

## Postmodernism in Society, Culture and Literature

Broadly speaking, postmodernism is a new socio-cultural phenomenon which rejects modernism as an ideal defining twentieth-century culture as we have known it. Although the term 'postmodernism' was coined by a historian in the late 1940s to denote a late stage of Renaissance, it has been used mainly by literary critics since the mid-1960s. The location of the time is a significant fact in itself. We may indeed mark out the first signs of postmodernism around the time.

A widely held view is that postmodernism has sprung from the post-industrial society, which is passing rapidly into the Information Age, or the so-called 'Third Wave'. According to this view, the political, economic, and social structures that have governed the Western World since the end of World War-II, are either changing, owing to the attacks within, or breaking down altogether. This industrial breakdown brought in its train a corresponding crisis in values, which mirrors the disarray of bourgeois culture. Postmodernism therefore could be said to be the product of the crises afflicting the middle class mind.

Postmodernism opposes modernism not only for the latter's arrogant claim to universality, but also for the evils of the contemporary civilization, which, the former believes, modernism has spawned. Democracy, based on Enlightenment values, is also looked down upon as a force of oppression to spread the West's hegemony the world over. Humanism again is repudiated as a vehicle for bourgeois projection. Not only humanism, but even reason, with its hierarchies of thought, is also dismissed in order that people may be liberated from the shackles of the established order. This, in turn, paves the way for non-traditional approaches – especially those from the Third World – emphasizing emotion, intuition, fantasy, contemplation, mysticism, and even magic. Science, which is no better than any other system, is also brushed aside, simply because scientific reality has proved to be redundant in human life.

Truth is rejected as neither possible nor desirable, in that it is used by its creators for their own power ends. Subjective and conflicting interpretations are all that can be offered, and these may vary according to their contexts. Since no set of values can have more validity than any other, everything becomes relative. In the brave new world of postmodernism, the individual is no longer anchored in time and space. Both time and space have been rendered obsolete in life – just as in science. This is because they are beyond normal human comprehension, and based on assumptions that are subjective, and hence, doubtful. Traditional definitions of time and space, moreover, were founded on hierarchy of thought that served the purposes of colonialism.

Little wonder that the breakdown of Modernism is hailed with exhilaration by the postmodernists, to whom it means the liberation of literature from the fetters of revolting established order. This new liberated literature marks a 'de-Eliotisation movement in art', and it seeks to bridge 'the gap between art and popular entertainment, between high and low, between elite culture and popular culture by absorbing into its corpus elements so contemporary in popular culture chiefly science fiction, pornography and the Western.

In the ultimate analysis, postmodernism appears to be an 'avant-garde' movement, which neither endeavours to pose new answers to replace the old certitudes it destroys, nor would make any attempt usher in a better world. Nothing strikes us coherent about it. If it is anything, it is but a loose collection of tendencies, which, above all, register a new sensibility.

There is no doubt that postmodernism is a fascinating phenomenon in art, culture, society and literature today. But, to many, it would seem to have cared little to produce works of artistic excellence that will live with us for ever. To them, it is merely symptomatic of the present time, and therein lies its interest for the critics and readers.