الجمهوريــــة الجزائريــــة الديمقراطيـــة الشعبيـــة
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education And Scientific Research
University Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem

وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي
جامعة عبد الحميد بن باديس مستغانم

مستغانـــــــم في:2023/04/19

قسم اللغة الانجليزية

الرقم: 06 / ج م/2023

Extrait de Procès Verbal du Conseil Scientifique
du Département de Langue Anglaise
19/04/2023

Lors de sa réunion du 19avril 2023, le CSD a validé les deux rapports signés **Favorable** après l'expertise du polycopié de cours de Dre DJAFRI Yasmina en vue de l'obtention du grade de professeur.

Les experts désignés sont :

- Pr BAHOUS Abbès   Professeur   université Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem/ Rapport favorable

- Pre SARNOU Dalal   Professeure   université Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem/ Rapport favorable

Intitulé : An Introduction to Postmodernism : a Course for Third Year Students of English

Mostaganem le 19/04/2023

Présidente du CSD

1

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis

Faculty of Foreign Languages

UNIVERSITE
Abdelhamid Ibn Badis
MOSTAGANEM

Department of English Language

An Introduction to Postmodernism:

A Course for Third Year Students of English

By

Dr Yasmina DJAFRI

2022-2023

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1. Course

1.1. Description

The present course is addressed to third year students of English language as far as the module of American literature is concerned, as well as to researchers who would inquire upon Postmodernism, and the aim of which is to provide them with a detailed insight about the movement, its socio-historical and philosophical backgrounds, its leading figures, and its innovatory style and techniques of fiction writing. The focus of the selected corpus of study, notably contemporary texts of fiction (short story mainly), is but an attempt to equip the learners with the suitable tools and information amenable to contribute to the completion of their literary competence in the mastery of the major literary movements' essence.

1.2. Objectives

By the end of this course successful students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a detailed understanding of the key concepts of the Postmodernist movement

- Show familiarity with Western Postmodernism and grasp its nuances

- Relate the texts to their historical and cultural contexts

- Analyse a range of narrative strategies used by Postmodern writers

- Apply philosophical approaches to a critical reading of these texts, where appropriate.

1.3. Requirements

Students of this course are supposed to have some basic competencies in order to best cope with the objectives set by this same course, notably:

- An understanding of the concept of modernist fiction and modernist in general movement

- An understanding of the decline of Modernism and its demise

- An acquaintance with some of the mid 20th century Western leading figures of the Postmodern thought

- An insightful reading of the texts suggested in this course to help debate the core issues and objectives of the course

- A predisposition to debate the highlighted issues in the class (possibly virtual too)

1.4. Timing

This course is meant to be achieved in a period of 12 weeks, 3 of which will be devoted to the theoretical foundations of the course, and 9 weeks for the practical study of the suggested corpus, further details about timing will be provided later in the explanation of the objectives and the corresponding timing for each part.

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I.   Theoretical Foundations
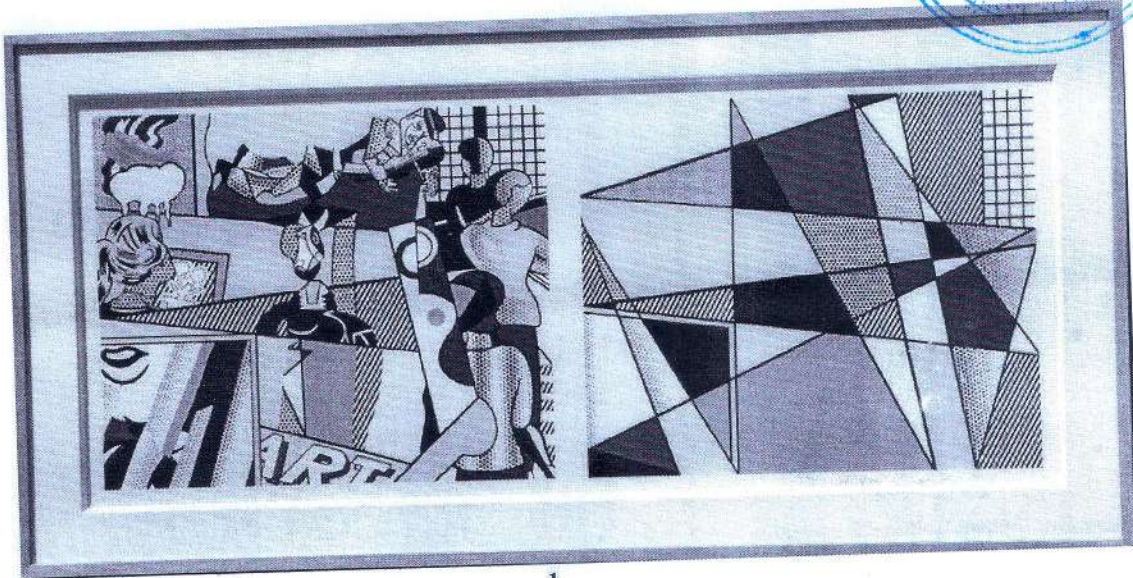
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> *Clearly, then, the time has come to theorize the term
> [postmodernism], if not to define it, before it fades from awkward
> neologism to derelict cliché without ever attaining to the dignity of
> a cultural concept. (Ihab Hassan)*

Controversies whether Postmodernism stands as a continuity or disruption of modernism are still at the core of the debate of contemporary thought. Provided that postmodernism came after modernism, an understanding of the origin of modernism and how the latter devised its principles of belief and modes of conduct from earlier thought imposes itself. The roots of Modernism go back to the Enlightenment period as the latter prioritized rational and empirical thinking at the expense of tradition and conservatism. Hence, the essence of Modernism foregrounded order as the driving force which led Man achieve control of the world through reason and science. In this sense, Klages (2001) reports,

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[1] The portrait is made by Roy Lichenstein (1923-1997), an American Pop artist.
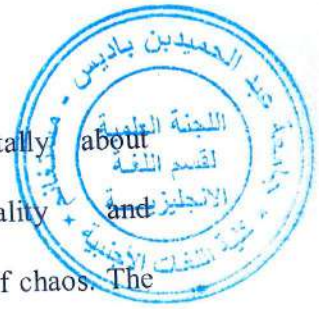
Modernity is fundamentally about order: about rationality and rationalization, order out of chaos. The assumption is that creating more rationality is conducive to creating more order, and that the more ordered a society is, the better it will function (the more rationally it will function). (12)

In contrast, and because of serious war endangerment among other more serious issues, the Western world experienced a deep disillusionment about what regulated the world so far. Unlike Modernism, the Postmodern thought challenged 'Order' and questioned Man's ability to maintain control over non-scientific, divine and human values. The Postmodernist spirit resorted to an appraisal of the past and its legacy and believed that the past is far richer and more glorious than the present.

Figure 1. The Evolution of the Postmodern World[2]

PREMODERN   **MODERN**   **POSTMODERN**

"Because God put it there and that's the way it's always been."   "Onwards and upwards with inevitable progress!"   "Bllpppggghljsdlkfjowejfalsk djflksdjflksjdldjl;aldflkj::::df"

[2] Available at : https://www.pinterest.com/pin/670684569483248717/
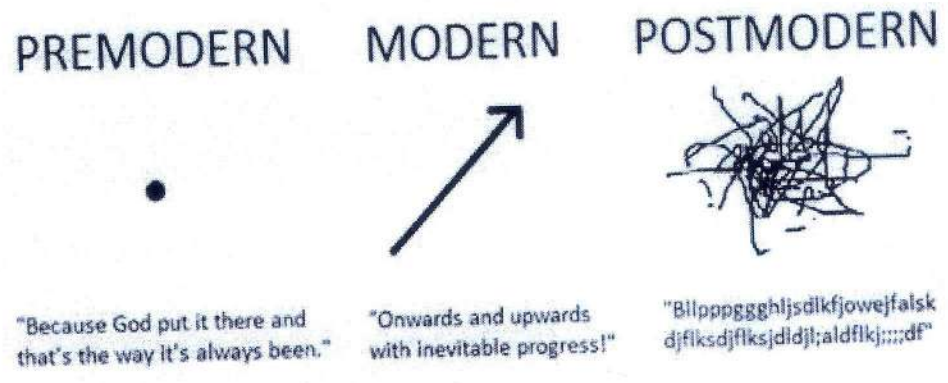
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The 1970s were the first period where the term Postmodernism was coined for the first time. The addition of the prefix 'post' meant change in its broadest sense and it implied a shift in the different paradigms that used to characterize the Modernist movement, yet, it did not necessarily mark the beginning of a new era. Considered a set of new embedded beliefs and inherent modes of conduct proper to the contemporary times, the meaning of the term varied according to the different disciplines in which it was implemented. Cudden reports on the term as,

> A general (and sometimes controversial) term used to refer to changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place (and are taking place) in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc since the 1940s or 1950s. Post-modernism is different from modernism, even a reaction against it (689-690).

Not surprisingly, the art field was the first discipline which took at its charge the urge to vehicle the transcendence of the old beliefs of the modern times through groundbreaking artistic styles. The first artistic usage of the term is attributed to the English painter John Watkins Chapman (fl.1853-1903), whose art surpassed impressionism and embraced the postmodernist spirit.

In the aftermath of World War I, a prevailing disappointment characterized the Western world. The project of modernity proved its limitation as human values were denigrated and substituted for economic and territorial expansion of the Empire overseas through colonialism. It is assumed that the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the 1940s and the 1950s are all historical drives which helped the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

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Whether considered a threat to modern issues or not, critics and theorists diverge in positioning postmodernism (Dockery 13). The postmodern thought seems to have emerged out of the power of uncontrolled historical, epistemological and religious facts that were beyond the understanding of Man, hence the complexity of the movement. In addition to the prevailing confusion standing around the movement, the latter sets itself in an ideology that refutes foundationalism, essentialism, and objective realism. Therefore, it is impossible to distinguish postmodernism as a transparent ideology which longs for change.

As modernism was characterised by a turn in thinking of the Victorian times, seen as obsolete and incompatible with modern times, prominent figures as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde and Joseph Conrad, to name but a few, brought a fresh touch to the art of writing by coining innovatory techniques that dealt with daring issues. Accordingly, the end of these monuments of literature and more particularly the death of both Joyce and Woolf in 1941 created an unprecedented intellectual emptiness leading many contemporary critics to claim their death as the beginning of a new era, namely the postmodernist one.

Notwithstanding modernism's epistemological dominant, postmodernism dealt with questions of Ontology. (Boehmer 157) Otherwise said, postmodernism aimed at unveiling existential questionings that have not been covered by modernism. The revival of the past legacy and the continual renewing of the sense of meaning of Man were inherent postmodernist traits that demarcated the movement.

The first texts of literature which mark the beginning of postmodernism are said to be *The Cannibal* (1949) by John Hawkes and *Waitnig for Godot* (1953) by Samuel Beckett, while critical theory witnessed the appearance of Jacque Derrida's *Structure, Sign, and Play* lecture in 1966 and Ihab Hassan's usage in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* in 1971.

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I.1. Background of Postmodernism

The core essence of the Postmodernist movement rests on a sharp critique of the Enlightenment of the 17th century, as the disillusionment of the period following the Second World War reached its peak. The Enlightenment was a movement which sought progress and order in all disciplines to the extent that it undoubtedly disregarded human sensibilities; the reason which led to its decline. Notable philosophers of the seventieth and the eighteenth centuries, as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, praised empiricism as a leading principle of conduct. Scientific reasoning as observation experimentation and deduction were the pillars of an emerging thought that aimed to control the world mechanically.

Admittedly, rational thinking dominated all the fields of society and politics was no exception. Advocators of the Enlightenment thought succeeded to reach political agendas as they defended individual freedom and social rights. The urge to instil communication between individuals and the state fashioned new laws that were enacted to ensure the true meaning of a social contract. Obviously, the belief in the power of the state was the driving principle responsible for creating a strong institutional framework amenable to ensure individual liberalism and a deserved freedom. In this line of thought, Locke reports, "where there is no law, there is no freedom." (50)

In his turn, Bacon revolutionised the knowledge of his predecessors and accused it of archaism as it relied on religious unfounded beliefs and conventional inherited modes of thinking. Instead, his approach, modern in its time, privileged scientific reasoning and logic. Bacon is to be credited for his defence of the power of observation and induction. He holds that only through empirical processing that Man can reach control of the world and improve

their condition.

Hobbes, the third map thinker of the Enlightenment movement, demarcated his achievements by extending the empirical thinking in unprecedented domains as politics. Actually, he was highly influenced by Kant and Hobbes, and this led him devise the terms of what he meant by the 'social contract'. In his master piece, *The Leviathan*, he suggested that politicks should disregard tyranny and absolutism and embrace *logicism* in its ruling. His major concern was to make the state ensure individuals' freedom while maintaining order and security, a quite difficult equation to attain!

