

## Fragmentation, Intertextuality, Authorship, and Meaning in Postmodern Literary Theory

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores fragmentation and intertextuality as central aesthetic and theoretical principles of postmodern literary theory, with particular emphasis on the problem of authorship. Drawing on French poststructuralist thought and its reception in American literary criticism from the 1970s onward, the article examines how postmodernism reconfigures traditional notions of authorial authority, originality, and textual meaning. Although the term “postmodernism” predates the cultural phenomenon it denotes, its theoretical consolidation coincided with the rise of poststructuralist ideas, especially those articulated by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. The concept of intertextuality is analyzed not merely as a stylistic device but as a fundamental mechanism that destabilizes semantic unity and transforms the relationship between text, author, and reader. The study argues that fragmentation and intertextuality jointly undermine the idea of a coherent authorial voice, replacing it with a model of textual production based on recombination, plurality, and interpretive openness. At the same time, the article demonstrates that intertextuality alone cannot fully account for the emergence of new artistic meanings. Instead, postmodern literary texts generate meaning through the interaction of multiple linguistic codes, cultural traditions, and aesthetic strategies, thereby redefining the ontological status of the literary text within postmodern theory.*

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, fragmentation, intertextuality, poststructuralism, literary theory, French postmodernist thought,

American literary criticism, authorship, scriptor, originality, reader-response, semiotics, textual plurality, aesthetic principles. Fragmentation, cultural memory.

#### INTRODUCTION

The multiplicity of theoretical approaches to postmodernism has generated sustained debate regarding its status as an autonomous literary phenomenon. A number of scholars question its historical distinctiveness, arguing that many of the aesthetic strategies commonly associated with postmodernism can be identified in earlier literary traditions. From this standpoint, postmodernism is interpreted not primarily as a chronological movement but as a particular interpretive framework or mode of reading shaped by the reader's critical position. Such an approach emphasizes methodological principles including aesthetic transformation, artistic abstraction, and internal aesthetic evaluation, each of which manifests differently across literary systems. Within this theoretical framework, fragmentation and intertextuality emerge as defining principles of postmodern poetics. The concept of intertextuality, formulated by Julia Kristeva in the mid-1960s through her reinterpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory, reconceives the literary text as a site of intersecting cultural, linguistic, and textual discourses. Its further elaboration in poststructuralist theory, particularly in the works of Roland Barthes, fundamentally challenges traditional assumptions about unified authorship, originality, and stable meaning. In this context, the present study investigates intertextuality in conjunction with fragmentation as key mechanisms of postmodern aesthetics, focusing on their role in destabilizing authorial authority and redefining the relationship between text, meaning, and reader participation.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the theoretical foundations of postmodern literary aesthetics with particular emphasis on the concept of intertextuality and its role in

redefining authorship, originality, and textual meaning. Drawing on French poststructuralist thought and its reception in American literary criticism from the 1970s onward, the study aims to clarify competing interpretations of postmodernism as either a historical literary movement or a transhistorical mode of reading. Special attention is given to the ideas of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, whose theories challenge traditional notions of authorial authority and semantic unity. By analyzing intertextuality as a dominant poetic mechanism of postmodern literature while also addressing its conceptual limitations, the study seeks to demonstrate that postmodern textual meaning emerges from a plurality of linguistic codes, cultural traditions, and aesthetic principles rather than from a single unifying authorial consciousness.

#### LITERARY ANALYSIS

From the standpoint of literary analysis, postmodern texts are no longer interpreted as closed and self-sufficient artistic entities but as complex semiotic formations generated through the interaction of diverse cultural, textual, and ideological codes. Within this analytical framework, meaning is neither stable nor guaranteed by authorial intention; rather, it emerges through the dynamic relationship between the text, its intertextual networks, and the reader. As a result, the postmodern literary work operates as an open system in which semantic coherence is intentionally disrupted. Intertextuality constitutes a central analytical category in postmodern literary theory, functioning not simply as the presence of explicit quotations or allusions but as a structural principle that governs the production of textual meaning. In accordance with Julia Kristeva's theoretical formulation, the literary text is approached as an intersection of prior discourses, genres, and cultural narratives, shifting critical attention away from linear models of influence toward the coexistence and interaction of heterogeneous textual fragments within a single work. In postmodern writing, intertextual references frequently remain implicit, thereby requiring the reader's cultural memory

and interpretive competence to activate concealed or latent meanings.

Roland Barthes's concept of the "death of the author" further shapes postmodern literary analysis by fundamentally redefining the problem of authorship. Within this paradigm, the author ceases to function as the primary source of meaning or interpretive authority. Instead, the text is produced by a scriptor whose role is limited to the recombination of pre-existing linguistic and cultural materials. Consequently, literary analysis privileges mechanisms such as fragmentation, recombination, citation, parody, and pastiche over biographical, intentional, or expressive readings. Aesthetic value is thus relocated from originality understood as absolute novelty to the productive reconfiguration of already circulating discursive forms.

