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4.0 OBJECTIVES:

In this unit we shall

- talk about the major writers of the postmodern era.
- discuss which of their works that manifest the postmodern tendencies.

On completing this unit, you should be able to

- know the well-known literary writers of the postmodern age.
- identify the literary works that brilliantly manifest the postmodernist characteristics.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To draw a line of distinction between those postmodern writers who are considered ‘major’ and those who are not is indeed a difficult task. As discussed in the previous chapter, the postmodern literature itself blurs all the kinds of distinctions. Identifying the writers as ‘major’ postmodern writers is also difficult for the outpouring of all the kinds of literary genres that the postmodern age has witnessed. There is a long list of postmodern writers and one may require many volumes to write about all

of them. Hence, we will focus only on the major writers of the three main fields of literature: fiction, poetry, and drama. However, the students should make it clear that no fix criteria are employed to identify these writers as the ‘major’ writers. The following list is purely an indicative list.

4.2 POSTMODERN FICTION

As the reading of Bran Nicol’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) suggests it, the postmodern fiction can be divided into seven broad categories: (i) Early postmodern fiction: Beckett and Burroughs, (ii) the US metafiction: Coover, Barth, Nabokov, Vonnegut, and Pynchon (ii) The postmodern historical novels: Fowles, Barnes, and Swift, (iv) Postmodern-postcolonial fiction: Rushdie, Morrison, and Reed, (v) Postmodern fiction by women: Carter, Atwood, and Acker, (vi) Cyberpunk and ‘metaphysical’ detective fiction, and (vii) Fiction of the ‘postmodern condition’: Ballard, DeLillo, and Ellis. One the basis of Bran Nicol’s selections of the representative postmodern novelist, one may talk about the following writers as the ‘major’ writers and their novel as the ‘major’ postmodern fiction.

1. Angela Carter’s *Shadow Dance* (1966)

Angela Olive Carter-Pearce (1940-1992), famously known by her pen name – Angela Carter, was an English novelist, short story writer, and journalist. Her first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966), is a third person narrative, viewed and narrated through the eye of Honeybuzzard's best friend - Morris, who is also his business partner. The novel opens when Morris encounters Ghislaine in the pub who is recently discharged from the hospital. The once beautiful girl “like moonlight and daisies” has suddenly turned into a “bride of Frankenstein.” She now carries a frightful scar on her face which leaves her “dreadful” and “repulsive.” The official story is that a gang of teenagers raped her and inflicted that wound on her. The truth is that Honeybuzzard is the real perpetrator, but Ghislaine’s love for him leaves him scot-free. Honeybuzzard, who had been away, returns with Emily, his new girlfriend from London who eventually gets pregnant with his child. The plot consists of various junk-hunting ventures of Honeybuzzard and Morris and reaches its conclusion when Honeybuzzard takes Ghislaine to a decent Victorian house and murders her in a “blasphemous ritual.”

2. Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991)

Bret Easton Ellis (1964-) is an American novelist, short story writer, and screen writer. *American Psycho* (1991), his third novel, is his most successful novel though it is widely criticised for its overly violent and misogynistic nature. The whole novel revolves around Patrick Bateman. “Bateman is the epitome of a young American conservative - a white and wealthy Wall Street stock trader whose life seems rather comfortable on the surface. Aged 27 at the beginning of the novel, he is the protagonist

and narrator of *American Psycho*. Early on in the narrative, it is revealed that he brutally murders those different from him: women, children, gays, blacks, and the poor. These “random acts of violence” are connected in that the victims are all somehow “othered” by Bateman. He is surrounded by friends who are mostly interested in themselves, and the relations between them are superficial.”

3. Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985)

Don Richard DeLillo (1936-) is an American novelist, playwright, and essayist. His *White Noise* was included by *Time* in its list of “Best English Novels from 1923 to 2005.” *White Noise*, his eighth novel, tells the story of a college professor and his family whose small Midwestern town is evacuated after an industrial accident. In the light of the grave Union Carbide disaster in India that killed over 2,000 people and injured thousands more, the novel focuses on the condition of the United States during the 1980s. This novel is an attempt to create “the hyper-awareness of a world that has become oblivious to criticism via its mind-numbing familiarity – familiarity achieved particularly through the omnipresence of uniform information that is repetitively generated by an all-pervasive mass-media”.

4. Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983)

Graham Colin Swift (1949-), popularly known as Graham Swift is an English novelist. *Waterland* (1992), *Shuttlecock* (1993), and *Last Orders* (1996) are his best-known works. He was awarded Booker Prize for his *Last Orders* in 1996. His *Waterland* is set in low-lying fens region of the eastern England. “It is narrated by Tom Crick, a middle-aged history. Tom is facing a personal crisis, since he is about to be laid off from his job and his wife has been admitted to a mental hospital. He is a man who is keenly interested in ideas about the nature and purpose of history. Faced with a class of bored and rebellious students, he scrapes the traditional history curriculum and tells them stories of fens instead. These stories form the substance of the novel, which takes place mainly in two time frames: the present, and the year 1943, when Tom Crick is fifteen years old. The traumatic events of his adolescence reach forward in time to influence the present.”

5. Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)

Ishmael Scott Reed (1938-) is an African-American novelist, poet, essayist and playwright. He is known for his satirical works. His *Mumbo Jumbo* is a mythical representation of black history and its relation to Judaeo-Christian tradition. The novel is set in the backdrop of the 1920s. It examines a significant stage in the history of African-American writing – Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age – and its relation to the rest of American culture. It is believed that Reed wrote this novel to contradict the popularly held belief that the black-Americans lacked literary tradition. The novel begins with an outbreak of Jes Grew, a psychic condition which embodies the freedom and vitality of the Afro-American

tradition in New Orleans. Jes Grew is a metaphor for the creative energy of the Harlem Renaissance. In its metafictional mode of narration, the novel reflects the author's growing black consciousness in a predominantly white society.

6. JG Ballard's *Crash* (1973)

James Graham Ballard (1930-2009) was a famous English novelist, short story writer, and essayist. His famous works include the names like *The Wind From Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962) and *High-Rise* (1975). According to JG Ballard, *Crash* is the "first pornographic novel based on technology." He says that the "ultimate role of *Crash* is cautionary, a warning against that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape." The novel is a story about symphorophilia and car-crush fetishism. It narrates the sexual fetishism of its protagonist who is sexually aroused by staging and participating in the real car-crashes. The novel is narrated by James Ballard, a character named after the author himself, and it centres on a menacing character, Dr. Robert Vaughan who is a former TV scientist "turned nightmare angel of the expressways."

7. John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960)

John Simmons Barth (1930-) is a well-known American writer. Besides *The Sot-Weed Factor*, he is best-known for his postmodernist and metafictional works like *The Floating Opera* (1956), *The End of the Road* (1958), *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), *Lost in Funhouse* (1968), *Chimera* (1972) and *Letters* (1979). *The Sot-Weed Factor* implicitly marks Barth's entry as a renowned postmodernist writer. The title of the novel is derived from a poem with the same title *The Sotweed Factor, or A Voyage to Maryland, A Satyr* (1708) by the English-born poet Ebenezer of whom few biographical details are known. The novel is a satirical epic set in the 1680s-90s in London and Colonial Maryland and deals with fictionalised character called Ebenezer Cooke, who is given the title "Poet Laureate of Maryland" by Charles Calvert, the third Baron Baltimore and is commissioned to write a *Marylandiad* to sing the praises of the colony. The novel narrates Tom Jones-like adventures of Ebenezer Cooke on his journey to and within Maryland while striving to preserve his virginity.

8. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Wife* (1969)

John Robert Fowles (1926-2005) was a famous English novelist and poet. His works reflect the considerable influence of the thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. His novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is remembered for depicting a Victorian-era romance with a postmodernist twist. The novel centres around the troubled relationship of gentleman and amateur naturalist Charles Smithson and the former governess and independent woman Sarah Woodruff with whom he falls in love with.

9. Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984)

Julian Patrick Barnes (1946 -) is an English writer and the winner of Man Booker Prize for his novel *The Sense of an Ending* (2011). His other works such as *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1998), and *Arthur & George* (2005) were also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* tries to tracking down the parrot that sat atop on Flaubert's writing desk while he wrote *Un Coeur Simple*. In fact, the attempt to find the parrot is an attempt to discover the real Flaubert. The novel can be divided into the three parts: the first deals with the optimistic phase of Flaubert's life – his successes and conquest; the second dealing with the negative phase Flaubert's life – his failures, illness, and deaths of his friends and lovers; and the third dealing with quotations written by Flaubert in his journals at various points of his life.

10. Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream* (1986)

Kathy Acker (1947-1997) was a postmodernist and experimental American novelist. Her works show the marked influence of the experimental styles of William S. Burroughs and Marguerite Duras. She has combined biographical elements, power, sex and violence in her works. Her *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream* is a novel about love and violence. The novel depicts the journey of a woman who has just had abortion and decides that she wants to be knight and go in search of love. The opening of the novel explains the reasons for her formidable quest: "When she was finally crazy because she was about to have an abortion, she conceived of the most insane idea that any woman can think of. Which she is to love."

11. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922-2007) was an American novelist, short story writer, and playwright. His *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* is antiwar science fiction. Through the character of Billy Pilgrim, it depicts the journey and experiences during the time of World War II. The novel presents one of the most dreadful annihilations in European history – the World War II firebombing of Dresden, a city in eastern Germany, on February 13, 1945 – with mock-serious humour and apparent antiwar sentiment. It is based on Kurt Vonnegut's own experience in the World War II. In the novel, a prisoner of war witnesses and survives the Allied forces' firebombing of Dresden. Vonnegut, like his protagonist Billy Pilgrim, emerged from a meat locker beneath a slaughter-house into the moonscape of burned-out Dresden. His surviving captors put him to work finding, burying, and burning bodies. His task continued until the Russians came and the war ended. Vonnegut survived by chance, confined as a prisoner of war (POW) in a well-insulated meat locker, and so missed the cataclysmic moment of attack, emerging the day after into the charred ruins of a once-beautiful cityscape.

12. Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (1972)

Margaret Eleanor Atwood (1939 -) is a Canadian novelist, poet, critic, and essayist. She has extensively contributed to the field of literature through her seventeen books of poetry, sixteen novels, ten non-fictional books, eight collections of short fiction, eight children book and one graphic novel. She won the Booker Prize for her *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and was nominated four times for the Booker Prize for her *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *Alias Grace* (1996), *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986). Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* is a novel about an eighty-two-years old Iris lady writing her memoir in a race against time. Atwood's novel is a fictive autobiography, her fictional protagonist imparting her tale to us in the form of a memoir. In this novel, Margaret Atwood interestingly poses many questions on writing about the past. To what extent can one write what has truly happened? Can one shape the past through the act of describing it? How can one capture something that was once real and highly traumatic on a page of a book?

13. Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985)

Paul Benjamin Auster (1947 -) is an American writer and a film director. He is famous for his *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *Moon Palace* (1989), *The Music of Chance* (1990), *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Invisible* (2009), *Sunset Park* (2010), *Winter Journal* (2012) and *4321* (2017). *City of Glass* is a part of his *The New York Trilogy*. The novel presents a detective writer who becomes a private investigator and finally descends into madness as he becomes embroiled in a case. *City of Glass* has an intertextual relationship with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The novel is a detective fiction and exhibits many postmodern characteristics. It presents an indeterminate and ironic relationship between character and author.

14. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)

Salman Rushdie (1947 -) is a British Indian writer. He was awarded the Booker Prize for his *Midnight's Children* (1981). The novel was also awarded the "Booker of Bookers Prize. He is noted for combining magic realism with historical fiction. The novel is set in the actual historical events of India followed by the Independence from the British colonisers. The story is narrated by Saleem Sinai, the protagonist who symbolises India. The novel opens up with the story of the Sinai family, particularly with events leading up to India's Independence and Partition. Saleem is born precisely at midnight, 15 August 1947, therefore, exactly as old as the Independent India. He later discovers that all children born in India between 12 a.m. and 1 a.m. on that date are imbued with special powers. Saleem, using his telepathic powers, assembles a *Midnight Children's Conference*, reflective of the issues India faced in its early statehood concerning the cultural, linguistic, religious, and political differences faced by a vastly diverse nation. Saleem acts as a telepathic conduit, bringing hundreds of geographically disparate children into contact while also attempting to discover the meaning of their gifts. In particular, those children born closest to the stroke of midnight wield more powerful gifts

than the others. Shiva “of the Knees”, Saleem’s nemesis, and Parvati, called “Parvati-the-witch,” are two of these children with notable gifts and roles in Saleem’s story.

15. Samuel Beckett’s *Unnamable* (1953)

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989) is an Irish playwright and novelist. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. The novel, *Unnamable* (1953), was first published in French and was later translated into English. The novel is a part of a trilogy published as *Three Novels* (1959), the other two novels being *Molly* (1951) and *Malone Dies* (1951). *Unnamable* presents the search for self in the tragic realm of human suffering. The fanatical narrator, who opens up the novel asking, “Where now? Who now? When now?” is a disembodied person, living in a large jar in a restaurant window in Paris. Essentially “unnamable,” the narrator is referred to as Mahood, Worm, and Basil, in a series of tales. The final sentence in the novel is a long dramatic monologue. The narrator concludes with the desire to continue living despite an inescapable sense of anguish and entropy: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on.”

16. Thomas Pynchon’s *V* (1963)

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon Jr. (1937-) is an American novelist. Besides his novel, *V*, he is also known for his other novels like *The Crying Lot 49* (1963), *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), and *Bleeding Edge* (2013). His *V* describes the exploits of a discharged U.S. Navy sailor named Benny Profane, his reconnection in New York with a group of pseudo-bohemian artists and hangers-on known as the Whole Sick Crew, and the quest of an aging traveller named Herbert Stencil to identify and locate the mysterious entity he knows only as “V.”

17. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987)

Toni Morrison (1931 -) is an American novelist and essayist. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Awarded with the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988, the novel *Beloved* is set after the American Civil War (1861-65). The novel is inspired by the story of an African-American slave, Sethe, who escaped slavery in Kentucky late January 1856 by fleeing to a free state, Ohio. The plot of the story is inspired by a story with the title “A Visit to the Slave Mother who Killed Her Child” published in an 1856 newspaper article. *Beloved* begins in 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the protagonist Sethe, a former slave, has been living with her eighteen-year-old daughter Denver. Sethe’s mother-in-law, Baby Suggs lived with them until her death eight years earlier. Just before Baby Suggs’ death, Sethe’s two sons, Howard and Buglar, run away. Sethe believes they fled because of the malevolent presence of an abusive ghost that haunted their house at 124 Bluestone Road for years. The story opens with an introduction to the ghost: “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom.”

18. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983)

Umberto Eco (1932-2016) was an Italian novelist and literary critic. He is known for his works like *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, *The Island of the Day Before*, and *The Prague Cemetery*. Eco's novels are translated in different language around the world. His novels are the best examples of intertextuality and inter-connectedness. His style is influenced by James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges. *The Name of the Rose* is a medieval historical mystery set in the fourteenth century monastery. The novel describes Franciscan friar William of Baskerville and his assistant Adso, a Benedictine novice's investigations in a series of murders at a monastery that is to host an important religious debate. The novel is full of direct and indirect metatextual references. It chronicles the fourteenth century religious wars, a history of monastic orders, and a compendium of heretical movements.

19. Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962)

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was a Russian-born novelist, poet, and translator. His fame rests on his masterpiece, *Lolita* (1955). His another well-known work is *Pale Fire* (1962) which is in a 999-line poem form with the title "Pale Fire" written by a fictional poet John Shade, with a foreword, lengthy commentary and index written by Shade's neighbour and academic colleague, Charles Kinbote. The novel is widely considered a forerunner of postmodernism and a prime example of the literature of exhaustion. The novel has four distinct sections. The first is a "Forward," by Charles Kinbote who claims to be a scholar from the country of Zembla, relates how he befriended the American poet John Shade. Following Shade's untimely death, Kinbote was entrusted with the manuscript of the poet's last major work, a long autobiographical poem called "Pale Fire." The second section is the poem itself, divided into four cantos. The third section is Kinbote's own idiosyncratic commentary and line by line glosses. The fourth section is an index in which Kinbote provides brief capsule descriptions of the major people and places of the text and its accompanying commentary.

20. William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959)

William Seward Burroughs II (1914-1997) was an American writer, short story writer, essayist, and visual artist. Burroughs is the noted figure of the Beat Generation and a major postmodernist author. He has contributed eighteen novels and novellas, six collections of short stories, and four collections of essays. His *Naked Lunch* is structured as a series of loosely connected vignettes. It is believed that Burroughs himself stated that chapters of the novel are intended to be read in any order. In the novel, the readers come across the narration of junkie William Lee who takes on different pseudo names, from U.S. to Mexico, eventually to Tangier and the dreamlike Interzone.

21. William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984)

William Ford Gibson (1948-) is an American-Canadian novelist. He is widely popular for writing cyberpunk fictions. The novel is set in future and describes the exploits of Henry Case, a washed-up computer hacker who is hired by the mysterious master criminal Armitage and equally mysterious mercenary cyborg Molly Millions for one last job: to help a powerful artificial intelligence merge with its twin into a super consciousness and take control of a virtual reality global network known as "The Matrix."

• Check Your Progress 1

Look at the following table. The titles of some of the well-known postmodern fictions and their writers are listed below. The students have to find out the missing word/s from the title. Students may take the help of online recourses to find out the missing word/s from the title.

No.	Title	Missing Word/s	Writer
1.	_____ <i>Rainbow</i>		Thomas Pynchon
2.	<i>Shadow</i> _____		Angela Carter
3.	<i>The French</i> _____ <i>Woman</i>		John Fowles
4.	<i>White</i> _____		Don DeLillio
5.	<i>Last</i> _____		Graham Swift
6.	<i>Infinite</i> _____		David Foster Wallace
7.	_____ <i>Jumbo</i>		Ishmael Reed
8.	_____ <i>Children</i>		Salman Rushdie
9.	<i>The</i> _____ <i>Tale</i>		Margaret Atwood
10.	<i>The Wind From</i> _____		JG Ballard
11.	<i>The Unbearable</i> _____ <i>of</i> <i>Being</i>		Milan Kundera
12.	<i>The</i> _____ <i>of Saturn</i>		WG Sebald
13.	<i>Slaughterhouse-</i> _____		Kurt Vonnegut
14.	_____ <i>Pendulum</i>		Umberto Eco
15.	_____ : <i>Which Was a</i>		Kathy Acker