Enlightenment thinkers in general and Hobbes in particular were aware of the true nature of Man which was inevitably malevolent, leading most of the time to the construction of violent, vicious and fierce world. For him, society is founded on the selfishness of Man. Had these selfish individuals act separately, the world would have fallen in an unparalleled anarchy. Therefore, he was of the idea that individual mentalities should collide to ensure liberalism under the rule of a strong state which would abide by the rigour of the law.

In an utopian view of the world, Hobbes imagined a social contract that would involve both subjects and dominant powers. He even went further and held that subjects should prioritise the dominant power's safety at the expense of individuals' safety. His perception of what is now called 'State' was built on a logical reasoning as he considered both subjects and monarchs having equal interests. Subjects would sign a contract where they would choose a protector, the sovereign in this case, while the latter is asked to enforce the required security.

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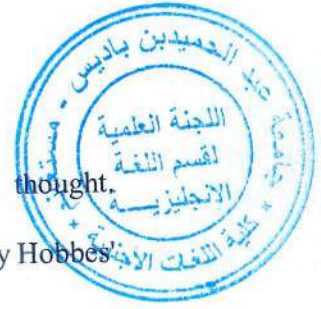
Other philosophers also played a significant role in shaping political thought. Voltaire, for example, championed religious tolerance, while Rousseau, inspired by Hobbes' *Leviathan*, proposed a different form of democracy and advocated for a republican system. This led to a greater awareness of the subjects, culminating in the execution of King Charles I at the end of the eighteenth century. France was celebrated worldwide for this move, particularly in England, where the romanticists were its first supporters.

This was an era in which the socio-economic platform shifted from an agrarian mode of economy to an industrial one. It was also an age in which the Church's influence on social matters was minimized. Religion, spirituality, and previous knowledge of the world were evaluated based on rational reasoning and empirical thinking. A pragmatic approach was preferred over pre-acquired systems that belonged to a remote period in time. This resulted in the creation of a new economic, social, and political system that served a new kind of Man in a newly created rational world (Bronner 70). This era was characterized by optimism and enthusiasm, as it promised a better standard of living, more equality, and reduced hardship. However, like any other movement, it takes time to measure its validity and success, sometimes decades or even a whole century.

According to Stephen Bronner, both Locke and Hobbes called for the limitation of individual freedom to ensure the security of one another. This led to the creation of a scheme that called for social and economic order. Bronner reports on them:

> as soon as authority ceased to defend the fundamental rights
> of human life, the members of society could break the contract and
> overthrow the ruling government ... both Hobbes and Locke thought
> of the state in terms of a utilitarian device which supported law

through sanctions and regulated the competition of the market. They both identified the public realm with the State and the private realm with the interplay of particular interests and personal property.(43-44)

The Enlightenment Era, as the name implies, illuminated the truth and reason against the ignorance, false beliefs, and superstitions of human thought. It prioritized reason in human understanding and urged individuals to utilize rational thinking in their daily affairs. The intellectuals of the Age argued that reason can only be obtained through observational empiricism, logic, and common sense. Reason was meant to counter non-rational thinking that had prevailed in previous centuries. Reason was considered the primary source of legitimacy and authority (Cited in Porter 2-3). The Enlightenment thinkers aimed to promote democracy and liberalism. Liberalism was "the primary political theory of the Enlightenment. Its approach was the critical application of 'reason' and its objective was to improve the conditions of social life and expand 'freedom'" (2004 41). Thus, liberalism began to take root with its central principles of promoting equality of rights, popular sovereignty, and an economic system as a rational economic mechanism.

The Enlightenment believed in the power of rationalism and gave Man's rational thinking the ability to triumph over historical progress. They believed that Man could monitor and control the world, or at least his social environment, through the application of reason. They believed that ideologies and social/economic exploitation were rooted in social and political institutions, keeping in mind that injustice is the product of social action based on irrational forces, superstition, and political tyranny.

However, as much as the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason called for a renovation of the social and governmental order, the ideologies they supported were

somewhat too optimistic and delusional to a certain extent. The Enlightenment was negatively criticized by many, such as the German sociologists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who argued that Baconian scientific reasoning, aimed at subjecting nature to human needs, had been transformed into a complete rationalization of reality, also known as hyper-rational momentum.

The fundamental scientific principles of the Age of Enlightenment, namely empiricism and rationality, resulted in the potential or actual erosion of values and the dehumanization of the human spirit and agency that are inherent to human beings. The consequences of this scientific approach led to nothing but capitalism in Western democracies and catastrophic political events of the 20th century, such as the World Wars, atomic bombs, and the Holocaust. From then on, modernity has been tarnished by its own deconstruction due to the hyper-scientific spirit and an unrelenting pursuit of a liberal egalitarian state through instrumental rationality. On the one hand, myths and superstitions that were prevalent during the pre-modern era have been overcome, but they have been replaced by a tragic myth of individualism and equality under instrumental reason (Horkheimer & Adorno 10).

Over the past few centuries, the excessive control and utilization of positive scientific and technological advancements in all fields have led to the destruction of the environment, the extermination of certain groups of people for ethnic or religious reasons, and the creation of war technologies that could lead to the extinction of humankind. Reason has failed to maintain control over the world and ensure progress. As a result, the Enlightenment's positivistic progressivism has been exhausted, and the limits of scientific rationalism have been exposed.

Critics of the Enlightenment, therefore, re-evaluate the era in terms of the cost of

progress, the consequences of alienation and reification, as well as the harm caused by science and technology to nature and society. However, these critics have often viewed the Age of Enlightenment from a highly tangible or materialistic perspective, ignoring the cultural and humanistic changes that occurred at the expense of hyper-rational progressivism.

Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of the Age of Enlightenment has been criticized for being biased and limited by scholars like Vincenzo Ferrone and Stephen Bronner. Ferrone examines the development of the Enlightenment's historical discourse and suggests that the era should be viewed as a cultural and historical world that needs to be reconstructed. He believes that Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment failed to consider the historical Enlightenment within its cultural and chronological context and is based on an abstract notion of the Enlightenment.

In addition, Ferrone suggests that the nationalistic and historical philosophies that emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries were a result of the confident enthusiasm of the Age of Enlightenment. However, this led to a detrimental view of history as a continuous and inevitable progression, dominated by the idea of historical progress and the notion that the past should only be viewed in terms of accomplishments. Ferrone further criticizes proponents of the Enlightenment, arguing that they were misled and manipulated by this idea.

Stephen Bronner also critiques Adorno and Horkheimer's view of the Age of Enlightenment, claiming that their evaluation is arbitrary and one-sided. He argues that they fail to undertake a genuine historical analysis and focus only on the Enlightenment's connection with technological rationality. Both Ferrone and Bronner believe that Adorno and Horkheimer's evaluation should have been approached from a culturally enlightening

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viewpoint, rather than emphasizing the hyper-rational side of the movement. This resulted in the prioritization of science and technology over the cultural aspects of the movement, leading to the dehumanization of humanity and the formation of the atomic bomb.

Furthermore, Adorno and Horkheimer's denial of the possibility of a universal history and their use of "inverted historicism" contributed to the distortion of history from a postmodernist viewpoint. Postmodernism emerged as a reaction against the uniformity and fundamentalism of modernism, rejecting the structural view of human history progress. Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives[3]" encapsulates the disintegrative thoughts that are characteristic of this movement. Postmodernism is viewed as a historical and cultural reaction to the shortcomings of modernism, and major thinkers of this movement include Baudrillard, Jameson, Lyotard, Habermas, and Derrida. The death of previously held options of structural uniformity is a central feature of postmodernism.

The Enlightenment's notion of creating a flawless society based on common sense and tolerance has been criticized and labelled as an illusion. The association of reason with rationalization and human progress has lost its persuasiveness due to the world wars, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima. As a result, critical theory argues that progress has come at too high a cost. The events of the last century have proven that reason has failed as purposive or instrumental rationalism, and it is no longer possible to refer to a rational development or a

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[3] A metanarrative "can include any grand, all-encompassing story, classic text, or archetypal account of the historical record. It can also provide a framework upon which an individual's own experiences and thoughts may be ordered. These grand, all-encompassing stories are typically characterised by some form of 'transcendent and universal truth' in addition to an ecolutionary tale of human existence (a story with a beginning, middle and an end). The majority of *metarratives* tend to be relatively optimistic in their vision for human kind, some verge on utopia, but different schools of thought offer very differing accounts". See http://www.wordiq.com/definition/metanarratives

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linear logic of history. Postmodernists, however, find themselves helpless in the face of recent events, as humanity seems to be drifting without direction in a (post-) ideological world. Ferrone wonders how the philosophical debate on the Enlightenment and modernity will proceed and how the clash between modern and postmodern intellectuals will end. He also denounces those who reject reason without offering serious alternatives. Postmodernism, according to Patricia Waugh, is a critique of the Enlightenment and a counter-Enlightenment mode. Postmodernists argue that pursuing a rational, scientific understanding of the natural and social world is an impossible and dangerous fantasy. The world is too complex and multi-faceted to be understood through a single totalizing theory, and all master narratives have decayed and ceased to be validated. Postmodernity resists any hegemonic theory and the belief in a progressive motion of the world, which claims for false coherence and universal applicability. The postmodern understanding of society is based on the belief that the Enlightenment's totalizing principles have been fatally undermined, calling into question the "ineluctable" progress of reason, which sounds tragically paradoxical after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Postmodernism highlights the fact that modernity not only failed to grant social and political well-being within social formations through the application of science and technology but also made the Holocaust and the atom bomb possible. The project of rationality was extended to the point where it appeared to coincide with its opposite.

In their essay *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente* (1947), which was the most important product of the Frankfurt School, Adorno and Horkheimer explained why it was no longer possible to believe in the idea of progress. They drew attention to the dark side of the Enlightenment, reflecting on the fact that Enlightenment's rationality aided in the creation of a totalitarian society, that rationalism, seized by totalitarian regimes, produced Auschwitz. Totalitarianism regarded total dominion of men as its final purpose;

concentration camps have been the place where to experiment total dominion[4].
Rationalization, bureaucracy and modern technology have been the source of many
unexpected evils. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that what is called 'Enlightenment' and
was hailed as 'progress' led eventually to the gas chambers (Jewish Genocide). The
Enlightenment's use and abuse of reason are central to the postmodern debate: postmodern
intellectuals agree with Adorno and Horkheimer's arguments, seeing the Enlightenment's
conception of reason as totalitarian. The Enlightenment's reason paved the way to
totalitarian regimes of rationalist efficiency serving utterly irrational ends; Adorno was
critical towards the Enlightenment's reason as a form of instrumental, rationalist
domination of nature. He argued that reason could not grasp the totality of the real, and
denounced the violence perpetrated in the name of rationality and rationalization. The
Enlightenment's reason was unable to disempower irrationalism, to annihilate superstition
and false credence, and its faith in progress was misplaced or misdirected; instead of being
conductive to morality, justice and social improvement, reason and rational organization
led to a mechanical and utilitarian view of the world. Terror and concentration camps
cannot certainly be cited as evidence of progress; progress demonstrated to be dangerous,
fake, and unthinkable.

Adorno and Horkheimer thus acknowledged the end of trust in the Enlightenment's
reason and progress[5]. The Enlightenment's original aim was to free the world from myths
by exploding them through science (a crusade against superstition), and to better the lives
of individuals. The Enlightenment presented itself as the modern scientific spirit, as the

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[4] See Alice Mandricado: *The End Of history in English Historiographic Metafiction*, Chapter Two, 2008.
[5] Yet, there are historians and critics, such as Peter Gay, who reports that the Enlightenment's idea of progress
should be interpreted as the possibility of personal liberation and popular empowerment, as the will to know
and the fight against prejudice, rather than as the belief in the omnipotence of reason and its authoritarianism.

philosophy which identifies the avenue to truth with scientific method; through scientific enquiry, man could solve the mysteries of the universe, find principles, order and truth, and deduce knowledge.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment's failure consisted in the perversion of the use of human intellect and the production of instrumental rationality. The organization and system of science at some point in history underwent a crisis: scientific commitment failed to keep its ethical promise. Despite the Enlightenment thinkers' attempt to defend the free exercise of subjectivity and support the free pursuit of scientific knowledge, the logic of science reaffirmed illiberal forms of authority and the power of myth[6].

The aim of progress during the Enlightenment was to emancipate humans from the domination of nature, enabling them to become both masters of themselves and of the natural world, and freeing them from fear of the unknown and irrational. Reason was seen as a driving force for comprehending the world, leading to progress and a better understanding. However, this progress ultimately led to regression, making humans victims of their own advancements[7].

