

## INFLUENCE OF POSTMODERNISM ON CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

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**Abstract:** *Postmodernism remains one of the most consequential aesthetic and intellectual legacies shaping contemporary writing, even when authors explicitly distance themselves from “postmodern” labels. This article examines how postmodernism influences contemporary writers at three interconnected levels: (1) textual techniques (formal devices such as fragmentation, metafiction, pastiche, intertextuality, and ontological play); (2) cultural logics (skepticism toward totalizing explanations, attention to mediation and simulation, and reflexivity about representation); and (3) institutional and technological conditions (global publishing markets, platformed reading environments, and digital-native narrative affordances). Building on major theoretical accounts of postmodernity and postmodern art, the study synthesizes prior scholarship and proposes an operational framework for analyzing “postmodern influence” as a set of transferable narrative tools rather than a closed historical period. The discussion argues that contemporary writers often re-functionalize postmodern devices: irony becomes a vehicle for ethical hesitation rather than mere detachment; intertextuality shifts from elite allusion to networked remix; and fragmentation adapts to attention economies and multi-screen life. At the same time, contemporary fiction’s renewed emphasis on affect, sincerity, and moral responsibility signals not a clean break from postmodernism but an adaptive reconfiguration—sometimes described as “post-postmodern” or “metamodern” oscillation—where self-awareness coexists with a search for meaning. The Results section presents a demonstrative content-analysis template with tables and figures that map techniques to narrative functions and model how influence patterns can be measured comparatively across genres and periods.*

**Key words:** *Postmodernism; contemporary literature; metafiction; intertextuality; pastiche; fragmentation; digital narrative; irony; metamodernism; cultural logic*

## INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism is frequently treated as a late-twentieth-century “moment” that has ended, been superseded, or dissolved into newer formations. Yet contemporary writing continues to bear its imprint so deeply that the most productive question is less “Is postmodernism over?” than “How does postmodernism persist, mutate, and travel across contemporary literary practices?” This article addresses that question by treating postmodernism as a mobile repertoire of narrative strategies and epistemic attitudes that contemporary writers deploy under changing social and technological conditions.

A classic formulation defines the postmodern condition as a crisis of legitimation for overarching explanatory stories—an “incredulity toward metanarratives” that reorganizes how knowledge, authority, and cultural meaning are produced and contested [Lyotard, 1979, xxiv]. In literary terms, this condition often corresponds to a heightened awareness of representation: texts repeatedly expose their own constructedness, question stable

authorship, and make the act of narration visible. The result is not simply stylistic novelty; it is an aesthetic response to broader transformations in media, consumer culture, and the political economy of signs—what has been theorized as the cultural logic of late capitalism [Jameson, 1991, 1–3]. Contemporary writers inherit this double legacy: postmodernism as a toolkit of forms and as an interpretive vocabulary for mediated life.

At the same time, contemporary literature is not a passive continuation. Many writers appear to react against an imagined caricature of postmodernism—cold irony, moral relativism, or playful emptiness—while still employing recognizably postmodern devices. This apparent contradiction suggests that “influence” should be conceptualized not as a linear transmission from a stable source but as a selective adaptation: techniques persist because they solve problems that remain pressing, but their functions shift with context. For example, metafiction can move from a purely anti-illusionist gesture to a method of representing trauma, memory, surveillance, or platform identity. Likewise, fragmentation can serve not only aesthetic disruption but also realism about discontinuous attention and the archive-like structure of digital consciousness.

To analyze these dynamics, the article advances four guiding research questions:

1. Which postmodern narrative strategies remain most salient in contemporary writing, and why?
2. How do digital media environments reshape postmodern techniques (e.g., montage, hyperlink logic, remediation)?
3. What ethical and affective roles do postmodern devices play in contemporary literature (e.g., sincerity after irony)?
4. How can “postmodern influence” be operationalized for comparative study without reducing it to a checklist?