	<i>Dream</i>		
16.	<i>The _____ Factor</i>		John Barth
17.	<i>The Blind _____</i>		Margaret Atwood
18.	<i>Pale _____</i>		Vladimir Nabokov
19.	<i>One _____ Years of Solitude</i>		Garcia Marquez
20.	<i>Flaubert's _____</i>		Julian Barnes
21.	<i>_____ Cradle</i>		Kurt Vonnegut
22.	<i>Wide _____ Sea</i>		Jean Rhys
23.	<i>Life: A _____ Manual</i>		Georges Perec
24.	<i>The Wind-Up Bird _____</i>		Haruki Murakami
25.	<i>Fear and _____ in Las Vegas</i>		Hunter S. Thompson
26.	<i>American _____</i>		Bret Easton Ellis
27.	<i>The Brooklyn _____</i>		Paul Auster
28.	<i>The Crying Lot _____</i>		Thomas Pynchon
29.	<i>The _____ of the Rose</i>		Umberto Eco
30.	<i>_____ Lunch</i>		William Burroughs

4.3 POSTMODERN DRAMA:

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the hyphenated term 'post-modern' and the non-hyphenated term 'post-modern' often cause a problem. A well-known scholar, Stephen Watt, in his book, *Postmodern/ Drama: Reading the Contemporary Stage* (1998) remarks that the playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Cherrié Moraga, Harold Pinter, David Rabe, Karen Finley, and others should not be labelled "postmodernist," but rather recognized as producers of texts that might be termed "post-modern." This remark raises a query: who shall we consider 'postmodern' dramatists? Rodney Simard's *Postmodern Drama: Contemporary Playwrights in America and Britain* (1984) tries to establish a "postmodern dramatic aesthetic" which is clearly differentiated from the aesthetics of modernist drama, and to bring together contemporary British and American drama in an effort to construct, with this postmodern aesthetic, a common framework for the

two national dramatic literatures. Simard defines postmodern drama as a “synthetic” form of drama which utilises and combines the methods of modernist realism, experimentalism, and Epic Theatre, without adopting the absolutist stance that each of these movements tended to assume. Defying conventional categorisation, it is generically mixed and “essentially tragicomic”. As its emphasis is on the “individual mind,” it is an open form of drama celebrating possibility and multiplicity rather than conveying the unalterable necessities and singleness of purpose of the closed forms of modernist drama. It is optimistic rather than pessimistic, transcending nihilism without relapsing into naive affirmation or one-dimensional ideology. This change in dramatic aesthetic entails a different mode of interaction between the stage and audience in that it evokes and unifies opposing responses, combining intellectual distance with emotional identification, the Brechtian alienation effect with the sensual immediacy of Artaudian theatre. Simard discusses Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard, Peter Shaffer, and David Rabe as the representative postmodern dramatist from Britain and America. However, one may discuss the following playwright as the ‘major’ postmodernist playwrights.

1. Harold Pinter’s *No Man’s Land* (1975)

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) was a British playwright, actor, and director. He has revolutionised the theatre world of the 20th century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2005 for his contribution to the field of drama. He belongs to the post-war decades when British society was undergoing a major transformation both in the political realm and in the theatre. It was a period when modernity was being challenged by the new literary movement of Postmodernism. Pinter’s works also represent changing styles in the arts with the advent of Postmodernism. His *No Man’s Land* is a memory play. The plot of the play resembles to his another play, *The Caretaker* (1960). The play presents four characters: the reserved house owner, Hirst (a poet and a literary critic); the tramp, Spooner; and two servants, Foster (who also claims himself as a poet) and Briggs. Spooner is clearly another Davies-like figure, who suffers much of the bitterness of snares in life and is desperate to find a peaceful shelter of “room.” Hirst, a successful poet like Pinter, is trapped in his “no man’s land” of art. Significantly, simple as it seems to be in plot structure, *No Man’s Land* is one of the most difficult plays written by Pinter because of its profundity and ambiguity in meaning caused by his special use of memory.