The Enlightenment's objective of dominating nature and placing humanity above it had adverse effects on humanity itself. Humanity's ability to enslave nature also led to the ability to enslave other humans, as has been proven. On one hand, scientific and rational discoveries have increased humankind's awareness of their power over reality and nature, on

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[6] See Alice Mandricado: *The End Of history in English Historiographic Metafiction*, Chapter Two, 2008.

[7] In his attempt to salvage the Enlightenment legacy, Stephen Bronner claims that the Enlightenment identified progress with "fostering the will to know and the fight against prejudice, the insistence upon tolerance, the demand for a democratic public sphere, and the accountability of institutions" (Bronner 29).

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the other hand, this newfound power has led to control over other individuals and objects, leading to human alienation, reification, and commodification within society. In the end, individuals became controlled by the economic structure in which they resided, becoming slaves to the social strains they have created. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that modern conformist and profit-driven "culture industries" undermine the possibility of reflection or revolution.

Thus, the Enlightenment has been intrinsically linked to a tendency towards regression and destruction of freedom as well as order. Although Enlightenment thinkers viewed human history as a progression towards maturity, reason, and freedom from superstition, immaturity, and slavery, their progress did not lead to civilization but instead drove them back to barbarism. The Enlightenment paved the way for technology to dominate society, leading to systems and production methods that transformed the world of ends into a world of means. The use of technology transformed humans into mere tools for achieving specific objectives.

It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust possible. Cruel irrationality destroyed the belief in rational human progress achieved through increasing knowledge. The Enlightenment's degenerated effects and products including slavery, wars, nuclear wars, exploitation, and death camps. Adorno and Horkheimer believed that totalitarianism is a product of the very Enlightenment.

In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin wrote, "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," (vii) suggesting that civilization and barbarism exist simultaneously. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, identified the cause of "modern" barbarism with technological and social progress,

which began with the Enlightenment and ended in Nazi death camps, the West-East war, and Racial and Religious Wars.

After man learned to live together in a community, and nature was dominated, reason's function became to ensure that man lived in a decent context while being alive. Reason not only provided man with the possibility of being alive but also the chance to live properly. However, in Western countries, this stage has almost come to an end, and people now seek to expand the occasions and ways to get satisfaction. This has led to a belief in a pseudo *hedonistic* life, where man's goal is his own pleasure. The situation is different in less-developed countries, where there is a significant gap in situations, perspectives, needs, and reactions.

In the postmodern era, reason serves to fulfill man's desires and offer manifold chances for pleasure. Despite this achievement, it is unclear whether contemporary Western societies are developing towards or away from an increase in human well-being. James Graham Ballard[8] argues that "the balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decade, and we live in a world of fictions of every kind" (1974 8), where the world becomes increasingly divorced from the real due to the pervasive power of technology and systems of representation.

The individual does not have to adapt to society but identify with it, and mass culture glorifies the world as it is. However, this deprives the individual of their freedom to think against the models that society supports and celebrates. Technology has become the main vehicle of reification, and the presence of advertising and the media, particularly television,

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[8] James Graham Ballard (1930 –2009) was an English novelist, short story writer, satirist, and essayist known for provocative works of fiction which explored the relations between human psychology, technology, sex, and mass media

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is ubiquitous. Mass media are both vehicles of information and enjoyment and instruments of propaganda.

In contemporary society, commercials and propaganda coincide, and human imagination undergoes a process of reification. Man is possessed by his own images, and imagination, which is a function of man's freedom, is now muffled and blocked. The bombardments of the media transform reality into images, and time is fragmented into a series of perpetual presents. Postmodernist thinkers focus on the new *depthlessness* and the consequent weakening of historicity. The present has dissolved in images, and history has lost its place and importance due to the intense velocity with which information circulates in the mass media.

The era of postmodernity is characterized by a dominance of images and simulations, with history being inaccessible and only existing as endlessly reproduced images. Despite this, there is still a desire to uncover the past in order to gain a deeper understanding of the world. However, it is impossible to construct a definitive meaning of human history, and the very notion of searching for meaning must be abandoned. Uncertainty is a key aspect of postmodern thinking, which challenges established beliefs and values, while still seeking truth.

Postmodernism emerged in the late 20th century as a critical evaluation of modernism, which had been dominant for over two centuries. Postmodern thinkers reject the notion of absolute truth and fixed narratives, which were held up as the ultimate sources of knowledge in the past. They are skeptical of tradition and hold a distrust of metanarratives. Postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, which championed reason and science, and rejected tradition.

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Postmodernism is often associated with feelings of alienation and disillusionment as individuals are cut off from the world and feel dehumanized. Materialism and capitalism have contributed to this state of affairs, and individualism has only exacerbated the problem. This individualism can be traced back to the utilitarianism of the modern period.

This transition signifies a change in attitude towards the past that is often viewed as a rejection or re-evaluation in the western world. The contemporary man's understanding of the past, which is based on narrative reports, is now being scrutinized to determine their validity and trustworthiness.

This skeptical attitude towards the past is the essence of this transition and is evident in various fields, particularly in philosophy, literature, and art. Postmodern literature, for example, is characterized by a resistance to the traditional approach to history and instead implements historiography within a fictional account. This approach creates a multi-interpretative conclusion, allowing readers to come up with their own finality through open-finality closures. This democratized literature has no fixed ending, which alludes to the state of loss and plurality of the time. Postmodernist thinkers aim to reconstruct history with sustainable authenticity away from grand narratives that have overtaken the world's *reportedness* of truth.

I.2. Fiction in the Postmodern Age

Postmodern literature emerged after the Second World War, characterized by disillusionment with the previous modern enterprise's failure to secure peace and justice. It reflects the chaos that the world witnessed due to Western domination. Postmodern literature is often referred to as "historiographic metafiction,[9]" a term coined by Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian academic. This genre of literature is concerned with revisiting history and reflecting on the *reportedness* of history to evaluate its authenticity and validation through fictional accounts. Authors of the postmodernist age revise not only the authenticity of past history but also inquire about the validation of anything belonging to the realm of knowledge that has been brought to us through individual reportedness, the prose genre of historiography. Postmodern literature is ironically contradictory as it combines the fictitious element with the realistic historiographic genre of reportedness, representing the poetics of postmodernism.

Postmodern literature is thematically linked to history, as it incorporates factual events into fictional writing, making it a form of resistance. This genre combines historical accuracy and creative imagination through unconventional techniques like intertextuality, fragmentation, and open-ended narratives, resulting in an experimental form of literature (Sim 121-133).

According to Barry Lewis, postmodern literature encompasses the work of writers from ethnic minorities who have a hybrid status in a displaced, globalized society (cited in Sim 111). This literature is both technically and thematically experimental, reflecting a new

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[9] This literary technique will be expanded on more substantially in the section **Postmodern Techniques and Themes**

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atmosphere of disillusionment and disappointment resulting from the failures of hypermodernity, which led to wars and terror. Commentators like Barth, De Villo Sloan, Bradbury, and Ruland have all contributed to defining the period and its characteristics.

John Barth (1984) describes postmodern literature as a literature of "exhausted possibility" or "the literature of exhaustion" (p. 64). He highlights the genre's galvanizing forms against modernism, emphasizing the need for writers to move beyond the works of Joyce and Kafka and succeed in their own right. Barth argues that Joyce and Kafka's works reflect and deal with ultimacy, both technically and thematically, in an age of felt ultimacies and "final solutions" (p. 67).

Barth's assertion regarding the all-encompassing nature of postmodern literature does not refer to the clichéd themes of physical, moral, or intellectual decay. Rather, he highlights the exhaustion of particular forms and possibilities, which need not be a cause for despair (p. 64). Barth's view aligns with De Villo's perspective in his essay *The Decline of American Postmodernism* (1987), where he argues that postmodernism as a literary movement has entered its final phase of decadence (cited in Sim 111). Malcom Bradbury and Richard Ruland, in their survey *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (1991), define postmodern literature as the writerly production of the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, with anything after the 1990s categorized as either 'post-postmodernism' or 'post-pomo'.

Defining a contemporary and recent shift in both literature and ideology is a complex undertaking that requires time and categorization. Postmodernism is an ideological movement characterized by hybridity, pluralism, and a culture of 'anything goes'. These changes are reflected in literature, particularly in fiction, as noted by Raymond Federman in his *Self-Reflexive Fiction* (1988), where he suggests that postmodern practitioners can be

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considered a unified movement for which a coherent theory could be formulated (cited in Sim 112).

Similarly, Aldridge defines postmodern fiction as a genre that:

> ... virtually everything and everyone exists in such a radical stateof distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of sanity they may be said to depart. The conventions of verisimilitude and sanity have been nullified. Characters inhabit a dimension of structure less being in which their behaviour becomes inexplicably arbitrary and unjudgeable because the fiction itself stands asa metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement (Aldridge 65).

Postmodernist fiction addresses themes of historiographic metafiction, thus it challenges the traditional structures of fictional narration while claiming a superior knowledge of history beyond what official historiography has recognized. This literature revises the past in a condescending or satirical manner, undermining the authority of historical reporting and inviting readers to question how history has been constructed and disseminated. It blends fact and fiction, straddling the line between literature and para-literature. It resists both conventional fiction and factual historical reporting, openly defying the criteria of official history as a critical counter-inspection of the past. Historiographic metafiction measures the authenticity and truthfulness of official history by implementing factual elements with fictitious suppositions. Its structure and themes reflect a self-

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conception of epistemological superiority over historiography, condemning it as a virtual tantalization of civilization's history. As W. Benjamin famously noted, history is written by the victors, and throughout history, it has been reported by those in power, namely the Westerners. Postmodernist philosophers and thinkers, who represent the postmodern Man, have taken this into consideration and contributed to shaping the spirit of postmodernism with a dystopian view of society.

Scholars who adhere to postmodernism include Jameson, whose work *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, expresses concern about the replacement of culture by hyper-consumerism due to the post-industrial process in Western hyper-modernized societies. According to him, knowledge and culture are now dominated by mass-media. Another major thinker, J.F. Lyotard, argues in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* that the end of universal history is happening now and that postmodernism is defined by "incredulity towards past narratives." Baudrillard shares a similar view in *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, where he theorizes about the simulation of history and the inability to distinguish between the 'Truth' and 'Grand Narrative.' Both Lyotard and Baudrillard reject the Hegelian position on the possibility of a static, reported history. For these scholars, truth is merely a simulation of authentic reality. Roland Barthes notes that history is not a mere collection of facts, but rather a collection and interpretation of signifiers with the aim of establishing positive meaning. The German literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss also rejects a single-pointed view of history and instead advocates for a three-dimensional approach between the author, the work, the text, and the reader, reflecting the postmodern spirit of denouncing the invalidation of the past.

Jauss's theory was a response to the "cultural, cognitive, and literary changes in Western Germany during the late 1960s" (p. xiii), which challenged the closed conclusions
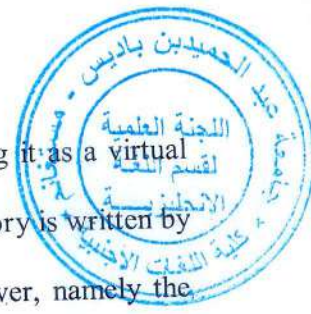
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of fictional narratives. This theory opposes the limitations of formalist literary analysis, which is associated with traditional schools of thought. Formalism tends to view poetry and literature in general as serving only itself, without considering the historical context in which it is situated. The aesthetics of reception, known in German as Rezeptionsästhetik and considered a new postmodern literary criticism that emerged after WWII, emphasizes the crucial role of the reader in synthesizing the flow and structure of a literary text.22

Jauss contends that literature is a "dialectical process of production and reception" in which:

> ... the relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing object but also through the consuming subject – through the interaction of author and public (Jauss, trans 15).

Jauss perceives literature, especially fiction, through the reader's eyes. To completely understand a text, the reader must participate, resulting in an individualistic interpretation that varies from one contextual background to another. The reception theory aligns with Barthes' belief that history cannot be told through a single, static narrative. The audience is invited to participate in the creation of the narrative, which reflects the democratization of literature. This literary democracy is also linked to the current age.

Figure 2. Postmodernism Theoretical conception[10]

Fragmentation
of social life

Globalisation
has narrowed
time and
space

Search for
truth

People less
likely to
follow rigid
ideology

Modern age has lost
the enlightenment

Consumerism
is all

Postmodernism

Greater pluralism
in modern life

No absolutes

The impact of ICT
on social life

Culture and
structures are
fragmented

Transformation
of the self
('pick 'n' mix')

Traditional labels
and categories
loose relevance

Less predictable

Confusion/lack of structure/
incessant choice
YOU CREATE WHO YOU WANT TO BE

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[10] The figure was uploaded by Abdulazim N.Elaaati in 2016 in *An Introduction of Postmodern Theory* .
Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303812364_POSTMODERNISM_THEORY/figures?lo=1

I.3. Postmodernism: Leading Thinkers

As a contemporary movement of ideas, postmodernism relied on prominent intellectuals as philosophers, novelists and playwrights to fashion its core essence. Interestingly enough, postmodernism embraced a global dimension which entailed the deconstruction of the concept of borders among countries. All of the Theatre of the Absurd, the Beat Generation and Magic Realism, for instance, are postmodern literary movement par excellence, yet their different origins implied the convergence of all parts of the world towards one unique conception of the postmodern spirit. In this line of thought, all of Samuel Beckett, William S. Burroughs, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, and Gabriel García Márquez are recognized as important contributors to the postmodern poetics.

