readers in the meaning-making and meaning-interpreting process. The title of Brann's article "What is Postmodernism?" indicates the methodology and pursuits of her analysis: throughout her article, Eva Brann (1992) offers a detailed description of Postmodernism, starting from its linguistic background, then moving towards the Modernism- Postmodernism distinction, and next indicating the importance which each reader or interpreter brings to the very existence of the phenomenon. While presenting a series of differences between Modernism and Postmodernism and stating that the latter is the reaction to the former, what is particularly revealing in Brann's approach on Postmodernism is the following: the ones that come in contact with culture, written or not, are the ones who give meaning to it (Brann 1992:7). In this sense, one should view Postmodernism as the result of a connection between creators and readers, thus stressing the importance of interpretation and perspectivism.

Hossain and Karim (2013) count themselves among the theoreticians who attempt to explain Postmodernism and its traits, employing a series of opinions and definitions of the phenomenon in their corpus. Their article features a collection of theoretical stances, with several inputs regarding postmodernist theoreticians such as Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Jameson, Foucault, Riesman, Nicol, and Rosenau. One recurring idea in the corpus of these opinions is the struggle to define a phenomenon that is against the very act of defining, for various reasons: either to avoid enacting metanarratives themselves (which they so much oppose), or because of their core belief that nothing can ever be defined entirely. In light of the emergence of Postmodernism, researchers claim that the phenomenon distinguished itself from its predecessor, i.e., Modernism, in the second half of the twentieth century, either as a more radical extension of it or as the final form of Modernism (Hossain and Karim 2013:173). As such, Postmodernism, unlike earlier currents, stresses that one cannot grasp everyday life (Hossain and Karim 2013:173) and that multiple realities (but not an unlimited number) or perspectives of the same phenomenon can come into being. In this sense, "[a]ny fixity of moral codes is denied" (Hossain, Karim 2013:176), meaning that moral codes and multiple ways of grasping reality enact a multiplicity of perceptions.

2. Attempts at Explaining Postmodernism

When discussing Postmodernism, Hossain and Karim (2013) identify three researchers who highlight perceived limitations of the current approach and its definitions: Rosenau, Shaikh, and Nicol. While Rosenau and Shaikh highlight oppositions between Modernism and Postmodernism in terms of categorisation, traits, and purposes, indicating their pro- and anti-Enlightenment stances, respectively, Nicol stresses two representative traits of Postmodernism: the problem of language and the purposes of narratives. At first, Nicol suggests that the language of Postmodernist literary compositions makes the works almost unreachable to the public (Nicol in Hossain and Karim 2013:179). To be more exact, by making this claim, Nicol has in mind the very use of problematic linguistic structures, vague stances, or incoherent narratives as obstacles to understanding the transmitted messages: the narratives may be purposeless, often with no established finality. Because of that, she argues, Postmodernist art (in this case, literature) poses problems for the trained and/or non-trained reader and presents manifestations that can be labelled as "weird for the sake of weird" (Hossain and Karim 2013:180). In this sense, this research will investigate these concepts and possibilities by viewing Nicol's concept of strangeness not as a consequence but as a result. In this sense, Postmodernism is multifaceted and not only allows different stances on opinion but also urges us to adopt them. As such, the "weird for the sake of weird" is nothing but an advantage to elaborate and to embrace the bizarre instead of the known, of the comfortable.

While others try to define Postmodernism as a break from (high) Modernism, Lyotard prefers to adopt a non-categorical stance and considers the two phenomena to intertwine due to recurring beliefs and features (Jameson in Lyotard 1987:xvi). As such, differences become more pronounced when Postmodernism advances its critical stance on knowledge, culture, and language: the Postmodern differentiates itself from the Modern by refusing to validate and reinforce metanarratives (Lyotard 1987:xxiv). In other words, the author defines this very rejection as a manifestation of “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1987:xxiv).

In his conception, metanarratives are theories, descriptions, concepts, and ideas that claim to share an incontestable validity in the eyes of non-Postmodernist thinkers. Some metanarratives that legitimise their use and/or abuse of power exclude opposing views, and the contestation of their doctrine includes religions, ethics, scientific knowledge, politics, and cultural knowledge (Lyotard 1987:29-33). One such failed metanarrative is the Enlightenment, a movement structured on the core belief that reason, learning, and scientific discovery can explain phenomena of the past, present, and future, thus having the form of universal truth (Lyotard 1987:6, 1987:31). For example, scientific knowledge does contribute to the progress of societies. Still, the findings of this branch are not final in the sense that more is to be discovered (Lyotard 1987:31).

