

## Conceptualizing Postmodernism

### - **Ihab Hassan: from “Towards a concept of Postmodernism”**

In *Towards a Concept of Postmodernism* (1978) Hassan endeavors to categorize the term inclusive of its fluidity and in this light, he continues to attempt at understanding Postmodernism before he can define it.

He describes how it “eludes definition” and is, like Romanticism and Modernism, fluid as it will “shift and slide continually with time, particularly in an age of ideological conflict and media hype”

### - **Brian McHale : *From Modernism to Postmodernism***

He quotes John Barth, a familiar face, as saying of postmodernism that the term is, “awkward and faintly epigonic, suggestive less of a vigorous or even interesting new direction in the old art of storytelling than of something anti-climatic, feebly following a very hard act to follow.”

Postmodernism, as well as the Renaissance and romanticism are not solid definitive objects, but instead are contrived notions, created by, as McHale writes, “contemporary readers and writers or retrospectively by literary historians.” And because postmodernism has no set definition, it is open to a multitude of interpretations.

#### • **The Dominant:**

The tool McHale uses to trace the emergence of postmodernism from modernism in fiction is the concept of “**the dominant.**”

“The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure...”

#### • **The Epistemological dominant:**

It is related to Modernism. It focuses on an individual’s knowledge. In an epistemological text, there is no question about the reliability of the narrator or the actions in the text. McHale uses the detective novel as a means of describing the epistemological. In detective novels, we are given the same questions again and again, those being the who, what, where, when, and why. And each of these questions has a definitive answer, which come with the solving of the crime.

#### • **The Ontological Dominant:**

McHale correlates this dominant with the postmodern. With ontological dominant, the focus is less on questions about the world which can be

answered; instead, the world itself comes into question. Where McHale likened epistemological with detective fiction, he relates the ontological with science fiction. In science fiction, the reliability of the world around you is not a major concern.

- **Jean François Lyotard: from *The Postmodern Condition***

According to Lyotard, the postmodern is the disbelief toward grand narratives (Metanarratives). He calls this period as a period of "slackening"---> Anything goes.

One of the grand narratives is the Enlightenment project. Enlightenment believes that science, reason, and rationalism satisfy all human capacities and fulfillment. It tries to unify all aspects of knowledge and truth, and consequently, human life. Other metanarratives include religion, Marxism, and realism.

• **Modern Vs. Postmodern aesthetics**

- The modern presents the unrepresentable through forms that are recognizable in order to give the reader solace for the missing content.
- The postmodern denies itself of good forms in order to highlight the impossibility of representation.