One of the major artistic revolutions of the postmodern drama is the appearance of the Theatre of the Absurd; a new emerging trend in drama which enforced meaninglessness of life and its absurdity. This dramatic sub-genre saw light thanks to the influence of Albert's Camus, a French thinker and novelist who pondered on the absurdity of existence. He defines the absurd Man as,

> The absurd Man can only drain every-things to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solidarity efforts for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. (Camus, 1983, p. 139)

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In accordance to Camus' concept of the Absurd, Martin Esslin coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" during the 1950s to characterize the postmodern art by the failure of language to transmit the essence of life.

In deconstructing the power of language and enforcing its absurdity, a modernist characteristic par excellence, Beckett could be viewed as one among the first playwrights who helped the transition from modernism to postmodernism. In his endeavor to highlight the limitation of the modernists, especially in their appraisal of language, in his plays, lost characters are depicted living sordid lives struggling to reach an unattainable communication,

> Mostly concerned with what he saw as impossibilities in fiction (identity of characters; reliable consciousness; the reliability of language itself; and the rubrication of literature in genres) Beckett's experiments with narrative form and with the disintegration of narration and character in fiction and drama won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. His works published after 1969 are mostly meta-literary attempts that must be read in light of his own theories and previous works and the attempt to deconstruct literary forms and genres.
> (In Sharma and Chaudhary 2011:492)

The second major literary phenomenon that characterized the postmodern age is undoubtedly the 'Beat Generation'. As Jack Kerouac coined the term "Beat Generation" to describe the disillusioned youth of America during the materialistic 1950s. Kerouac's use of automatism led to the development of "spontaneous prose," which he employed in his multi-

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novel epic, the Delouse Legend, modeled after Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. The term "Beat Generation" is now commonly used to refer to a variety of post-war American writers, including the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, and the San Francisco Renaissance. These writers have also been labeled "Postmoderns," as referenced by Charles Olson and the Grove anthologies edited by Donald Allen. Although this term is no longer widely used, many writers associated with this group, such as John Ashbery, Richard Brautigan, and Gilbert Sorrentino, are still considered postmodernists. William S. Burroughs, a writer associated with the Beat Generation, is frequently listed as a postmodern writer. His novel *Naked Lunch*, published in 1959, is considered the first truly postmodern novel due to its fragmented structure, use of pastiche, and playful parody. Burroughs is also known for the "cut-up" technique, which he used to create novels like *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.

Magic Realism is a popular technique among Latin American writers, where supernatural elements are treated as ordinary occurrences. This technique was a significant part of the Latin American "boom," which coincided with the postmodern movement. Some of the major figures of the "Boom," such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, are occasionally labelled postmodernists. However, this labeling can be problematic, as *modernismo* and *posmodernismo* in Spanish-speaking Latin America refer to early 20th-century literary movements that are not directly related to English modernism and postmodernism. Octavio Paz has criticized the use of the term postmodernism in Latin America, arguing that it is incompatible with the region's cultural production.

Vladimir Nabokov is often cited as a transitional figure, along with Beckett and Borges. Similar to Beckett and Borges, Nabokov commenced his literary career prior to the onset of postmodernity (1926 in Russian, 1941 in English). Even though his renowned novel,

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Lolita (1955), can be classified as either modernist or postmodernist, his subsequent literary creations especially *Pale Fire* in 1962 and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* in 1969) are distinctly postmodern, as per Brian McHale.

I.3.1 Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007): "Simulacra and Simulation

Figure 3. Jean Baudrillard on Information Consumerism[11]
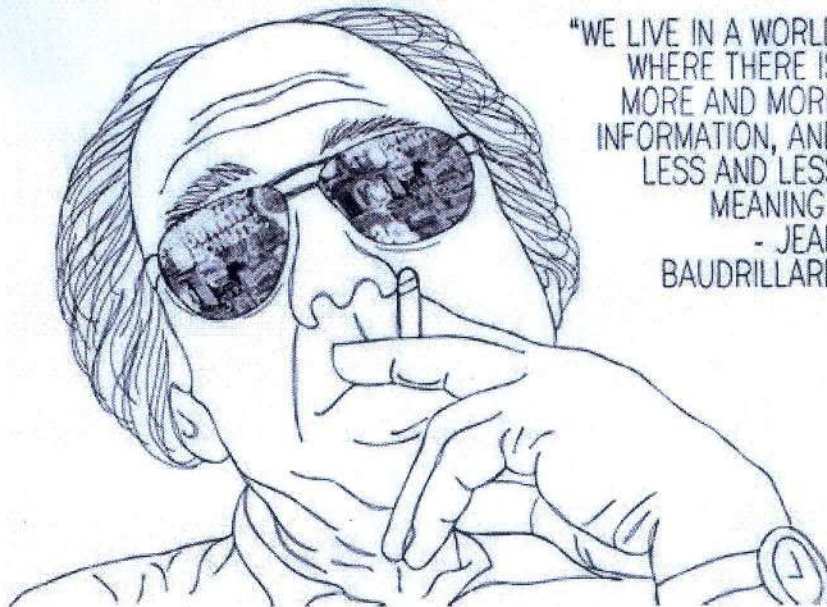
"WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE THERE IS MORE AND MORE INFORMATION, AND LESS AND LESS MEANING" - JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals. (Baudrillard)

Among the most concerned thinkers by the postmodern thought, Jean Baudrillard is at the origin of the critique of modernity. Baudrillard accuses modernity for having privileged capitalism and economic growth at the expense of human values and morals. He sees the postmodern world as a set of representations which aim at imitating the real world,

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[11] Available at: https://brunch.co.kr/@jinakim6als/8

losing then track of it. Hence, in an attempt to conform to these postmodern configurations, the world, Baudrillard claims, is founded on simulacra and simulation which characterize contemporary art, literature, media and consumerist societies. (Baudrillard 1974)

Interestingly enough, Baudrillard maps the conception of his concept simulacra on the incomprehensible confusion that exists between the real and the fictional. In other terms, for Baudrillard, contemporary societies are unable to distinguish between the reality of representation and the representation itself, a harassing point as it were! Baudrillard identifies three orders of Simulacra. The first is the image that is a clear counterfeit of the original, recognized as an illusion. In the second, the distinctions between the image and representation break down due to mass production. The third relies on the complete lack of distinction between reality and its representation, where the representation precedes and determines the real.

Baudrillard's concept of simulacra is interesting in the sense that the critic sees it as the failure of all modern traits, notably media culture, capitalism, urbanization, language and ideology. For Baudrillard, these phenomena are spoiled by a consumerist spirit which leads them distance society from nature and lose touch of the truth. For instance, magazines which display the representation of an ideal woman; pretty, tall and thin, become part of realty, making it difficult for women to consider the rest of women who do not abide by these qualities as *ideal women*. Appearance, then, is prioritized over the inherent human qualities which would distinguish a woman as a human being first. Unfortunately, the demarcation line between hyper-reality and the reality of everyday life is rarely perceived in contemporary societies, leaving space to images to dominate minds and orient their perception of the world.

I.3.2. Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998): *"The Postmodern Condition"*

Figure 4. Lyotard's Deconstruction of Metanarratives[13]
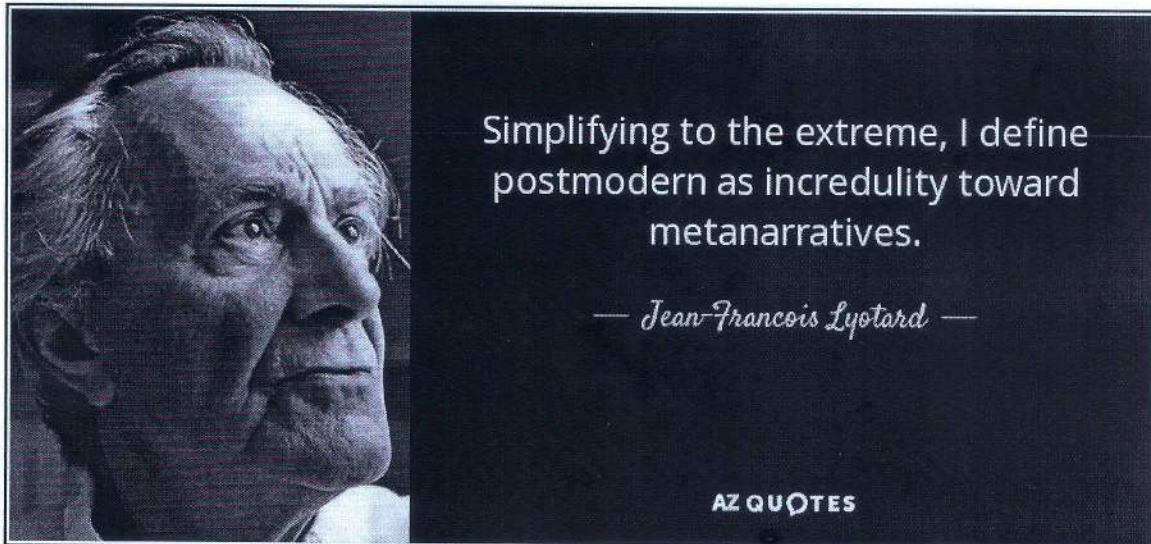
Jean Francois Lyotard, a prominent scholar and holder of the famous motto: "incredulity towards past narratives" (Figure 4), enforces a strong disbelief in past narratives instilling incomparable confusion in people. Otherwise said, in his distinguished book *The Postmodern Condition: A Reports on Knowledge (1984),* Lyotard holds that universal history is a myth and that knowledge has transformed to a readily available knowledge that is found in the abundancy of easily accessed information. Unfortunately, Lyotard puts to the fore the drastic dangers of the digital era and the predominance of the cybernetics in the contemporary era and which in fact have threatened the status of knowledge making it

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[13] Available at: https://www.azquotes.com/author/9176-Jean_Francois_Lyotard

question the legitimacy of grand or master narratives. Lyotard has instead oriented postmodernist thought towards continual questionings and reevaluation of meta narratives.

In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1998), Lyotard embraces Baudrillard's view on the simulation of history. He therefore rejects the conception of facticity and sees history as disentangled, dismantled and fragmented. Hence, the postmodernist thought enforces Hegel's view and emulates its principles.

Interestingly, all of Baudrillard, Jameson, and Lyotard, conceive the truth a mere simulation or a fabricated representation of reality. Roland Barthes, in his turn, considers that the role attributed to historians is far more serious than the mere collection of facts. Instead, historians' role lies in fashioning of an already existing legacy responsible for answering the emptiness of the unknown and the void of confusing sequences. (Jenkins, 1997, p. 121)

Actually, history is being purported by men who strove to collect facts and elaborate on them, therefore suggesting definite beginnings and endings and imposing a certain linearity in the 'historiographic' constructed narrative. In an attempt to fashion clarity, no space is attributed to genuine reality, rather a spoiled conception of the truth is prioritized. Aleksandar Sancrac maintains that:

> Postmodern theory of truth is not based only on Nietzsche's nihilism. *Truth* as subjective experience and subjective faith is an established concept in Kierkegaard's philosophy of existence. According to his philosophy, *truth is subjectivity*— emptied of objective and historical certainty. Truth of

God or truth of salvation is *highly subjective* because there are no objective measures for truthfulness (Scripture, Creeds, tradition, or Church authority). Postmodernism has accepted this idea without critical reflection because it has the same presuppositions as existentialism, by maintaining that *truth* has *no objective certainty.* (9)