The same approach ought to be taken into account when discussing the politics of ethics (be they inspired by the Western world or not) and other branches of knowledge and art - to achieve a more significant potential, these types of metanarratives should be questioned so that they do not turn into totalitarian manifestations. In the domain of politics, an example of this sense is the political ideologies and regimes, i.e., fascist and communist regimes (Jameson in Lyotard 1987:x), which legitimise their means by reinforcing their metanarratives and claiming universality, validity, and exclusive authority (Lyotard 1987:103). Refusing the reinforcement of metanarratives and being critical of the assumption of objective truth come as reactions against Modernism. To be more exact, people should approach these concepts with scepticism and caution. As a result, this questioning might lead to the revelation of a diversity of truths, meanings, and perspectives rather than to the embrace of a single one. Thus, the principles and incorporated values are contested, casting a shade of scepticism over all sectors of the Postmodern world.

In the Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, Fredric Jameson mentions two essential aspects of Jean-François Lyotard’s writing perspective and the educative values it seeks to inspire: these aspects have broader significance, not restricted to Lyotard’s work. To be more precise, Jameson writes that Lyotard writes from the perspective of a philosopher. This attribution is suggestive because it suggests that Jean-François Lyotard does not seek the final (which he does not believe in) but instead asks questions and starts a discussion. Therefore, his positioning invites those who relate to his causes, as well as those who do not, to ask questions and contribute to the dialogue of meanings and knowledge(s), irrespective of their domain. Also, his work not only starts a conversation but also proposes methods of work that shape thinking patterns: this text “refines our sensitivity to differences” (Jameson 1987:xxv).

Another researcher who contributes to the dialogue of understanding Postmodernism is Nicholas Royle (2003), an author who provides the readers with an in-depth analysis of the works of Jacques Derrida. In his research, Royle brings into the discussion some of the grounding postmodernist attitudes, i.e., scepticism, as well as characteristics and practices such as deconstruction, decentring, constative and/or performative utterances. By manifesting this attitude of distrust, the Postmodernist thinker questions the old and new intellectual values and wonders about their validity. The Postmodernist thinker intends to ask questions without expecting answers to all of them or to transform the responses into metanarratives (2003:20). As such, one question is: how valid is what one perceives as truth? Derrida suggests that there is a plurality of truths or ways of reading what one experiences:

Postmodernist thinkers ought to question ideas, institutions, practices, the community, and themselves altogether.

According to the French theorist, deconstruction is a method or phenomenon that seeks to uncover the marginalised and/or the unperceived because of the human interest and the constant focus on the centre. Instead of centrism, Derrida proposes a decentring and uncovering of omissions, of the incomplete, of the seemingly complete intellectual and spiritual values. By approaching this type of search for pieces of knowledge, Derrida indicates that in the domain of language, deconstruction plans to counteract linguistics and to highlight the importance of the other in idioms/language (Royle 2003:76). In other words, his intentions ought to explore what language wants to do, what it can do and what it cannot do, along with the importance of overly ignored categories of language such as jargon. In literature and other idiomatic arts, Derrida proposes two categories of utterances which make up an author's text and give him/her authority of non-authority: constative utterances and performative utterances (Derrida in Royle 2003: 26). While clarifying the terms, Royle explains that a constative utterance and a performative do have specific differences, Royle indicates that these differences are not entirely noticeable (Royle 2003:25-26). Although he distinguishes between description and transformation, there is no clear boundary between them in his conception, as highlighted above. Postmodernists strive to refuse categorical divisions and dualistic perspectives.

Jacques Derrida, a theoretician credited with defining and explaining the concept of deconstruction in the 1970s, proposes deconstruction as open to the possibility of purposes. According to him, deconstruction is a strategy that does not follow a single purpose. Still, it invites followers of this belief to deconstruct whatever subject of their choice simply for the sake of doing so (Derrida in Royle 2003:53). In his account, Royle indicates that Jacques Derrida intends to prompt people to adopt a conscious attitude towards what has been viewed as the centre of something. Royle indicates that what Jacques Derrida suggests is decentring, a process of averting or focusing one's gaze towards a plurality of perspectives regarding human or non-human objects, including logos (Royle 2003:15).