An additional dimension of postmodern literary analysis concerns the active role of the reader in the construction of meaning. Interpretation involves recognizing intertextual signals, reconstructing fragmented narrative structures, and negotiating multiple and often competing semantic possibilities. The reader functions not as a passive recipient but as a co-creator of meaning, a shift that aligns postmodern literary theory with reader-response criticism and semiotic models of interpretation. Moreover, postmodern texts are marked by fragmentation, stylistic heterogeneity, and the coexistence of multiple linguistic registers, features that undermine traditional narrative coherence and challenge hierarchical distinctions between high and low culture, as well as between canonical and non-canonical forms. The plurality of codes characteristic of postmodern literature reflects a broader cultural condition in which historical epochs, aesthetic systems, and symbolic languages coexist without a unifying center. At the same time, literary analysis reveals the theoretical limitations of intertextuality as an explanatory concept. Although it accounts for the transformation of external cultural material into textual form, it does not fully explain the emergence of new figurative meanings. Such meanings are generated through additional aesthetic principles operating within the internal structure of the literary work, including narrative strategy, genre hybridization, and symbolic recontextualization.

Accordingly, postmodern literary analysis conceptualizes the literary text as an ontologically unstable construct defined by multiplicity, openness, and semantic indeterminacy. By foregrounding fragmentation, intertextuality, and reader participation, postmodern literary theory not only redefines the object of literary study but also transforms the methodological foundations of literary interpretation.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is grounded in qualitative literary-theoretical analysis and adopts an interdisciplinary methodological framework that integrates poststructuralist, semiotic, and reader-oriented approaches to literary interpretation. The primary corpus of the research consists of seminal theoretical works in postmodern literary theory, semiotics, and intertextual studies, with particular emphasis on the writings of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and other influential representatives of French postmodernist and poststructuralist thought, as well as the critical reception of these ideas in American and Russian literary scholarship. The methodological foundation of the study includes comparative theoretical analysis, which is employed to examine divergent conceptions of postmodernism as both a historically situated literary phenomenon and a transhistorical interpretive paradigm. Historical-literary analysis is used to trace the evolution of the concept of postmodernism from its early twentieth-century usage to its theoretical consolidation in the latter half of the twentieth century. Conceptual analysis is applied to clarify and systematize key theoretical categories central to the study, including intertextuality, fragmentation, authorship, originality, the notion of the scriptor, and textual meaning. In addition, the research draws on semiotic analysis to investigate the postmodern understanding of reality as a network of sign systems and to examine the literary text as a semiotic structure composed of multiple interacting codes. Intertextual analysis is employed to explore the mechanisms through which literary texts engage with prior cultural, literary, and philosophical discourses, allowing for the identification of both implicit and explicit intertextual

relations and for an assessment of their role in destabilizing semantic coherence and traditional models of textual unity. Reader-response methodology further informs the analysis by foregrounding the active role of the reader in the construction of meaning. This approach is used to examine how cultural memory, interpretive competence, and textual plurality shape the reception and interpretation of postmodern literary texts. Furthermore, elements of structural and aesthetic analysis are incorporated to examine fragmentation, stylistic heterogeneity, and the coexistence of diverse linguistic registers as defining features of postmodern poetics. By integrating these methodological perspectives, the study offers a comprehensive theoretical examination of intertextuality and fragmentation as dominant poetic mechanisms of postmodern literature while also identifying the conceptual limitations of intertextuality as an explanatory model. The combined methodological approach enables a nuanced understanding of how postmodern texts generate meaning through the interaction of textual structures, aesthetic principles, and reader participation.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study demonstrate that postmodernism cannot be understood as a unified or stable literary phenomenon defined solely by historical chronology or a fixed set of stylistic features. Instead, the analysis confirms that postmodernism functions as a complex aesthetic and interpretive system grounded in a semiotic perception of reality. One of the central findings is that intertextuality operates as a dominant poetic mechanism in postmodern literature, shaping both textual production and interpretation. However, the study also reveals that intertextuality alone is insufficient to explain the generation of new artistic meanings within postmodern texts.

The analysis shows that postmodern literary texts are constructed through the interaction of multiple cultural, linguistic, and ideological codes. These codes coexist within a single textual space without being subordinated to a unifying narrative center or authorial consciousness. As a result, semantic

unity is intentionally destabilized, and meaning emerges as plural, provisional, and dependent on interpretive context. This finding supports poststructuralist claims, particularly those articulated by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, regarding the non-originary nature of textual meaning and the displacement of traditional authorship. A significant result concerns the redefinition of authorship in postmodern theory. The study confirms that Barthes's distinction between the author and the scribe is fundamental to understanding postmodern textuality. The author is no longer positioned as the source of meaning or creative originality; instead, the text is produced through the recombination of pre-existing discursive elements. This shift challenges Romantic and modernist notions of originality as radical novelty and positions creativity as a process of reconfiguration rather than invention. The findings thus align postmodern aesthetics with a model of textual production based on repetition, citation, parody, and pastiche.