I.3.3. Ihab Hassan (1925-2015): *"From Postmodernism to Postmodernity"*

Figure 5. Ihab Hassan's Conception of Difference between Modernist and Postmodernist Art[14]
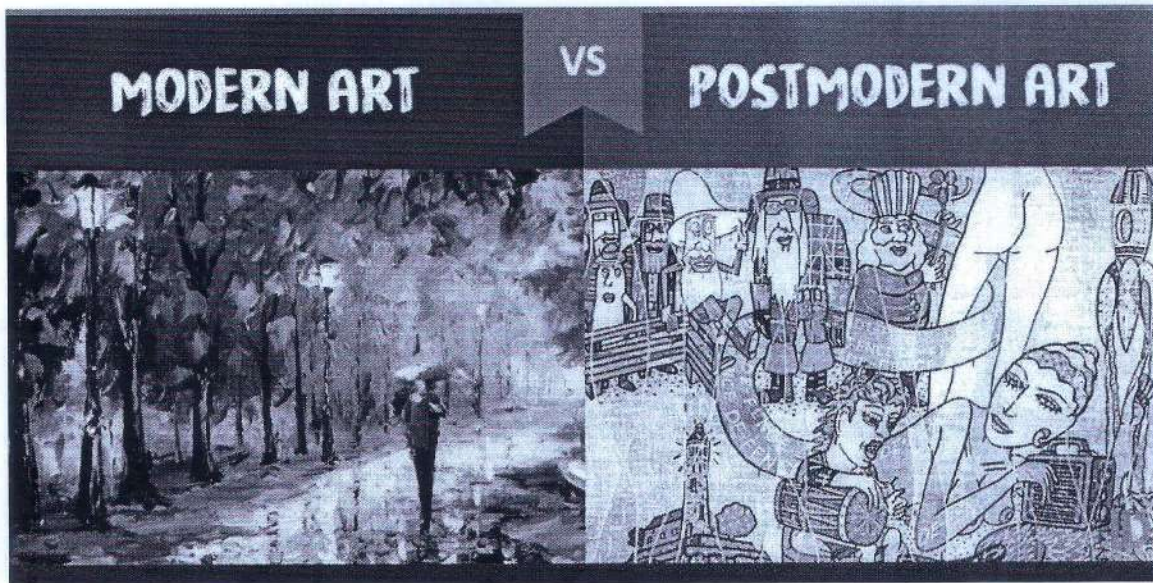
The (post) structuralist temper requires too great a depersonalization of the writing/speaking subject. Writing becomes plagiarism; speaking becomes quoting. Meanwhile, we do write, we do speak. (Ihab Hassan)

Ihab Hassan, is another map-maker of the postmodernist thought, born from an Egyptian origin and educated in American universities, as his reflections pondered around the difficulty to grasp the essence of the decentred postmodern world. In his turn, Hassan, in *Post Modernism to Postmodernity* (2000), found it difficult to define the term

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[14] Available at: https://nl.images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search

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postmodernism, for, unlike the preceding movements which marked the Western world, Postmodernism sought to explain "what is going on now in the present time?", while it is agreed that only seen retrospectively the present cannot be deciphered clearly.

Hassan in no different in that he also, as an aware critic of the postmodern time, highlighted the fluidity of the movement and the inability to fully acknowledge its contours. In *Towards a Concept of Postmodernism* (1978), Hassan took at his charge the need to create a family of elements proper to the postmodern work. For him, fragments, hybridity, decentralisations, periphery, parody, humour, are part of a list of related terms that characterize the postmodern art yet still fail to provide a clearcut definition of it.

In *Toward a Concept of Postmodernism* (1978), Hassan explores the concept of 'recycling' in the postmodern times. As disillusionment prevailed the Western world, there was a need to devise knowledge somewhere. However, in front of the predominant intellectual sterility that overshadowed the West, only the past was a reliable source of inspiration. In this line of thought, Hassan suggests, for instance, that previous genres and narratives of the past are either pasted or recycled to create a new version of them in the present times. Hence, the postmodern art is an interesting combination of fragments of something that already existed presented in a new form. Novelist Michael Chabon reports,

> All literature, highbrow or low, from the Aeneid onward, is fan fiction. Through parody and pastiche, allusion and homage, retelling and reimagining the stories that were told before us and that we have come of age loving--amateurs--we proceed, seeking out the blank places in the map that our

favorite writers, in their greatness and negligence have left for us, hoping to pass on to our own readers--should we be lucky enough to find any--some of the pleasure that we ourselves have taken in the stuff that we love: to get in on the game. All novels are sequels; influence is bliss.[15]

However, Hassan admits that the term Postmodernity is surrounded by numerous issues. Besides the problem of context, the word itself has inherent difficulties as it contains the term Modern, which means it is "imprisoned by its own enemy" (Hassan, 1987). It cannot escape from the grasp of modernism and can only be understood in comparison to it. Another issue it faces is the "semantic instability," as there is no clear consensus among theorists about its meaning. Nevertheless, these are not the only challenges confronting Postmodernity, as Jean Baudrillard points out in his essay Simulacra and Simulation (Baudrillard, 1994).

Replicas have turned into an important facet of present-day society, but if we persist in duplicating and reusing fragments from the past, then what can be imitated from the postmodern epoch? Hassan has compiled a list of Modernism versus Postmodernism differences, which seeks to both explicate and depict the intricate correlation between both movements. In the category of Modernism, we find words such as Structure, Detachment, Interpretation and Grand Narrative, while in the Postmodernism category we have Anti-structure, Participation, Against Interpretation and Small Narrative. The distinctions are evident as they relate to both Modernism and Postmodernism separately.

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[15] The above quote is by the famous Michael Chabon (1963-), American novelist, screenwriter, columnist and short story writer, known for his celebration of the postmodern art in his fiction.

Postmodern vs Modern

Table 1. Ihab Hassan's Differences between Modernism and Postmodernism (Powell 1998)

Postmodern	Modern
Rejects theories that try to totalize reality	Believes in an all-encompassing "grand theory" that combines culture, science, and history to explain everything and represent all knowledge
Subjective	Objective
No universal truths	There are universal truths that govern the world
Irony, parody, lack of seriousness	Seriousness, directness
No depth, only superficial appearances	Faith in a deeper meaning over superficial

I.4. Themes and Techniques

Most of the stated themes and techniques below are often used together. For example, metafiction and pastiche are often used for irony. These are not used by all postmodernists, nor is this an exclusive list of features. In what follows a thorough explanation of the corresponding postmodern techniques used to refer to particular postmodern themes.

I.4.1. Irony, Playfulness, Black Humour

According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern literature is characterized by the use of ironic quotation marks, which can often be interpreted as tongue-in-cheek. This type of irony, along with dark humor and the idea of "play" (related to Derrida's concept or the ideas advocated by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*), are some of the most recognizable features of postmodernism. Although the use of these techniques in literature did not originate with the postmodernists (modernists also employed playful and ironic elements), they became central features in many postmodern works. In fact, several writers who later became labelled as postmodern were initially referred to as black humorists, including John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, and Bruce Jay Friedman. Postmodernists often approach serious subjects in a playful and humorous manner, as can be seen in the way Heller, Vonnegut, and Pynchon address the events of World War II. Donald Barthelme's stories provide a good example of postmodern irony and dark humor, as seen in *The School*, in which the deaths of plants, animals, and people connected to a class of children are treated as a joke, with the narrator remaining emotionally detached. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is centered around the ironic concept of the now-famous "catch-22," with the narrative structured around a series of similar ironies. Thomas Pynchon is particularly known for his playful use of language, including wordplay, within a serious context. *The*

Crying of Lot 49, for instance, features characters with names like Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks, as well as a radio station called KCUF, while still exploring a serious subject matter and featuring a complex structure.

I.4.2. Intertextuality

The roots of intertextuality are attributed to the postmodern conception of the world as being decentralized, hence the need to regard it from a holistic perspective. Individual works are not seen separately, rather it is the interrelatedness that exists between them which deserves attention and needs to be put to the fore. Put differently, intertextuality is the technique through which former texts, be they novels, poems, or short stories, relate to the present ones. Admittedly, many contemporary critics are aware that the use of intertextuality denotes a lack of creativity and a massive use of carbonized images, yet, they recognize its importance in the postmodern knowledge. Even though intertextuality holds its roots in the past, it has substantially expanded during the postmodern age. In this context Maggie Stiefvater reports,

> A special kind of relationship happened between an artist and a piece of art, on account of the investment. Sometimes it was an emotional investment. The subject matter meant something to the artist, making every stroke of the brush weightier than it looked. It might be a technical investment. It was a new method, a hard angle, an artistic challenge that meant no success on the canvas could be taken for granted. And sometimes it was simply the sheer investment of time. Art took hours, days, weeks, years, of single-minded focus. This investment meant that everything that touched the art-making experience got absorbed. Music, conversations, or television shows experienced during the making became part of the piece, too. Hours, days, weeks, years

later, the memory of one could instantly invoke the memory of the other, because they had been inextricably joined.[16]

Postmodern narratives draw deliberately on former stories and expand on past historical personalities to sketch a unique story. In *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* by Borges, the historical figure of the medieval knight namely Don Quixote is referred to constantly. In his turn, Julian Barnes, a prominent British novelist of the postmodern times, wrote texts of fiction whose protagonists were none than famous personalities of the past, notably Gustave Flaubert in *Flaubert's Parrot*.

I.4.3 Pastiche

Related to postmodern intertextuality, pastiche means to combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. In Postmodernist literature, this can be an homage to or a parody of past styles. It can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society. It can be a combination of multiple genres to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in postmodernity. For example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns; Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales; Umberto Eco uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction, Derek Pell relies on collage and noir detective, erotica, travel guides, and how-to manuals, and so on. Though pastiche commonly refers to the mixing of genres, many other elements are also included (metafiction and temporal distortion are common in the broader pastiche of the postmodern novel). For example, Thomas Pynchon includes in his novels elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction; songs; pop culture references; well-known, obscure, and fictional history mixed together;

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[16] Maggie Steifvater (1984-) is a young American novelist of young adult fiction. She is mostly known for her series on fantasy novels of *The Wolves of Mercy Falls* and *The Raven Cycle*.

real contemporary and historical figures (Mickey Rooney and Wernher von Braun for example); a wide variety of well-known, obscure and fictional cultures and concepts. In Robert Coover's 1977 novel *The Public Burning*, the novelist mixes historically inaccurate accounts of Richard Nixon interacting with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker. Pastiche can also refer to compositional technique, for example the cut-up technique employed by Burroughs. Another example is B. S. Johnson's 1969 novel *The Unfortunates*; it was released in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it the way they chose.

I.4.4. Metafiction

Metafiction is fundamentally about the art of writing or "foregrounding the mechanism", revealing the artificiality of literature or the fictitious nature of fiction to the reader, and it often disregards the need for "willing suspension of disbelief". It is commonly used to challenge the authority of the author, for unexpected plot twists, to progress a story in a unique manner, for emotional detachment, or to offer commentary on the art of storytelling. For instance, Italo Calvino's novel *If, on a winter's night a traveler*, published in 1979, is centered around a reader who is attempting to read a novel with the same title. Kurt Vonnegut also frequently utilized this technique: the opening chapter of his novel Slaughterhouse-Five, published in 1969, is focused on the process of writing the book and draws attention to his own presence throughout the story. Although much of the novel is associated with Vonnegut's own experiences during the bombing of Dresden, he persistently highlights the artificiality of the central narrative, which includes evidently fictional elements like aliens and time travel. Similarly, Tim O'Brien's

novel/story collection *The Things They Carried*, published in 1990, which is about the experiences of a platoon during the Vietnam War, features a character named Tim O'Brien; even though O'Brien was a Vietnam veteran, the book is a work of fiction, and O'Brien casts doubt on the fictitious nature of the characters and events throughout the book. One story in the collection, "How to Tell a True War Story," challenges the concept of storytelling. The narrator claims that factual retellings of war stories would be unbelievable and that moral war stories fail to capture the truth.

I.4.5 Fabulation

The term fabulation is sometimes used interchangeably with metafiction and is associated with pastiche and Magic Realism. It involves a rejection of realism in literature and instead embraces the idea that literature is a creative work that is not limited by notions of mimesis and verisimilitude. Fabulation challenges conventional ideas about literature, such as the traditional novel structure or the role of the narrator, while also integrating other traditional storytelling elements, such as magical or mythical elements, or elements from popular genres like science fiction. Some credit Robert Scholes with coining the term in his book *The Fabulators*. Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a prime example of fabulation.

I.4.6. Poioumena

Poioumenon (plural: poioumena; from Ancient Greek: ποιούμενον, "product") is a term created by Alastair Fowler to describe a specific kind of metafiction where the story focuses on the process of creation. According to Fowler, "the poioumenon is intended to provide opportunities to explore the limits of fiction and reality - the boundaries of narrative truth." In several instances, the book will revolve around the creation of the book or include a central metaphor for this process. Notable examples of this are Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor*

Resartus and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which is about the narrator's unsuccessful efforts to tell his own story. A significant postmodern illustration is Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, in which the narrator, Kinbote, asserts that he is writing an analysis of John Shade's lengthy poem "Pale Fire," but the narrative of the connection between Shade and Kinbote is presented in what seems to be the footnotes to the poem. Similarly, the self-aware narrator in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children compares the creation of his book to the creation of chutney and the creation of independent India. Other postmodern instances of poioumena include Samuel Beckett's trilogy *(Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable)*; Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*; John Fowles's *Mantissa*; William Golding's *Paper Men*; and Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*.