Throughout his study, Nicholas Royle gives his definition of deconstruction, indicating that the concept is linked to the *uncanny* (2003:26). Specifically, Royle suggests that uncanniness should be seen as both strange and not strange, both present and absent. As such, by linking deconstruction with his idea of uncanniness, Royle suggests that deconstruction triggers the "ghostly and the real" (2003:29), meaning that the unfamiliarity can be found in familiarity: these concepts are intertwined, and their resistance towards a finality causes the desired discomfort and the disturbance of the readers' active interpretation skills. Nicholas Royle and Ramachandran Gnanasekaran evaluate Derrida's concept of deconstruction, presenting their views on deconstruction (see Royle 2003 and Gnanasekaran 2015). In addition to introducing aspects of deconstruction and its aims, Gnanasekaran sketches the portrait of a deconstructionist. According to Gnanasekaran, employing deconstruction offers the deconstructionist a vast array of possibilities regarding purposes and the interpretation of texts. As such, the deconstructionist reader looks for revealing contradictions, the intertwining of oppositions, and highlights the incoherent and the marginal. As highlighted by Derrida and sustained by Royle, Gnanasekaran indicates that these methods aim at revealing "the definiteness of its structure and implications into an inconclusive exhibit of contradictory and undecidable possibilities" (Gnanasekaran 2015:212). In other words, by adopting a deconstructionist perspective and method, the readers ought to explore what an author of a text does not seem to be in control of (2015:213).

Another voice addresses phenomena associated with the Postmodernist school of thought(s) and offers a multidisciplinary analysis of a range of topics in Jean Baudrillard's (1981) work. In addition to offering a critique of the social and political facets of several

establishments, Jean Baudrillard provides the readers with an analysis of American (consumer) culture and highlights the effects of mass media on the shaping and reshaping of what one would call “reality”. Some concepts he uses to expose the specific issues of consumerist societies and their difficulty in discerning the real from its corrupted/debased forms of reality include the following: simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality.

In his analysis, Jean Baudrillard indicates that a shift in meaning has occurred: reality has been corrupted or transformed by simulations, and anything can be simulated one way or the other. Hence, Postmodernist culture is oversaturated with images (Baudrillard 1981:1-2). The media, advertisements, and films play an essential role in this constant reshaping of the real, and, as a result, people in contemporary society have difficulty recognizing these transformations and are increasingly unable to separate the real from the image (Baudrillard 1981:31-32). Moreover, the simulacrum not only reshapes the real but also becomes the represented object itself through replacement.

To Jean Baudrillard, the simulacrum is a term that describes something (be it a person, place, or other objects and non-objects) that does not have an original or that never had an original. As such, Jean Baudrillard provides examples of simulacra by rendering how the intention to represent the divine in icons is one of the factors that hints at God’s replacement and (later on) absence. To be more exact, the iconoclasts-iconodules conflict in which God’s existence is simulated (replaced) by the presence of an icon used by the previous ones, while the latter group seems to refuse this significant replacement of God with an icon since they are aware of his inexistence: “God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum” (Baudrillard 1981:5).

Also, the author conjures a dreamy Disneyland, revealing that people consider it a fictional world in which they can escape and, afterwards, return to the real world once they leave the gates of the park (1981:13-15). While these are two examples, the author insists that the concepts of simulacra, simulation, and hyperreal corrupt, influence, shape, or replace the reality outside the fictional world of Disneyland. By taking into account the boundary of the United States, Baudrillard suggests that reality has been intertwined by such simulations and simulacra, even if the viewer is not yet aware of it, and even if such insertions are not very visible.

In contrast to Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon claims that distinctions in paradigm arise regarding Postmodernity and Postmodernism. While Jameson insists that Postmodernism is a direct consequence of capitalism and takes a rather pessimistic view of the phenomenon (Jameson 1984:1), Hutcheon looks at the possibility of meaning and interpretation and views Postmodernity as a time frame and a condition. As such, Hutcheon insists that Postmodernism is the term that refers more to the cultural manifestation of contemporaneity (1988:56). Moreover, the critic claims that Postmodernism manifests as a “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political” phenomenon (1988:4).