Another important result is the identification of the reader as an active participant in meaning construction. The analysis demonstrates that postmodern texts presuppose a reader capable of recognizing intertextual signals and activating cultural memory. Meaning is not embedded in the text as a stable entity but is realized through the reader's interpretive engagement. This confirms the compatibility of postmodern literary theory with reader-response and semiotic approaches, in which interpretation is understood as a dynamic and collaborative process. The discussion further reveals that while intertextuality accounts for the transformation of extra-textual reality into textual form, it does not fully explain how new figurative meanings arise. The study identifies additional aesthetic principles – such as fragmentation, genre hybridization, narrative strategy, and symbolic recontextualization – as crucial mechanisms that operate alongside intertextuality. These principles contribute to the ontological instability of the literary text and enable the production of meanings that cannot be reduced to simple textual borrowing or reference.

The comparative discussion of modernist and postmodernist intertextuality highlights a fundamental aesthetic shift. While

modernist literature often relies on intertextual references to reinforce artistic authority or elite cultural continuity, postmodern literature employs intertextuality to undermine hierarchy, dissolve canonical boundaries, and juxtapose heterogeneous cultural forms. This distinction underscores the broader cultural condition reflected in postmodern aesthetics, characterized by plurality, simultaneity, and the coexistence of historically disparate traditions. The intertextual, philosophical, and literary-theoretical ideas of French postmodernist thinkers gained particular prominence in the United States, where they began to spread in the 1970s. By the middle of that decade, these ideas contributed to the formation of a coherent theory of postmodernism. At the same time, scholars have noted that the concept of “postmodernism” emerged earlier than the cultural phenomenon it was meant to describe. The term “postmodern” was first introduced by R. Pannwitz in *The Crisis of European Culture* (1917). Later, in 1934, F. Onís applied the term to characterize the transitional phase between two stages of modernism. In D. Somervell’s abridged version of Arnold J. Toynbee’s *A Study of History* (1947), “postmodernity” was understood as a new postwar phase of Western European civilization, distinguished by a shift from nationally oriented political thinking toward a global, international worldview.

The abundance of theoretical models, interpretations, and definitions surrounding literary postmodernism often gives rise to the notion that postmodernism is merely a construct devised by critics and that it will cease to exist once a consensus is reached regarding its meaning. One of the most widespread arguments denying postmodernism as a distinct artistic phenomenon is the observation that its defining poetic features had already appeared in literary works long before writers such as Borges, Nabokov, Cortázar, and Eco. In this context, E. Smith argues that since the core characteristics of postmodernism can be found in authors like Rabelais, Cervantes, and Sterne, postmodernism should be understood not as a historical movement but as a particular mode or condition of reading. From this perspective, the classification of a text as postmodern depends largely on the reader’s interpretive stance. At the same time, several methodological

approaches are applied to the study of this issue. Among them are the principle of aesthetic transformation, which governs the conversion of extra-literary reality into an artistic construct; the principle of artistic generalization, which shapes the figurative representation of this transformed reality; and the principle of aesthetic evaluation, which operates internally within the structure of the literary work. Nevertheless, each artistic system embodies these principles through its own specific poetic mechanisms. Consequently, analyzing the role of dominant poetic elements helps reveal the internal logic through which aesthetic wholeness is constructed, a logic that defines the distinct character of an artistic system.

The postmodern worldview, grounded in a broadly semiotic perception of reality, is most clearly manifested in one of the defining features of postmodern poetics – intertextuality, a concept introduced by Julia Kristeva. The concept of intertextuality is a relatively recent theoretical development. Introduced by Julia Kristeva in the mid-1960s during her engagement with Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas, the term quickly entered literary theory and became a foundational tool for textual analysis. Despite its modern formulation, intertextuality refers to practices that have accompanied writing since its earliest stages, as no text can exist independently of prior texts and cultural traditions.

Poststructuralist thinkers elevated intertextuality to the level of a general principle governing literary production. Roland Barthes, in particular, rejected the notion of textual origins or linear influence, arguing instead that texts are composed of impersonal, previously encountered discursive fragments that circulate without explicit attribution. This theoretical stance aligns closely with postmodern aesthetics, where intertextuality functions as a deliberate and self-aware artistic strategy. As G. Kosikov observes, intertextuality should not be equated with mere quotation, which represents only one of its many stylistic expressions. Central to intertextual reading is the role of the reader, whose active participation is essential for identifying, interpreting, and contextualizing intertextual references. The reader's task extends beyond recognizing textual echoes to

assuming interpretive roles suggested by the text – whether as a collaborator in meaning-making or as a decoder of concealed meanings embedded in allegory and indirect expression.