I.4.7. Historiographic metafiction

The term "historiographic metafiction" was created by Linda Hutcheon to describe literary works that fictionalize factual historical events or personalities. Some noteworthy examples include Gabriel García Márquez's *The General in His Labyrinth* (which centers around Simón Bolívar), Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (which centers around Gustave Flaubert), E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime (*which features historical figures such as Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Booker T. Washington, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung), and Rabih Alameddine's Koolaids: *The Art of War* (which alludes to the Lebanese Civil War and various real-life political figures). Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* also employs this technique, as evidenced by a scene in which George Washington is depicted smoking marijuana. John Fowles similarly explores the Victorian Period in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. From a critical theory standpoint, this approach can be linked to Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author*.

I.4.8 Temporal Distortion

Fragmentation and non-linear narratives are prominent features in both modern and postmodern literature, making it a common technique. Postmodern fiction often employs temporal distortion, which serves the purpose of irony. Historiographic metafiction is an excellent example of this technique. Kurt Vonnegut's non-linear novels are known for their central feature of temporal distortions, with Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five* becoming "unstuck in time" being the most famous example. Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* playfully deals with anachronisms, such as Abraham Lincoln using a telephone. Time can overlap, repeat, or bifurcate into multiple possibilities in postmodern fiction. For instance, Robert Coover's The Babysitter from Pricksongs & Descants has multiple possible events occurring simultaneously, where the babysitter is murdered in one section, and in another section, nothing happens. However, no version of the story is favored as the correct version.

I.4.9 Magic Realism

A literary creation distinguished by the utilization of clear, sharply-defined, smoothly depicted images of characters and objects portrayed in a surrealistic style. The topics and themes are frequently fanciful, unusual, and surreal, with a certain dream-like quality. Some of the typical traits of this type of writing include the mixing and contrasting of the realistic and the bizarre or fantastical, adept manipulation of time, complicated and intricate storylines and plots, diverse use of dreams, legends and fairy tales, expressive and even surrealistic portrayal, esoteric knowledge, the element of surprise or sudden shock, the dreadful and the inexplicable. This has been applied to the works of Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentine author who published his *Historia universal de la infamia* in 1935, considered by many to be the first instance of magic realism. Colombian novelist Gabriel

García Marquez is also known for his expertise in this genre, particularly his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier is another who has been labeled a "magic realist". Postmodern writers like Salman Rushdie and Italo Calvino frequently incorporate Magic Realism in their works. A combination of fables and magic realism is evident in certain American short stories from the early 21st century, such as Kevin Brockmeier's *The Ceiling*.

I.4.10 Technoculture and Hyper-reality

Fredric Jameson referred to postmodernism as the "cultural reasoning of advanced capitalism." "Advanced capitalism" suggests that society has progressed beyond the industrial age and into the era of information. Similarly, Jean Baudrillard argued that postmodernity was characterized by a shift towards hyperreality, in which simulations have taken the place of reality. In postmodernity, people are inundated with information, technology has become a key focus in many lives, and our understanding of reality is shaped by simulations of the real. Numerous works of fiction have addressed this feature of postmodernity with characteristic irony and pastiche. For example, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* portrays characters who are bombarded with a "white noise" of television, product brand names, and clichés. The cyberpunk science fiction of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and many others employs science fiction techniques to explore this postmodern, hyperreal information overload. Steampunk, a subgenre of science fiction popularized in novels and comics by writers such as Alan Moore and James Blaylock, exhibits postmodern pastiche, temporal distortion, and a focus on technoculture with its amalgamation of futuristic technology and Victorian culture.

I.4.11 Paranoia

As explained earlier, the postmodern movement defied 'Order' and blamed its rigidity. The advocators of the postmodern thought sought to demonstrate that within the disorder of the world, Man can find his own way, albeit at the detriment of his mental stability. Termed 'paranoia' , postmodern agents highlighted the phenomenon recurrently in their works, as they believed that Man seeks arrangement witin this world of disorder. In Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1962), the characters experience paranoid anxieties as they confront the horrors of war leading Yossarian, the protagonist, a bombardier of the American Air Forces, experience extreme moments of despair simply because he belives that everybody wants to kill him.

In this line of thought American writer Philip. K. Dicks reports, " *This is a mournful discovery. 1) Those who agree with you are insane and 2) Those who do not agree with you are in power.*"[17] Mainly, paranoia appears in themes that explore techno culture or hyper-reality.

I.4.12 Maximalism

Termed as maximalism by certain critics, the extensive scope and fragmented plot of some authors like Dave Eggers have sparked debate on the "function" of a novel as a narrative and the standards by which it is evaluated. The postmodern stance is that the manner of a novel should be suitable to what it portrays and signifies, and cites examples from earlier eras such as *Gargantua* by François Rabelais and Homer's *Odyssey*, which Nancy Felson regards as the archetype of the versatile audience and its involvement with a work. Several modernist critics, especially B.R. Myers in his critical work *A Reader's*

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[17] Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/298115-this-is-a-mournful-discovery-1-those-who-agree-with-you

Manifesto, criticize the maximalist novel for being chaotic, unproductive and filled with wordplay for its own sake, devoid of emotional commitment—and therefore, lacking in value as a novel. However, there are opposing instances, such as Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*.

I.4.13 Minimalism

Literary minimalism can be characterized as a focus on a surface description where readers are expected to take an active role in the creation of a story. The characters in minimalist stories and novels tend to be unexceptional. Generally, the short stories are "slice of life" stories. Minimalism, the opposite of maximalism, is a representation of only the most basic and necessary pieces, specific by economy with words. Minimalist authors hesitate to use adjectives, adverbs, or meaningless details. Instead of providing every minute detail, the author provides a general context and then allows the reader's imagination to shape the story. Among those categorized as postmodernist, literary minimalism is most commonly associated with Samuel Beckett.

II.   Practical Part

The practical part is supposed to be covered in a period of 9 weeks where classes are delivered once a week during a period of 90mn. In each class, learners are expected to read the questions during 10mn- the short stories are supposed to have been read before coming to class. Then, learners would discuss the questions according to the given instructions for 60mn. During the last 20mn, learners would start the writing task relying on the instructor's guidelines and clues.

As it is assumed that the postmodernist literature goes beyond the intricate confines of the American and British literatures to embrace a global dimension missing in former literary movements, the selected texts for the purposes of this course, short stories par excellence, are American, Argentinian, Canadian to cite but a few.

The short story fiction sub-genre has been selected, for the adequate length criterion, short accessible texts; of the latter helps fulfill the set objectives for each class.

Introduction to Postmodernism *by Yasmina DJAFRI*

II.1. Objective and Timing

By the end of the reading of *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1951) during a period of 3 weeks, learners are supposed to get acquainted with the short story's major themes, and delve into the world of the short story as Borges revises the narrative perspective.

II.1.1. *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1951) by Jorge Luis Borges[18](1899-1986)

The *visible work* left by this novelist is easily and briefly enumerated. Imperdonable, therefore, are the omissions and additions perpetrated by Madame Henry Bachelier in a fallacious catalogue which a certain daily, whose Protestant tendency is no secret, has had the inconsideration to inflict upon its deplorable readers—though these be few and Calvinist, if not Masonic and circumscribed. The true friends of Menard have viewed this catalogue with alarm and even with a certain melancholy. One might say that only yesterday we gathered before his final monument, amidst the lugubrious cypresses, and already Error tries to tarnish his Memory . . . Decidedly, a brief rectification is unavoidable.

I am aware that it is quite easy to challenge my slight authority. I hope, however, that I shall not be prohibited from mentioning two eminent testimonies. The Baroness de Bacourt at whose unforgettable *vendredis.* I had the honor of meeting the lamented poet) .has seen fit to approve the pages which follow. The Countess de Bagnoregio, one of the most delicate spirits of the Principality of Monaco (and now of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, following her recent marriage to the international philanthropist Simo, autzsch, who has been so inconsiderately slandered, alas! By the victims of his disinterested maneuvers) has sacrificed "to veracity and to death" (such were her words) the stately reserve which is her distinction, and, in an open letter published in the magazine *Luxe,* conceded me her approval as well. These authorizations, I think, are not entirely insufficient.

I have said that Menard's visible work can be easily enumerated. Having examined with care his personal files, I find that they contain the following items:

a) A Symbolist sonnet which appeared twice (with variants) in the review La conque (issues of March and October 1899). (Excerpt from *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*)

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[18] Jorge Luis Borges is an Argentinian short story writer, essayist, poet and translator. His best known books are *Ficciones* (Fictions) and *EL Aleph* (The Aleph) published in the 1940s, short stories that explore the themes of dreams, labyrinths, chance, infinity, archives, mirrors, and mythology. He is also an influencer of the magic realism mouvement in 20th century American Literature.

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II.1.2. About the Short Story *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*

The story is a about Pierre Menard. It begins with a succinct foreword about him and his comprehensive list of his literary and scientific works that straddle both the world of symbolist literature and algebra. The story's main idea is about Menard's absurd conundrum and his impossible attempt to rewrite the Cervantes's Don Quixote. The latter's rewrite is not a handbook reproduction of the same work, but rather the recounting the exact work with the exact words word by word and line by line. He attempted to rewrite the exact Quixote and not another version similar to it. To do this task, he was compelled to learn the Spanish language and its various cultures. He was also obliged to renew his catholic religion and dismiss the preceding events that took place in Europe in the previous hundred years. He tried to write Quixote throughout the understanding of Cervantes, but he missed this theory as it appeared to be not that pivotal for him. He preferred to live the postmodern 20th century with all it existing thoughts and ideals and document Quixote through the world view of Menard instead. Meanwhile, the narrator revises a couple of chapters of the initial parts of Don Quixote that Menard was capable of reproducing. He comments that though they are reproduced exactly the same, these chapters are much richer to what Cervantes wrote long ago for Menard was managed to do such a cumbersome task despite all obstructions like the massive historical and cultural incidents that have altered human viewpoint in the superseding epochs. Though they are the same, the newly written lines give different meanings since they are written in dissimilar contexts and diverse circumstances that took place in the modern and postmodern world. Through this perspective, the narrator implies that though the words match, the language does not give sense in itself, but rather it is the reader who offers meaning to the story. The reader who gives a new meaning to an old text is not a passive one, but he is considered as an active

agent in his evaluative and interpretative method. Though the words are eternally unchangeable, the perception they evoke in the readers are eternally different. So, the story made us understand that a book of literature is not the package of pages that made up the book, but rather the background knowledge, the countless newly made interpretations that the reader come to make after reading it.. Borges concludes that sometimes even the luminous pieces of arts are downgraded in libraries when are not met by avid and active readers and that Menard was courageous enough to do such an attempt of rewriting Don Quixote so that the book remains significant in the arena of literary books.

II.1.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of this activity, including discussion, which will take 70 mn, learners are expected to acquire the necessary vocabulary related to the theme of the short story. They are also supposed to project themselves in the world of the short story and that of the original one as the major objective of the short story is to highlight the worth of the past productions.

II.1.4. Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How would "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" be different if it centred on a text other than Don Quixote? Does Don Quixote seem like the most appropriate choice for Menard's strange project, and for Borges's story? Should Borges have focused his satire on a totally different selection from world literature?

1. Why did Borges use so many literary allusions in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"? How do you think Borges wants his readers to react to these allusions? With respect? Annoyance? Confusion?

2. How would you characterize the narrator of Borges's story? Do you feel that this

    narrator is simply a stand-in for Borges, or are Borges and the narrator very different

    in major ways?

3. Are the ideas about writing and reading that appear in this story absurd? Or can you

    think of real-life reading and writing methods that recall Menard's ideas?

II.1.5. Intermediate Objective

By the end of this activity, students should be able to write an argumentative essay where

they would highlight the interrelatedness of the text to the past.

II.1.6. Writing Task

In an argumentative essay, discuss the interrelatedness of *Pierre Menard author of the*

Quixote with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

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II.2. Objective and Timing

By the end of the reading of *Axolotl* (1964) during a period of 2 weeks, learners are supposed to get acquainted with the short story's major themes and delve in the world of the short story.

II. 2.1. *Axolotl* (1964) by Julio Cortazar[19] (1914-1984)

There was a time when I thought a great deal about the axolotls. I went to see them in the aquarium at tbe Jardin des Plantes and stayed for hours watching them, observing their immobility, their faint movements. Now I am an axolotl.

I got to them by chance one spring morning when Paris was spreading its peacock tail after a wintry Lent. I was heading down tbe boulevard Port-Royal, then I took Saint-Marcel and L'Hôpital and saw green among all that grey and remembered the lions. I was friend of the lions and panthers, but had never gone into the dark, humid building that was the aquarium. I left my bike against tbe gratings and went to look at the tulips. The lions were sad and ugly and my panther was asleep. I decided on the aquarium, looked obliquely at banal fish until, unexpectedly, I hit it off with the axolotls. I stayed watching them for an hour and left, unable to think of anything else.