In contrast with other researchers who are in support of an either-or-paradigm of representation and meaning, Linda Hutcheon indicates that Postmodernism is a cultural and discourse enterprise which refuses binarities and produces discourses and manifestations which find themselves in a “complicitous critique” of grand (and not only) narratives (1998:2). By referencing Wellbery, Hutcheon indicates that Postmodernism offers a “critique of domination” (Wellbery in Hutcheon 1988:4) and leans towards the discovery and voicing of the marginal while, at the same time, is critical of both. In other words, Postmodernists develop multiple perspectives, or a broader perspectivism, as a method of recovering what was hidden, unseen, voicing the unvoiced, or mocking what is voiced excessively.

3. Postmodernist Attitudes and Literary Techniques

Regarding the devices and attitudes promoted by Postmodernism, I begin by citing the theorist Linda Hutcheon, who highlights the paradigm shift adopted by Postmodernists in perception. In her assertion, Postmodernism and its creations aim at making the viewer expand their perception in what concerns values, objects, and practices, representation, acquiring or adopting different perspectives on the matters concerned: in her conception, a Postmodernist ought to understand that what one perceives as a given (or “natural”) is, in fact, human-made, i.e. the cultural realisation of our perceptions and interpretations (Hutcheon 1988:2). This continuous manufacture and reshaping of representations are possible thanks to the use of Postmodernist devices such as parody, irony, satire.

Through the use of parody, the art piece is critical of real-life situations, practices, and people, while at the same time, it is also self-aware of its flaws, incompleteness, and that it might become the object of parody: the cyclic process of parody, as I would like to call it. Hutcheon observes the entanglement of the real and the manufactured and claims that through the use of real-life elements, respectively, manufactured parodic ones, the Postmodernist thinker analyses these structures while simultaneously taking a distance from history, but it is also bound to it (1988:2).

What is more, Hutcheon takes a different approach from other theoreticians who insist that Postmodernism does not take or perform political action. Instead of adopting this stance, Hutcheon indicates that the Postmodernist aesthetic results, i.e., parodic depictions of politics and political actors, for example, do achieve results in the sense that they train the reader to adopt that de-naturalising gaze cast upon the representations and the represented (Hutcheon 1988:2-3). By this, the author implies that Postmodernist thinkers and the products of their artistic endeavours ought to help viewers to cast a de-naturalising gaze on themselves, the environment and other social actors (Hutcheon 1998:3). The process of parody manifests itself as a copy or mimicry of something to comment on it, to criticise it, to laugh at it, to start a debate possibly. At the same time, this type of representation “purveys and challenges ideology – but always self-consciously” (Hutcheon 1988:4). According to her, parody results from the reshaping of past or present elements and acts as a device of questioning (familiar and non-familiar) values. As such, parody is tied to historical and history-in-the-making, serving as a tool that employs the same de-naturalising gaze (Hutcheon 1988:90).

As parody concerns itself with more than just artistic representation, along with irony and satire, this method comes in different shapes and is done with a multitude of purposes in popular media outlets (Hutcheon 1988:90). Although Modernists adopt and make use of parody, they overlook its effects and the value of parodies which are present in the mundane and pop culture (Huyssen in Hutcheon 1988:14-15).

While caricature mocks people and their actions by amplifying their traits and human(e) flaws to scorn them, parody is a well-planned technique that invites the viewer/reader to apply a critical gaze to what is portrayed before them, thereby receiving social self-criticism (Childs and Fowler 2006:167). According to them, the audience is aware of the subtexts of the representations and views the critique as “a part of literature, not a separate industry” (Childs and Fowler 2006:167). Moreover, irony functions as the primary device in both parody and satire. In this sense, Childs and Fowler (2006) define irony as a speech technique that functions as the utterance of discourse with subversive intentions and the opposite meaning to what appears on the surface. In essence, a speaker uses irony to be critical of something or someone (2006:123). The authors present two types of irony: situational and verbal. The former type, the situational one, may manifest in the following subtypes: social, moral, metaphysical, political (Childs and Fowler 2006:123-124).