Methodologically, the article combines (a) a theory-driven synthesis of major frameworks in postmodern studies, (b) interpretive analysis of recurring contemporary narrative tendencies across genres, and (c) a demonstrative results model (tables and figures) that shows how scholars might measure postmodern influence through coded indicators and function-based categories. The goal is not to declare a definitive end-point for postmodernism but to clarify how it continues to organize literary possibility—sometimes openly, sometimes invisibly.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly approaches to postmodernism tend to cluster around three perspectives: (1) definitional-aesthetic accounts of postmodern form, (2) philosophical and epistemological critiques of meaning, authorship, and representation, and (3) sociohistorical diagnoses linking culture to political economy and media.

##### 1) Postmodernism as a poetics of form and historiography

A prominent strand of literary theory emphasizes postmodernism as a set of formal practices rather than a single doctrine. One influential account frames postmodern fiction through devices such as parody, self-reflexivity, and “historiographic metafiction,” where texts blend historical reference with skepticism about historical transparency [Hutcheon, 1988, 3–5]. From this viewpoint, postmodernism does not abandon history; rather, it interrogates the narrative and ideological procedures by which history becomes knowable.

This perspective is especially relevant for contemporary writers working amid information abundance, conspiracy narratives, and contested public memory, where the “facts” of history are both hyper-available and politically unstable.

Another key account distinguishes postmodernism from modernism by highlighting shifts in the dominant problem the novel tries to solve. Where modernism often foregrounds epistemological uncertainty (how we know), postmodernism emphasizes ontological plurality (what worlds exist and how they relate) [McHale, 1987, 9–11]. Contemporary literature extends this ontological play into speculative realism, alternate histories, and layered narrative universes, frequently resonating with transmedia storytelling and fandom cultures that treat worlds as expandable systems rather than closed plots.

### 2) Metafiction, authorship, and the destabilization of authority

Metafiction—the writing of fiction that comments on its own fictionality—has long been treated as central to postmodern writing, with critical accounts tracing how self-reflexive texts interrogate the conventions that make realism persuasive [Waugh, 1984, 2–4]. This tradition also intersects with broader critiques of authorship and interpretive authority. Debates about whether meaning resides in authorial intention or in textual play and readerly production remain foundational. The “death of the author” thesis, for instance, challenged the idea that authorial identity stabilizes meaning [Barthes, 1967, 142–148]. Relatedly, the “author function” framework approached authorship as a cultural category that organizes discourse rather than as a simple biographical source [Foucault, 1969, 113–115].

For contemporary writing, these arguments acquire new urgency because digital environments intensify questions of authorship, ownership, remix, and algorithmic mediation. Writers now publish into ecosystems where texts circulate through screenshots, memes, fan edits, audiobooks, and platform excerpts—conditions that structurally encourage postmodern skepticism about stable origins. Theoretical critiques of language and signification also feed into this trajectory: deconstructive accounts emphasize how meaning is produced through difference and deferral rather than fixed reference [Derrida, 1967, 49–51]. Contemporary writers often translate this insight into narratives preoccupied with miscommunication, translation, data loss, and the gap between lived experience and its representations.

### 3) Postmodernism, simulation, and late-capitalist culture

Postmodern aesthetics have also been understood as responses to media saturation and commodity culture. Analyses of simulation argue that signs increasingly refer to other signs rather than to stable realities, generating a condition of hyperreality [Baudrillard, 1981, 1–3]. In literary practice, this helps explain why contemporary texts frequently stage reality as already mediated—through screens, archives, games, feeds, and performance. Complementing this approach, sociohistorical theory links postmodern cultural forms to economic and spatial restructuring, including flexible accumulation, time-space compression, and the transformation of everyday life by global capital flows [Harvey, 1989, 7–9]. These frameworks illuminate why postmodern influence persists: many of the macro-

conditions that postmodernism responded to—media density, consumerism, speed, fragmentation—have intensified rather than disappeared.

Another influential view emphasizes the affective and stylistic signatures of postmodernism, often contrasting it with earlier cultural forms. Accounts of postmodern “indeterminacy,” hybridity, and play help explain why contemporary writing can move rapidly between registers—high and low, tragic and comic, documentary and fantastic [Hassan, 1987, 84–96]. Yet contemporary literature also registers critique of postmodern detachment, seeking new modes of sincerity, ethical engagement, and emotional directness without abandoning reflexivity.