Ultimately, it is the reader's cultural and textual memory that enables the detection of intertextual connections. Within the postmodern framework, aesthetic structures are not subordinate to lived reality; rather, reality itself is understood as a product of pervasive semiotic systems. The distinction between modernist and postmodernist forms of intertextuality remains a particularly contentious issue. As A. K. Zholkovsky observes, modernist aesthetics are characterized by a strong dependence on intertextual references, a claim he supports through analyses of intertextual patterns in the works of Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Zoshchenko, and Olenin.

Postmodern theory, however, approaches this aesthetic problem in a fundamentally different way. One major shift concerns the erosion of the concept of authorial self-expression. Roland Barthes famously differentiates between the traditional author and the scriptor, arguing that the postmodern text no longer presupposes an author as a unifying personal consciousness. Instead, the author is replaced by the scriptor, whose function is limited to the recombination and juxtaposition of pre-existing discursive forms. In this model, creative expression no longer stems from inner experience or individuality but from an impersonal linguistic reservoir. Writing becomes an endless process of sign manipulation in which life imitates textuality, and texts themselves are composed of endlessly recycled signs.

A second crucial shift involves the re-evaluation of originality and novelty – concepts that were central to the aesthetics of modernity. Since Romanticism, artistic originality had been understood as radical uniqueness and qualitative innovation, serving as a key criterion for assessing both the work and its creator. In postmodernism, this paradigm is fundamentally reconsidered. The apparent paradox of intertextuality in postmodern poetics can be explained by the limits of the concept itself. While intertextuality accounts for the transformation of extra-textual reality into textual form, it does

not fully explain the mechanisms through which figurative structures generate new artistic meanings. These processes are governed by other aesthetic principles that operate independently of intertextuality.

Consequently, intertextuality may be defined as a mechanism by which one text reworks another, whereas the intertext denotes the entire network of texts that resonate within a given work, whether explicitly referenced or implicitly embedded. In contrast to Classical and medieval literary systems, postmodernism does not rely on a single normative language. Instead, it draws upon a plurality of linguistic codes and cultural traditions belonging to historically and aesthetically disparate epochs, which are presented as coexisting within a shared cultural and symbolic space. According to V. S. Bibler, this plurality defines the distinctive character of twentieth-century culture, a characteristic that achieved coherent theoretical expression only in postmodern poetics.

The paradoxical nature of intertextuality in postmodern aesthetics can be explained by the limitations of the concept itself. Although intertextuality accounts for the transformation of extra-textual reality into textual form, it does not fully explain the mechanisms by which figurative structures generate new artistic meanings. These processes are governed by other aesthetic principles that extend beyond the scope of intertextual analysis. Moreover, intertextuality fundamentally challenges the idea of a unified and stable meaning within a literary text. Through the incorporation of heterogeneous textual fragments and references to pre-existing meanings, it destabilizes semantic coherence and disrupts linear reading practices. In doing so, intertextuality redefines the ontological status of the literary text, as contemporary aesthetics increasingly view fragmentation and heterogeneity as intrinsic qualities of textual structure.

#### CONCLUSION

The findings of the study confirm that postmodernism cannot be confined to a single historical phase, stylistic paradigm, or limited set of poetic techniques. Rather, it constitutes a complex

aesthetic and theoretical system rooted in a semiotic understanding of reality, in which literary texts are viewed as configurations of interacting cultural and discursive codes rather than as manifestations of a unified authorial subject. Within this framework, intertextuality occupies a central yet problematic position, functioning not simply as a mode of citation or reference but as a governing principle of textual construction and interpretation. At the same time, the analysis exposes the theoretical limits of intertextuality as an explanatory concept. Although it accounts for the transformation of extra-textual cultural material into textual form, it cannot fully explain the processes through which new figurative meanings are generated. These processes are shaped by additional aesthetic principles, most notably fragmentation, structural heterogeneity, and narrative recombination that operate within the internal organization of the literary text. The reliance of postmodern literature on plural linguistic systems and heterogeneous cultural traditions further undermines the notion of semantic coherence, foregrounding multiplicity, openness, and indeterminacy as intrinsic textual qualities. Consequently, postmodern aesthetics fundamentally redefines the ontological status of the literary text, displacing authorial intention and originality in favor of recombination, reader participation, and cultural memory. In this sense, postmodern literary theory offers a conceptual framework capable of articulating both the defining features of twentieth-century culture and the shifting relationship between text, meaning, and interpretation.

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