As for satire, this form of representation seeks to criticise exaggerations and abuses in society, pointing out the flaws in human or non-human actors, such as institutions,

ideologies, practices (Childs and Fowler 2006:211-212). Through its representations, satire discourses provide more or less subtle lessons for readers and for its viewers, taking into account the ascendancy and spread of media and images throughout societies in recent decades. According to Childs and Fowler, to gain certain desiderata and effects on the receivers of the satire, the satirists resort to using certain types of distortions: in some cases, the satirists replace the real with fantasy, and in others, they combine the real with the fantasy. In this sense, it is possible that, in some satirical discourses, the presence of personified non-human entities could help satirists be critical of specific issues and enable satire receivers to cast a critical gaze upon the issue (2006:212).

As Postmodernist thought invites a critical gaze upon discourse in general and metanarratives in particular, it also expresses the interconnectedness of texts and the transmission of knowledge through the words, phrases, and images (deliberately or intentionally) included in another text, references which may or may not be evident at first. Postmodernist thought emphasizes the connections between texts in the literary and non-literary worlds, as argued by the critic Julia Kristeva, who is credited with coining the term "intertextuality". To Kristeva, the literary world is "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (Kristeva 1980:65). By building upon her theory, it can be said that all texts inherently carry other texts within their content, connecting meanings. Thus, a text is not autonomously constructed, but is a mosaic of other texts. Charles Bazerman defines the phenomenon, intertextuality, below:

The explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary and potential future texts. Through such relations a text evokes a representation of the discourse situation, the textual resources that bear on the situation, and how the current text positions itself and draws on other texts. (Bazerman 2003).

According to Charles Bazerman, there are different levels of intertextuality and various ways in which it is present within a text. Among the techniques, he mentions "1. direct quotation, 2. indirect quotation, 3. mentioning of a person, document, or statements, 4. comment or evaluation on a statement, text, or otherwise invoked voice, 5. using recognizable phrasing, terminology associated with specific, 6. using language and forms that seem to echo certain ways of communicating, discussions among other people, types of documents, people or groups of people or particular documents." (Bazerman 2003:88-89).

4. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the literature reviewed above, it is essential to reiterate that the purpose of this chapter is to pinpoint the trends of Postmodernist creation since its establishment and up to today, along with identifying its main attitudes and devices used in artistic creation. In addition, the literature review highlights that Postmodernism remains a phenomenon and a critical stance that allows different perspectives to be addressed when reading into today's narratives at work.

As such, the reviewed sources imply that Postmodernism is a multifaceted phenomenon, and commentators engage with it by proposing similar concepts and methods for interpreting the world, creating art, and understanding it. As portrayed above, Brann (1992) and Childs and Fowler (2006) identify the expanded role of the reader in decoding meanings in literary and non-literary texts.

While Jameson (1984) views it as a consequence of capitalism, Hutcheon (1988) views Postmodernism as a time frame, an expression of contemporaneity. Moreover, Hossain and Karim (2013), along with Childs (2006) and Fowler, highlight that Postmodernism differs from its predecessor in that it does not support the high-low culture separation promoted by Modernism. The authors identify the Postmodernist endeavour with an interest towards the

marginal, meaning that the phenomenon casts its attention upon pop culture and daily life in its artistic preoccupation.

While both Lyotard (1987) and Derrida (1997) agree on the necessity of scepticism toward the narratives at work and the refusal of binary oppositions, the two theorists differ in their theoretical approaches, particularly in their main concepts regarding Postmodernism. As such, Lyotard theorizes about metanarratives and little narratives, while Derrida proposes deconstruction as a method of reading and understanding the world and its narratives.

In addition, Hutcheon (1988, 2002), Childs and Fowler (2006), and Bazerman (2003) identify some of the main devices used by Postmodernists to better understand and critique the world. In this sense, Hutcheon, Childs, and Fowler mention irony, satire, parody, and intertextuality as the means by which Postmodernist creations thrive by acquiring a critical point of view towards the parodied figure and, in extension, towards the one who watches the parody. In addition, among irony, satire, and parody, Hutcheon (1988) included other attitudes and devices used by creators to bring into being works of art that ease beholders into obtaining a broader perspective on the world and personal affairs. As such, the critic completes her list of Postmodernist devices by including pastiche and perspectivism, two other devices which reconfigure the manner of doing and reacting to artistic endeavours.

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