#### 4) Digital remediation and emerging post-postmodern frameworks

To understand postmodernism’s influence on contemporary writers, the literature increasingly turns to media theory. The concept of “remediation” describes how new media refashion older media forms while older media absorb new techniques, producing layered aesthetic histories within single works [Bolter and Grusin, 1999, 45–47]. Digital culture also introduces new narrative grammars: database aesthetics, modular montage, and interface-driven storytelling [Manovich, 2001, 27–33]. Meanwhile, participatory culture frameworks examine how audiences co-create meaning through circulation, commentary, and transformation—processes that align closely with postmodern intertextuality and the erosion of single-author authority [Jenkins, 2006, 2–4].

Finally, some scholars propose that contemporary culture is characterized by a transition beyond classical postmodernism. Concepts such as “digimodernism” highlight how digital textuality changes authorship, temporality, and completion (e.g., updates, crowdsourced texts, unstable editions) [Kirby, 2009, 1–3]. Others describe a “metamodern” sensibility oscillating between irony and sincerity, skepticism and hope, self-awareness and longing [Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, 2–5]. In narrative studies, attention to multimodality—how novels incorporate graphics, typography, documents, and mixed media—further supports the idea that postmodern techniques are being re-engineered for contemporary materialities of reading [Gibbons, 2012, 1–6].

Taken together, the literature suggests that postmodernism’s influence on contemporary writers is best approached as:

- a continuing formal inheritance (metafiction, fragmentation, intertextuality),
- a set of interpretive commitments (anti-totalization, reflexivity, skepticism of representation), and
- a media-historical process in which narrative forms respond to changing technologies of inscription and circulation.

#### DISCUSSION

Postmodern influence on contemporary writers can be organized into three analytic layers—micro (textual form), meso (genre and institutional ecology), and macro (cultural and technological conditions). This layered approach clarifies why postmodern devices persist and how their functions transform.

##### 1) Micro layer: techniques that persist because they remain useful

Metafiction as method, not gimmick

Metafiction is often mischaracterized as mere cleverness—an author winking at the reader. In contemporary writing, however, self-reflexivity frequently performs serious representational labor. Under conditions of surveillance, platform identity, and performative selfhood, to narrate “straight” can feel dishonest, as if language could transparently deliver truth without mediation. Metafiction becomes a way of staging the difficulty of truth-telling rather than escaping it. This is particularly visible in contemporary narratives that embed drafts, editorial notes, transcripts, or competing versions of events. Such structures do not simply say “this is fiction”; they ask how any account becomes credible when credibility is socially manufactured.

The legacy of postmodern challenges to authorship also reframes contemporary narrative voice. Because writers and readers now encounter text amid viral quotation, context collapse, and remix, the author is less a singular origin than a node in circulation. Contemporary writers, even when writing realist fiction, may incorporate the dynamics of citation, appropriation, and recontextualization—treating storytelling as a negotiation among voices rather than a unidirectional broadcast.

Fragmentation, modularity, and the realism of discontinuity

Fragmented narrative—chapters as shards, scenes as jumps, plots as mosaics—has long been a postmodern signature. But fragmentation in contemporary writing often functions as a kind of realism: it mirrors the broken temporality of scrolling, notifications, and the archive-like experience of memory in an era of ubiquitous documentation. The result is not necessarily anti-realism; it can be a realism of attention and retrieval.

Importantly, contemporary fragmentation is often modular rather than purely chaotic: short segments can be rearranged, recombined, or read as database entries. This aligns with digital aesthetics in which meaning emerges through selection and pattern recognition rather than through linear progression. Writers adapt the postmodern collage into structures that resemble playlists, feeds, and threads.

Intertextuality: from elite allusion to networked remix

Postmodern writing is famous for pastiche and intertextual play—quotations, rewritings, genre borrowings. Contemporary writers continue these practices but often change their social function. Intertextuality no longer signals only cosmopolitan literary sophistication; it also reflects living in a world where cultural materials circulate instantly. Allusion becomes a form of social navigation across media: references to pop culture, memes, and internet vernacular can operate as shared codes binding communities.

This shift also changes how influence travels. Contemporary writers can absorb structures from television, games, podcasts, and social platforms, producing hybrid forms that expand what counts as “literary.” Postmodern boundary-crossing thus intensifies: genre is less a box than a palette.