In the library at Sainte-Geneviève, I consulted a dictionary and learned that axolotls are the larval stage (provided with gills) of a species of salamander of the genus Ambystoma. That they were Mexican I knew already by looking at them and their little pink Aztec faces and the placard at the top of the tank. I read that specimens of them had been found in Africa capable of living on dry land during the periods of drought, and continuing their life under water when the rainy season came. I found their Spanish name, *ajolote*, and the mention that they were edible, and that their oil was used (no longer used, it said) like cod-liver oil.

I didn't care to look up any of the specialized works, but the next day I went back to the Jardin des Plantes. I began to go every morning, morning and afternoon some days. The aquarium guard smiled perplexedly taking my ticket. I would lean up against the iron bar in front of the tanks and set to watching them. There's nothing strange in this, because after the first minute I knew that we were linked, that something infinitely lost and distant kept pulling us together. It had been enough to detain me that first morning in front of the sheet of glass where some bubbles rose through the water. The axolotls huddled on the wretched narrow (only I can know how narrow and wretched) floor of moss and stone in the tank. There were nine specimens, and the majority pressed their heads against the glass, looking with their eyes of gold at whoever came near them. Disconcerted, almost ashamed, I felt it a lewdness to be peering at

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[19] Julio Cortazar (1914-1984) is an Argentinian intellectual and writer of a number of experimental novels and many short stories.

these silent and immobile figures heaped at the bottom of the tank. Mentally I isolated one, situated on the right and somewhat apart from the others, to study it better. I saw a rosy little body, translucent (I thought of those Chinese figurines of milky glass), looking like a small lizard about six inches long, ending in a fish's tail of extraordinary delicacy, the most sensitive part of our body. Along the back ran a transparent fin which joined with the tail, but what obsessed me was the feet, of the slenderest nicety, ending in tiny fingers with minutely human nails. And then I discovered its eyes, its face. Inexpressive features, with no other trait save the eyes, two orifices, like brooches, wholly of transparent gold, lacking any life but looking, letting themselves be penetrated by my look, which seemed to travel past the golden level and lose itself in a diaphanous interior mystery. A very slender black halo ringed the eye and etched it onto the pink flesh, onto the rosy stone of the head, vaguely triangular, but with curved and triangular sides which gave it a total likeness to a statuette corroded by time. The mouth was masked by the triangular plane of the face, its considerable size would be guessed only in profile; in front a delicate crevice barely slit the lifeless stone. On both sides of the head where the ears should have been, there grew three tiny sprigs, red as coral, a vegetal outgrowth, the gills, I suppose. And they were the only thing quick about it; every ten or fifteen seconds the sprigs pricked up stiffly and again subsided. Once in a while a foot would barely move, I saw the diminutive toes poise mildly on the moss. It's that we don't enjoy moving a lot, and the tank is so cramped— we barely move in any direction and we're hitting one of the others with our tail or our head— difficulties arise, fights, tiredness. The time feels like it's less if we stay quietly.

It was their quietness that made me lean toward them fascinated the first time I saw the axolotls. Obscurely I seemed to understand their secret will, to abolish space and time with an indifferent immobility. I knew better later; the gill contraction, the tentative reckoning of the delicate feet on the stones, the abrupt swimming (some of them swim with a simple undulation of the body) proved to me that they were capable of escaping that mineral lethargy in which they spent whole hours. Above all else, their eyes obsessed me. In the standing tanks on either side of them, different fishes showed me the simple stupidity of their handsome eyes so similar to our own. The eyes of the axolotls spoke to me of the presence of a different life, of another way of seeing. Glueing my face to the glass (the guard would cough fussily once in a while), I tried to see better those diminutive golden points, that entrance to the infinitely slow and remote world of these rosy creatures. It was useless to tap with one finger on the glass directly in front of their faces; they never gave the least reaction. The golden eyes continued burning with their soft, terrible light; they continued looking at me from an unfathomable depth which made me dizzy. (Excerpt from *Axolotls*, translated by Paul Blackburn)

II. 2.2. About the Short Story *Axolotl*

Written amidst the short story collection '*End of the Game and Other Stories* of the Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar (1914-84), the story is narrated by a lonesome man who frequently comes to the local zoo where he becomes so enthralled by the enchanting axolotls

in the aquarium that he associates himself with them. The narrator, a man who lives in Paris, found it tedious to be around the lions and panthers he usually observes at the zoo. Therefore, he decided to inspect axolotls. Spending days and long hours in the zoo inspecting the axolotls led the lonely man to believe he is one. Inspecting the faint movement and slow motion of these creatures is what conjured up the man's transformation into an axolotl. Alienating himself from the human life and being mesmerized by the axolotls' golden eyes, the man thought that there is a different life or a different way of evaluating things in life. As this o obsession with the axolotls becomes intense, he grew eager for a closer relationship with axolotls. One day he pressed his face across the glass as he attempted to investigate the axolotls' world, but he simply saw his face instead. At that moment, he realizes that it is unfeasible for man to recognize the world of the axolotl simply because he was out of the aquarium. Thus, his reasoning was a reasoning outside the box. At the end, he realized his own being stating that he was an axolotl in his own world. He was frightened by the idea that he is to be buried alive among these unconscious creatures, but these feelings of repulsion come to end, as he understands that the axolotls cannot communicate. Afterward, the link between them is knocked out.

II. 2.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of this activity, including discussion, which will take 70 mn, learners are expected to acquire the necessary vocabulary related to the theme of the short story. They are also supposed to project themselves in the world of the short story and consider possible delineations of metamorphosis.

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II. 2.4. Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why does the narrator of "Axolotl" identify so strongly with the axolotls? Why is his human form eventually able to walk away and gradually stop visiting the aquarium altogether?

2. How would you categorize the short story?

3. Does the mind of the story's narrator miraculously transfer to the body of an axolotl, in a twist on Kafka's Gregor Samsa metamorphosing into an insect? Or does he merely *believe* his mind is within the body of the animal?

II.2.5. Intermediate objective

By the end of this activity, students should be able to write an argumentative essay where they would highlight the implications of transforming into an insect.

II.2.6. Writing Task

Discuss the implications of human metamorphosis in the short story relying on your reading of Kafka *Metamorphosis*.

II.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of the reading of *The Fifth Story (1964)* during a period of 2 weeks,

learners are supposed to get acquainted with the short story's major themes and delve in the

world of the short story considering the implications of the five different scenarios.

II.3. 1. *The Fifth Story* (1964) by Clarice Lispector[20] (1920-77)

This story could be called "The Statues." Another possible title would be "The Killing." Or even "How to Kill Cockroaches." So I shall tell at least three stories, all of them true, because none of the three will contradict the others. Although they constitute one story, they could become a thousand and one, were I to be granted a thousand and one nights.

The first story, "How To Kill Cockroaches," begins like this: I was complaining about the cockroaches. A woman heard me complain. She gave me a recipe for killing them. I was to mix together equal quantities of sugar, flour and gypsum. The flour and sugar would attract the cockroaches, the gypsum would dry up their insides. I followed her advice. The cockroaches died.

The next story is really the first, and it is called "The Killing." It begins like this: I was complaining about the cockroaches. A woman heard me complain. The recipe follows. And then the killing takes place. The truth is that I had only complained in abstract terms about the cockroaches, for they were not even mine: they belonged to the ground floor and climbed up the pipes in the building into our apartment. It was only when I prepared the mixture that they also became mine. On our behalf, therefore, I began to measure and weigh ingredients with greater concentration. A vague loathing had taken possession of me, a sense of outrage. By day, the cockroaches were invisible and no one would believe in the evil secret which eroded such a tranquil household. But if the cockroaches, like evil secrets, slept by day, there I was preparing their nightly poison. Meticulous, eager, I prepared the elixir of prolonged death. An angry fear and my own evil secret guided me. Now I coldly wanted one thing only: to kill every cockroach in existence. Cockroaches climb up the pipes while weary people sleep. And now the recipe was ready, looking so white. As if I were dealing with cockroaches as cunning as myself, I carefully spread the powder until it looked like part of the surface dust. From my bed, in the silence of the apartment, I imagined them climbing up one by one into the kitchen where darkness slept, a solitary towel alert on the clothes-line. I awoke hours later, startled at having overslept. It was beginning to grow light. I walked across the kitchen. There they lay on the floor of the scullery, huge and brittle. During the night I had killed them. On our behalf, it was beginning to grow light. On a nearby hill, a cockerel crowed.

The third story which now begins is called "The Statues." It begins by saying that I had been complaining about the cockroaches . Then the same woman appears on the scene. And so it goes on to the point where I awake as it is beginning to grow light, and I awake still feeling sleepy and I walk across the kitchen. Even more sleepy is the scullery floor with its tiled perspective. And in the shadows of dawn, there is a purplish hue which distances everything; at my feet, I perceive patches of light and shade, scores of rigid statues scattered everywhere.

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[20] Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) is a Brazilian novelist and journalist.

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The cockroaches that have hardened from core to shell. Some are lying upside down. Others arrested in the midst of some movement that will never be completed. In the mouths of some of the cockroaches, there are traces of white powder. I am the first to observe the dawn breaking over Pompei. I know what this night has been, I know about the orgy in the dark. In some, the gypsum has hardened as slowly as in some organic process, and the cockroaches, with ever more tortuous movements, have greedily intensified the night's pleasures, trying to escape from their insides. Until they turn to stone, in innocent terror and with such, but such an expression of pained reproach. Others— suddenly assailed by their own core, without even having perceived that their inner form was turning to stone!— these are suddenly crystallized, just like a word arrested on someone's lips: I love . . . The cockroaches, invoking the name of love in vain, sang on a summer's night. While the cockroach over there, the one with the brown antennae smeared with white, must have realized too late that it had become mummified. (*An excerpt from The Fifth Story*)

II.3.2. About the Short Story *The Fifth Story*

The fifth story is told by a woman narrator who recounts how she prepared a sugar recipe that is made of flour and plaster to heal cockroach infestation. This plane occurrence is exhibited in five alternative storylines. The story is gaining importance with every new telling of it. The story opens up with the narrator suggestion of a set of possibly alternative titles; 'The Statues', 'The Killing', or 'How to Kill Cockroaches. This variety of titles encourages the narrator to tell different but authentic storylines which are part and partial of the whole story. The first version of the story, entitled 'How to Kill Cockroaches', is the most clear-cut account of the story. The plotline is initialed by projecting a narrator who is constantly complaining about cockroaches. As she complains about them, a woman provided her with a recipe to kill them. The recipe entailed the mixture of sugar, flour, and gypsum. As the recipe suggests, the gypsum parched up the insides of the cockroaches as they eat it causing them to die. Consequently, cockroaches die as they eat the made up mixture left by the narrator. Appellate 'The Killing', the second version of the story recalls that the narrator's issue with the cockroaches was happening in her mind. The abstract idea of cockroaches is depicted as dark 'secrets' to the narrator. Though the cockroaches weren't even in the narrator's apartment, she desired to kill them in her evil secret and angry

despair. In the third version dubbed 'The Statues', the narrator marches on the kitchen floor to find the stiffed bodies of cockroaches dead and lied down like statues or stones across the tiles of the kitchen. With the nearing of dawn, the narrator investigates the dead cockroaches, contemplating on their crystallized shapes and on their lost lives being taken by the mixture of gypsum. The fourth version of the story starts like the previous sections, yet the different is envisaged in the narrator fears and anxieties. With the appearance of every cockroach, the narrator redoes the practice. Yet, she becomes entangled in the dilemma of liking the idea that she acts like a witch who turns cockroaches into stones, or the apprehension of hardening her own good nature through the use of gypsum. So, in either way, she is disappointed. By the end, she made up her mind that she must sanitize, the house by repeating the nightly habit of killing the cockroaches. The concluding section of the story is entitled 'Leibnitz and The Transcendence of Love in Polynesia' where the narrator proceeds with complaining about the existence cockroaches in her home.

II.3.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of this activity, including discussion, which will take 70 mn, learners are expected to acquire the necessary vocabulary related to the theme of the short story. They are also supposed to project themselves in the world of the short story and consider the metafictional dimensions suggested in the different five scenarios.

II.3.4. Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Could *The Fifth Story* regarded as an example of metafiction?

2. How do the five versions of the story differ?

3. Could the reading be an indirect allegory for the Holocaust here?

4. 'The Fifth Story' is, in the last analysis, a story about stories: it might be productively compared with other short examples of metafiction. Discuss and illustrate.

II.3.5. Intermediate objective

By the end of this activity, students should be able to write an argumentative essay where they would highlight the metafictional aspects of the short story.

