

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Postmodernism refers to any avant-garde writing style that rejects traditional assumptions and seeks to define the world in new ways.

Assumptions of liberal
humanism, to which
postmodernism is considered
a new extension of:

1. Literature has meaning
(essentialism – reducing a
complex phenomenon to its
basic core)

2. Language functions as a way of describing reality
3. Literature has a purpose
4. The author holds a position of authority over us

5. The work consists of an idea that began in the author's mind

6. There exists an author who is removed from the audience

The nature of reality is not found in the substance of things says postmodernist thought.

Liberal humanism
distinguishes between author
and audience but assumes
that the two can connect with
each other through a work of
art that uses language
effectively to convey meaning.

This relationship between things can be examined through the study of semiotics which consists of analyzing the signifier, the signified, and the sign.

Signifier – sound or image that
forms the word we use

Signified – the object that the
word refers to

Sign – the sound/image itself
that combines the
aforementioned concepts

Postmodernism holds that:

1. Language forms the bedrock of our existence
2. There really is no author
3. The author has no privileged position as the work's creator
4. The purpose of literature is not to show but rather to engage

The postmodern writer wants
to engage us in a collective
activity.

The postmodernist playwright is interested in how one scene relates to another, and the idea of a beginning, middle, and end format ceases to have importance.

In postmodernism, the parts are more important than the whole, and meaning comes from the relationship of parts.

Pastiche refers to a collection of things from a variety of sources, tied together randomly, as in a collage, and pastiche is a device commonly used in postmodernist plays.

The gradual shift away from characters as “people” in postmodernism occurs by:

1. Reflecting puppet-like figures
2. resembling animate bodies as part of a visual tableau
3. Depicted as parodies of characters in others plays or genres

Postmodern plays are language based and the primary focus is on the words rather than on the story or characters.

Postmodernism's basic philosophical assumptions are that people define their existence by words and, therefore, language is also the only vehicle there is for connecting with others.

The terms metadrama and metatheater mean that the art form, the production or play, is designed to comment on itself.

One of the characteristics of postmodernism is its sense of fun and play about the work.