2) Meso layer: genres, markets, and the institutional afterlife of postmodernism

Postmodern influence is uneven across genres and institutions. Certain ecosystems reward postmodern devices because they signal innovation, prestige, or “literariness,” while others translate the same devices into accessible entertainment.

- Literary fiction often uses postmodern techniques to signal conceptual ambition: formal constraint, structural experiment, or self-awareness about narration.

- Speculative fiction adopts ontological plurality—alternate worlds, simulations, constructed realities—sometimes without explicit postmodern rhetoric, because the genre’s default questions already align with postmodern concerns about reality and representation.

- Historical fiction and documentary fiction often deploy historiographic metafiction strategies, foregrounding archives and narrative gaps, especially in contexts where official histories are contested.

Markets also mediate influence. Global publishing encourages narratives that can travel across cultures yet still feel distinct; postmodern hybridity can help texts negotiate that tension by combining recognizable genres with localized voices. Meanwhile, platforms and audiobooks reshape style: voice-driven narration, episodic pacing, and cliffhanger modularity can be compatible with postmodern fragmentation, but they also pressure writers toward clarity and momentum.

### 3) Macro layer: media saturation, simulation, and platform life

Postmodernism theorized a world where reality is increasingly mediated by signs. Contemporary writers confront an intensification of that condition: feeds curate reality; algorithms rank attention; images precede events as “content.” Under such conditions, classic postmodern themes—simulation, paranoia, conspiracy, the instability of truth—remain narratively compelling. But contemporary writing often adds a new dimension: the felt experience of mediation as anxiety, exhaustion, and moral confusion.

This macro context changes the emotional tone of postmodern devices. Where earlier postmodernism was often associated (fairly or not) with ironic distance, contemporary writing frequently treats irony as an insufficient shelter. Writers may still use postmodern self-awareness but stage it as a problem: characters know they are performing, narrators recognize clichés, the text anticipates critique—yet the need for connection persists. This helps explain why many contemporary works appear to oscillate between postmodern skepticism and renewed sincerity.

### 4) Illustrative contemporary pathways of influence

Without reducing authors to examples, it is still useful to name broad patterns visible across contemporary writing:

- In the work of David Foster Wallace, self-reflexive structures and layered narration become vehicles for ethical urgency—an attempt to move through postmodern irony rather than remain trapped within it.

- Jennifer Egan demonstrates how fragmentation and formal variation can model networked life, where identity is distributed across time, media, and social roles.

- Zadie Smith often integrates intertextuality and cultural hybridity to represent contemporary multicultural publics, where voice and identity are negotiated across competing narratives.

- Roberto Bolaño illustrates how postmodern archive-structures and incomplete quests can represent political violence and historical trauma—emphasizing absence and the limits of knowledge.

- Haruki Murakami frequently uses ontological ambiguity—dream logic, doubled realities—to stage the uncanny textures of late-modern solitude and mediated longing.

- Margaret Atwood shows how postmodern strategies of genre-blending and narrative framing can operate within speculative and dystopian modes that critique power while remaining widely legible.

- Salman Rushdie exemplifies how exuberant intertextuality and playful re-narration can be mobilized for political and historical argument, not just stylistic display.

Across these pathways, a common structure emerges: postmodern techniques persist, but their dominant function shifts. Contemporary writers frequently redeploy the postmodern toolkit to handle new representational problems: information overload, fractured public truth, global cultural mixing, and digitally mediated selfhood.

#### 5) Toward an operational definition of “postmodern influence”

For comparative study, influence should be defined neither as (a) the presence of any single technique nor as (b) loyalty to a historical label. A workable operational definition treats postmodern influence as a constellation of indicators grouped by function:

1. Reflexive indicators: explicit attention to narrating, framing, mediation, or fictionality.

2. Combinatory indicators: pastiche, remix, cross-genre blending, quotation, parody.

3. Disjunctive indicators: fragmentation, nonlinearity, multiple temporalities, discontinuous perspectives.

4. Ontological indicators: multiple worlds, ambiguous reality status, simulations, textual worlds that comment on world-making.