II.3.6.Writing Task

Relying on your understanding of the short story, discuss its postmodernist implications of metafiction.

II.4. Objective and Timing

By the end of the reading of *The School* (1974) during a period of 1 week, learners are supposed to get acquainted with the short story's major themes and delve into the world of the short story.

II.4.1. *The School* (1974) by Donald Barthelme[21] (1931-89)

Well, we had all these children out planting trees, see, because we figured that … that was part of their education, to see how, you know, the root systems … and also the sense of responsibility, taking care of things, being individually responsible. You know what I mean. And the trees all died. They were orange trees. I don't know why they died, they just died. Something wrong with the soil possibly or maybe the stuff we got from the nursery wasn't the best. We complained about it. So we've got thirty kids there, each kid had his or her own little tree to plant and we've got these thirty dead trees. All these kids looking at these little brown sticks, it was depressing.

It wouldn't have been so bad except that just a couple of weeks before the thing with the trees, the snakes all died. But I think that the snakes – well, the reason that the snakes kicked off was that … you remember, the boiler was shut off for four days because of the strike, and that was explicable. It was something you could explain to the kids because of the strike. I mean, none of their parents would let them cross the picket line and they knew there was a strike going on and what it meant. So when things got started up again and we found the snakes they weren't too disturbed.

With the herb gardens it was probably a case of overwatering, and at least now they know not to overwater. The children were very conscientious with the herb gardens and some of them probably … you know, slipped them a little extra water when we weren't looking. Or maybe … well, I don't like to think about sabotage, although it did occur to us. I mean, it was something that crossed our minds. We were thinking that way probably because before that the gerbils had died, and the white mice had died, and the salamander … well, now they know not to carry them around in plastic bags.

Of course we expected the tropical fish to die, that was no surprise. Those numbers, you look at them crooked and they're belly-up on the surface. But the lesson plan called for a tropical

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[21] Donald Barthelme (1931 -1989) is an American short story writer and novelist known for his playful, postmodernist style of short fiction. Barthelme also worked as a newspaper reporter for the Houston Post, was managing editor of *Location* magazine, director of the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston (1961–1962).

fish input at that point, there was nothing we could do, it happens every year, you just have to hurry past it.

We weren't even supposed to have a puppy.

We weren't even supposed to have one, it was just a puppy the Murdoch girl found under a Gristede's truck one day and she was afraid the truck would run over it when the driver had finished making his delivery, so she stuck it in her knapsack and brought it to the school with her. So we had this puppy. As soon as I saw the puppy I thought, Oh Christ, I bet it will live for about two weeks and then... And that's what it did. It wasn't supposed to be in the classroom at all, there's some kind of regulation about it, but you can't tell them they can't have a puppy when the puppy is already there, right in front of them, running around on the floor and yap yap yapping. They named it Edgar – that is, they named it after me. They had a lot of fun running after it and yelling, "Here, Edgar! Nice Edgar!" Then they'd laugh like hell. They enjoyed the ambiguity. I enjoyed it myself. I don't mind being kidded. They made a little house for it in the supply closet and all that. I don't know what it died of. Distemper, I guess. It probably hadn't had any shots. I got it out of there before the kids got to school. I checked the supply closet each morning, routinely, because I knew what was going to happen. I gave it to the custodian.

And then there was this Korean orphan that the class adopted through the Help the Children program, all the kids brought in a quarter a month, that was the idea. It was an unfortunate thing, the kid's name was Kim and maybe we adopted him too late or something. The cause of death was not stated in the letter we got, they suggested we adopt another child instead and sent us some interesting case histories, but we didn't have the heart. The class took it pretty hard, they began (I think, nobody ever said anything to me directly) to feel that maybe there was something wrong with the school. But I don't think there's anything wrong with the school, particularly, I've seen better and I've seen worse. It was just a run of bad luck. We had an extraordinary number of parents passing away, for instance. There were I think two heart attacks and two suicides, one drowning, and four killed together in a car accident. One stroke. And we had the usual heavy mortality rate among the grandparents, or maybe it was heavier this year, it seemed so. And finally the tragedy... (*an excerpt from The School*)

II.4.2 About the Short Story *The School*

Retrieved from Donald Barthelme's collection 'Sixty Stories, the school is a short story which is a form of flash fiction. The story echoes the narrative voice of the first-person narrator Edgar. The latter is a teacher who starts to ponder the reasons behind the demise of school's gardens' trees. Written in an informal language, the first person-narrator provokes the audience answers by intriguing their thoughts. Then, he explicates the importance of

planting trees from the perspective of the school. By planting trees, the school assumes that children learn worthy skills; like individual responsibility in protecting things. Despite this vital value, the school tresses are in decay without any logic reason. The decay of the school gardens' trees intrigues both the students and teachers worry and anxiety. Just similar to the school gardens trees, Edgar summons similar occasions where snakes, plants, gerbils, tropical fish and a puppy who is named Edgar also die without any fathomable cause. Unreasonable deaths become frequent with the death of an adopted Korean orphan and parents and grandparents in addition to two kids known as Edgar and Mathew. The classmates question their teacher Edgar about the place these creatures go to after death. Yet, the teacher remains speechless for he has no accurate answer. The pupils long to know whether death makes life meaningful, but the teacher insists that it is life that makes meaning *per say* without relating it to death. Yet, the teacher's answer left the students dissatisfied. Nonetheless, Edgar insists that death is not to be feared and that value is found in everything in life. Meanwhile, the pupils require their teacher to have sex with his teaching assistant Helen, but he rejects. As Helen approaches to kiss Edgar publically, the children's attention is diverted by the coming of a new gerbil in the classroom.

II.4.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of this activity, including discussion, which will take 70 mn, learners are expected to acquire the necessary vocabulary related to the theme of the short story. They are also supposed to project themselves in the world of the short story and consider the specificity of the narrative perspective.

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II.4.4. Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How does the short story invite us to reflect on Death? And how does it help fashion the reader's attitude towards the meaning of life?

2. The short story's characters are children who succeed to understand the meaning of life better than their adult teacher. According to our understanding of the story unfolding, What does this imply?

3. The fact that it is the teacher who narrates the story to us, rather than some impersonal and detached third-person narrator, is significant because the teacher is not only involved, but possibly complicit, in the spate of deaths some of the school's inhabitants – human and non-human – have suffered. It is almost as if the teacher is nervously trying to absolve himself of any responsibility for what has happened, putting it down to a run of bad luck, as he says at one point. Discuss

II.4.5. Intermediate objective

By the end of this activity, students should be able to write an argumentative essay where they would reflect on the intricacies of the narrative perspective implemented by the writer.

II.4.6. Writing Task

Write an argumentative essay where you would discuss the postmodernist distortions of narrative perspectives. Elaborate on their implications as far as the reception of the text is concerned.

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II.5. Objective and Timing

By the end of the reading of *Happy Endings* (1983) during a period of 1 week, learners are supposed to get acquainted with the short story's major themes and delve into the world of the short story.

II.5.1. *Happy Endings* (1983) by Margaret Atwood[22] (1939-)

John and Mary meet.
    What happens next?
    If you want a happy ending, try A.

A

John and Mary fall in love and get married. They both have worthwhile and remunerative jobs which they find stimulating and challenging. They buy a charming house. Real estate values go up. Eventually, when they can afford live-in help, they have two children, to whom they are devoted. The children turn out well. John and Mary have a stimulating and challenging sex life and worthwhile friends. They go on fun vacations together. They retire. They both have hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging. Eventually they die. This is the end of the story.

B

Mary falls in love with John but John doesn't fall in love with Mary. He merely uses her body for selfish pleasure and ego gratification of a tepid kind. He comes to her apartment twice a week and she cooks him dinner, you'll notice that he doesn't even consider her worth the price of a dinner out, and after he's eaten the dinner he f@#$s her and after that he falls asleep, while she does the dishes so he won't think she's untidy, having all those dirty dishes lying around, and puts on fresh lipstick so she'll look good when he wakes up, but when he wakes up he doesn't even notice, he puts on his socks and his shorts and his pants and his shirt and his tie and his shoes, the reverse order from the one in which he took them off, he doesn't take off Mary's clothes, she takes them off herself, she acts as if she's dying for it every time, not because she likes sex exactly, she doesn't, but she wants John to think she does because if they do it often enough surely he'll get used to her, he'll come to depend on her and they will get married, but John goes out the door with hardly so much as a good-night and three days later he turns up at six o'clock and they do the whole thing over.
    Mary gets run-down. Crying is bad for your face, everyone knows that and so does Mary but she can't stop. People at work notice. Her friends tell her John is a rat, a pig, a dog, he

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[22] Margaret Eleanor Atwood (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian poet, novelist, critic, essayist, teacher, and inventor. Since 1961, she has published books of poetry, numerous novels, non-fiction books, collections of short fiction. Atwood works address themes like myth, religion, identity, gender, and politics.

isn't good enough for her but she can't believe it. Inside John, she thinks, is another John who is much nicer. This other John will emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon, a Jack from a box, a pit from a prune, if the first John is only squeezed enough.

One evening John complains about the food. He has never complained about the food before. Mary is hurt.

Her friends tell her they've seen him in a restaurant with another woman, whose name is Madge. It's not even Madge that finally gets to Mary; it's the restaurant. John has never taken Mary to a restaurant. Mary collects all the sleeping pills and aspirins she can find, and takes them and a half a bottle of sherry. You can see what kind of woman she is by the fact that it's not even whiskey. She leaves a note for John. She hopes he'll discover her and get her to the hospital in time and repent and then they can get married, but this fails to happen and she dies.

John marries Madge and everything continues as in A. (An excerpt from *Happy Endings*)

II.5.2. About the Short Story *Happy Endings*

Considered a piece of meta-fiction, *Happy Endings* was initially published in 1983. The story presents six different storylines that delineate alternative sentimental bonds between a man known as John a woman called Mary. In the first section that is entitled 'A', John and Mary fall head over heels in love upon the first encounter. Their life features decency as they both have decent jobs which allow them to buy a luxurious house. The happily wedded couple enjoy a happy life and have lovely children. As they grew older, they retreat from work, take pleasure in practicing their most favorite hobbies and meanwhile pass away. The second section 'B' distinguishes a different storyline where Mary is in love with John, but he does not love her in return. Her love and her presence alike seem to be needless for John. For example, he never consider spending quality time or leisure activities with her outside. For example, Instead of taking her out to spend quality time like eating out, he comes home and she cooks for him. Acknowledged about his love affair with another woman called Madge, she tried to put an end to her life by taking an overdose. Doing so, she attempted to intrigue John's feeling of guilt. However, he had no pity for her suicidal attempt and married Madge instead. Being frail and hopeless, Mary breathed her last. Section three

that is labeled 'C' is about old married man who has an affair with a younger lady known as Mary. However, Mary feels nothing but pity for the old John. Her shining youth and free spirited led her to fall for a man who is as young and free spirited as her. Hen John acknowledged that Mary had a sexual intercourse with her lover James, he bought a handgun killed them both and then killed himself. His widow Meg married another man called Fred afterward. Section D pictures the happy life that Fred and Madge enjoy together. Their life was quite until a tidal wave moved close to their coastal abode. Frightened enough, they managed to flee together. Section 'E' reveals the heart sickness of Fred and his abrupt death. Meanwhile, Madge appears to be involved in charity work. Yet, the narrator ushers to the fact that such information might be changed by suggesting that Madge is having a heath illness and Fred sends his tie in bird-watching instead of charity work. Madge devotes herself to charity work till she dies. In the final scenario, 'F', the narrator advocates an alternative storyline by proposing that John is a revolutionary man and Mary is a detective who is only involved in relationship with John to spy on him. Yet, the story ends up like the initial storyline. The main concluding theme that Atwood comes to emphasizes throughout the different stories is death which the certain ending of everybody.

5.3. Objective and Timing

By the end of this activity, including discussion, which will take 70 mn, learners are expected to acquire the necessary vocabulary related to the theme of the short story. They are also supposed to project themselves in the world of the short story and consider the metafictional dimensions.

II.5.4. Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Devise some metafictional elements in *Happy Endings*.

2. In constructing her narrative, Margaret Atwood imagined six different scenarios that depict men and women complex relationships. Discuss.

3. Relying on your own understanding of the story, have you depicted any feminist orientation from the part of the writer? Illustrate.

4. As Happy Ending is claimed a work of metafiction, how would you comment of the story of each scenario? And how do the scenarios serve the metafictional dimension of the short story. Discuss.

5.5. Intermediate objective

By the end of this activity, students should be able to write an argumentative essay where they would reflect on the need to use metafiction in the understanding of human beings' relationships.

5.6. Writing Task

Write an essay where you imagine a seventh scenario involving a relationship between a man and woman while taking into account the metafictional predominance of the short story

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