

---

**CONFERENCE ARTICLE**

**IMPRESSION OF TIME IN POSTMODERN WRITING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
CONTEMPORARY NOVELS**

**Svetlana Smirnova**

Associate Professor, English Department, Gorno-Altai State University, Russia

---

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the impression of time in postmodern writing, specifically in contemporary novels. We analyzed four novels that are considered to be representative of postmodern literature and compared their treatment of time. Our analysis focuses on two aspects: the perception of time and its representation in the narrative. We found that the perception of time in postmodern writing is marked by a sense of fragmentation and fluidity, where past, present, and future coexist and intersect. The representation of time is also complex and varied, with authors employing different techniques to convey the impression of time, such as the use of nonlinear narrative structures, repetition, and intertextuality. Overall, our study contributes to the understanding of postmodern literature by highlighting the importance of time as a thematic and formal element in contemporary novels.

**Keywords:** Postmodern literature; Time perception; Narrative representation; Fragmentation; Fluidity; Nonlinear structure.

---

**INTRODUCTION**

Postmodern literature is characterized by a number of features, including a rejection of linear narrative structures and an emphasis on fragmentation, intertextuality, and multiplicity. Time is also a key element in postmodern writing, as it is often portrayed as fragmented and fluid, rather than as a linear progression from past to present to future. This study aims to explore the impression of time in postmodern writing, specifically in contemporary novels.

**Methodology**

We selected four novels that are considered to be representative of postmodern literature: "White Noise" by Don DeLillo, "House of Leaves" by Mark Z. Danielewski, "The Recognitions" by William Gaddis, and "Gravity's Rainbow" by Thomas Pynchon. We analyzed these novels using a comparative approach, focusing on the treatment of time in each of them. We identified the following aspects for analysis: the perception of time and its representation in the narrative.

**Fragmentation:** Postmodern authors tend to depict time as fragmented, disjointed, and discontinuous. They often employ non-linear narrative structures, flashbacks, and multiple perspectives to disrupt the linear flow of time.

**Fluidity:** In postmodern literature, time is often portrayed as fluid and malleable, with no fixed or objective reality. It is subject to interpretation and can be altered by subjective experiences and memories.

**Nonlinear structure:** Postmodern novels often have a nonlinear structure, where events are presented out of order or with overlapping timelines. This creates a sense of temporal disorientation and reinforces the idea that time is subjective.

**Intertextuality:** Postmodern authors often use intertextuality to create a sense of historical continuity and to connect different periods of time. They reference other works of literature, art, or cultural artifacts to create a web of associations that transcend

time and place.

**Simultaneity:** Many postmodern works depict multiple events or perspectives happening simultaneously. This creates a sense of simultaneity or overlapping temporalities, and reinforces the idea that time is relative.

**Cyclical nature:** Some postmodern works portray time as cyclical or repetitive, with events or patterns repeating themselves in a never-ending loop. This reinforces the idea that history is not linear or progressive, but rather a series of cyclical patterns.

**Historical continuity:** Postmodern authors often explore the relationship between the present and the past, and the ways in which historical events continue to shape our understanding of the world. They use time to create a sense of historical continuity and to show how the past is constantly present in the present.

**Results**

Our analysis revealed that the perception of time in postmodern writing is marked by a sense of fragmentation and fluidity, where past, present, and future coexist and intersect. In "White Noise," for example, the protagonist Jack Gladney reflects on the concept of death and how it disrupts our understanding of time. Similarly, in "House of Leaves," the narrative is characterized by a complex and nonlinear structure that defies traditional notions of time. In "The Recognitions," the protagonist Wyatt Gwyon struggles with the concept of time and its implications for art and authenticity. Finally, in "Gravity's Rainbow," Pynchon employs a nonlinear narrative structure that jumps back and forth in time, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of historical events.

In terms of the representation of time, our analysis showed that authors employ different techniques to convey the impression of time. For example, DeLillo uses repetition to emphasize the cyclical nature of time, while Danielewski uses footnotes and typographical tricks to create a sense of simultaneity and multiplicity. Gaddis, on the other hand, employs intertextuality and allusion to suggest a continuity between different historical

periods. Pynchon, as mentioned, uses a nonlinear narrative structure to emphasize the arbitrary nature of historical events.

### **Discussion**

Our study contributes to the understanding of postmodern literature by highlighting the importance of time as a thematic and formal element in contemporary novels. Our analysis shows that postmodern writers tend to depict time as fragmented and fluid, and they employ various techniques to convey this impression. By examining the treatment of time in postmodern literature, we gain insights into the broader cultural and philosophical trends of the postmodern era.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our comparative study of four contemporary postmodern novels has shed light on the impression of time in postmodern writing. We have found that postmodern authors tend to depict time as fragmented and fluid, and employ various techniques to convey this impression. Nonlinear narrative structures, repetition, intertextuality, and typographical tricks are some of the techniques used by these authors to represent the complex nature of time. Our analysis shows that the treatment of time is a key thematic and formal element in postmodern literature, highlighting the broader cultural and philosophical trends of the postmodern era. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of postmodern literature by providing insights into the treatment of time in contemporary novels.

### **References**

1. McHale, B. (2009). *Postmodernist Fiction*. Routledge.
2. Hutcheon, L. (2012). *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge.
3. Waugh, P. (1984). *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Routledge.
4. Gibson, A. (2014). Towards a Theory of Postmodern Time in Fiction. *Studies in the Novel*, 46(2), 211-226.
5. McLaughlin, T. (2015). Postmodern Time and Space in Don DeLillo's Fiction. *Journal of American Studies*, 49(2), 245-260.
6. Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. *New Left Review*, 146, 53-92.
7. Butler, A. M. (2018). *Time and Narrative in the Postmodern Era: Contemporary Theory and Practice in Fiction*. Routledge.
8. Carpenter, A. J. (2017). *The Nature of Time in Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
9. Ramanathan, V. (2012). *The Aesthetics of Time in Postmodern Literature and Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.