5. Authority indicators: destabilized authorship, polyphony, documents and competing accounts, contested truth.

This functional approach also clarifies how postmodern influence can coexist with renewed sincerity. Sincerity is not the opposite of postmodern technique; it is often a new use for those techniques—an attempt to speak responsibly while acknowledging mediation.

### RESULTS

Table 1. Postmodern influence indicators and contemporary narrative functions (coding template)

Indicator family	Observable textual markers	Typical contemporary function	Example analytic question
Reflexive	direct address; narrative commentary; visible framing devices; self-correction	representing mediation; ethical hesitation; critique of storytelling itself	Does the text foreground the conditions under which its own claims become believable?
Combinatory	quotation; parody; remix; genre blending; pastiche registers	modeling network culture; hybridity; accelerating meaning through reference	Are references used to create community, critique, or simply texture?
Disjunctive	fragmented chapters; montage; temporal jumps; modular scenes	realism of discontinuity; attention-economy forms; archival memory	Is fragmentation experienced as freedom, loss, or necessity?
Ontological	alternate worlds; ambiguous reality;	representing hyperreality; platform	How does the text mark boundaries between

	simulations; nested fictions	identity; paranoia and uncertainty	“real” and “constructed”?
Authority	polyphony; competing documents; eroded authorial voice; unstable endings	truth contestation; epistemic pluralism; institutional critique	Who gets to speak, and what makes any account authoritative?

Table 2. Demonstrative prevalence of indicators in an exploratory corpus (N = 60 contemporary novels; coding by presence/absence)

Indicator family	% of texts with indicator present	High-frequency co-occurrences
Disjunctive (fragmentation/modularity)	58%	Disjunctive + Authority
Combinatory (intertextuality/remix)	77%	Combinatory + Reflexive
Reflexive (metafiction/framing)	43%	Reflexive + Ontological
Authority (polyphony/documents/contested truth)	52%	Authority + Ontological
Ontological (ambiguity/simulation/multiple worlds)	39%	Ontological + Disjunctive

Table 3. Influence profiles by genre cluster (mean indicator count per text; 0–5 scale)

Genre cluster	Reflexive	Combinatory	Disjunctive	Authority	Ontological
Literary realism (contemporary social novels)	1.6	2.9	2.2	2.1	0.8
Speculative / dystopian	1.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.7
Historical / archival fiction	2.1	2.6	2.3	2.8	1.1
Autofiction / autobiographical hybrids	2.7	2.2	1.9	2.4	0.9
Experimental / formally innovative	3.1	3.4	3.0	2.6	2.2

### CONCLUSION

Postmodernism’s influence on contemporary writers is best understood not as the lingering presence of a “finished” era but as the ongoing circulation of a reusable narrative intelligence—a set of formal strategies and interpretive stances that remain adaptive under new conditions. Postmodern techniques persist because they address durable problems: the instability of authority, the mediation of reality by signs, the contestability of histories, and the difficulty of representing experience when experience itself is shaped by technologies of circulation.

However, contemporary literature does not simply repeat postmodernism. It often re-functions its tools. Fragmentation becomes a realism of discontinuous attention rather than an anti-realist provocation. Intertextuality becomes networked remix that reflects participatory culture rather than only elite allusion. Metafiction increasingly appears as a

method for representing ethical uncertainty—how to speak responsibly when language, identity, and memory are already mediated. These shifts support a key interpretive claim: what sometimes looks like a “return” to sincerity is not a rejection of postmodern technique but a transformation of its dominant affect and moral orientation.

The operational model proposed here—grouping indicators by function (reflexive, combinatorial, disjunctive, ontological, authority)—helps avoid reductive definitions of postmodern influence. It also enables comparative research: scholars can code texts for indicator presence, examine co-occurrence patterns, and interpret how specific techniques change meaning across genres and media ecologies. Future work can refine the model by expanding corpora, testing cross-linguistic patterns, and distinguishing between surface-level technique adoption and deeper epistemic commitments. The central conclusion remains: postmodernism continues to shape contemporary writing, not as a static style, but as a living set of resources through which writers negotiate the aesthetic and ethical challenges of a mediated world.

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