2. Peter Shaffer’s *Equus* (1973)

Peter Levin Shaffer was an English playwright and scriptwriter. He has written numerous plays that have been adapted in films. His *Equus* tells the story of a psychiatrist who attempts to treat a young man who has a pathological religious fascination with horses. The plot of the play is inspired by an episode in which a seventeen-year old boy blinded six

horses in a small town near Suffolk. This play is a fanciful account of what might have enthused the young boy to commit the crime. The play won Shaffer the 1975 Tony Award for Best Play as well as the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

3. David Rabe's *Hurlyburly* (1985)

David William Rabe (1940 -) is an American playwright. He is famous for his plays like *Sticks and Bones* (1972), *In the Boom Boom Room* (1974), *Streamers* (1977), and *Hurlyburly* (1985). His *Hurlyburly* is a dark comedy. The title means "noisy confusion" or "tumult." The title of the play is derived from a dialogue in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The play presents the intersecting lives of several low-to-middle Hollywood players in the 1980s. Through their excessive drug addiction, these players try to find the meaning in the isolated and empty lives.

4. Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990)

Brian Patrick Friel (1929-2015) was an Irish dramatist, short story writer and the founder of the Field Day Theatre Company. He is also known as "Irish Chekhov" and "the universally accented voice of Ireland." His *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a memory play told from the point of view of the adult Michael Evans, the narrator. Michael Evans recounts the summer in his aunts' cottage in Glenties on the west coast of Donegal when he was seven years old. The play depicts the life of five Mundy Sisters whose family welcomes the frail elder brother, Jack, who has returned from a life as a missionary in Africa. By the end of the summer, the family witnesses sadness as the economic privatisation increases marking the fading away of their hopes. The play is set in early August, around the Celtic harvest festival, Lughnasadh. The play shows a bitter harvest for the Mundy sisters echoing the universal truth, "what you sow, shall you reap."

5. Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982)

Caryl Churchill (1938-) is a British playwright who is known for exploring sexual politics and feminist themes in her dramas. She has combined the social commitment with theatrical experimentation. Her *Top Girls* is about a woman named Marlene, a career-driven woman who is only interested in women's success in business. The play examines the role of women in society and what being a successful woman means. The play is divided in three acts, which look like three short, interwoven plays, each shedding a light on different aspect and raising different questions on the central theme of the successful women. The first act focuses on the life of six famous women from history, their exploitation, sacrifices and sufferings in a male set-up. The second act highlights the purely materialistic and success-oriented environment of an employment agency where women emulate 'male values' to survive and become successful in a highly competitive world. The third act with a homely setting, focuses on family, sacrifices and rejection of maternal instincts,

the politics of selfish versus selfless creed, and questions the future of abandoned children who may never be able to reach the top.

6. Howard Barker's *The Possibilities* (1986)

Howard Baker (1946-) is a British playwright, poet, and essayist. He has extensively contributed to the field of drama. His best-known plays include *Scenes from an Execution*, *Victory*, *The Europeans*, and *The Possibilities*. Barker described his work as a “theatre of catastrophe” – a conception of drama where meaning is not allied to authorial intent but ultimately to the moral response of the individual viewer. His works are therefore organised around antinomies of reason: circumstances and actions whose meaning can be justifiably explained in a number of ways. Barker's *The Possibilities* consists of ten short plays that explore the illogical, irrational, counter-factual, and counter-intuitive aspects of the human condition within a variety of different contexts and at various times in history. It does so in a manner that Barker referred to as “Theatre of Catastrophe” but they appear a more traditional example of “Theatre of the Absurd” or “Theatre of the Ridiculous.”

7. Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980)

Howard Brenton (1942-) is an English playwright. *The Romans in Britain* targets imperialism and the abuse of power. The play went into difficulty and was subjected of a private prosecution for indecency. The play is also famous as the cast of total thirty actors played sixty roles. Howard Brenton was threatened by many Christians for staging this notorious play.

8. Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1994)

Marina Carr is an Irish playwright. She has contributed total thirty plays. Her *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) was revived by the Abbey Theatre in 2014. *The Mai* is a moving story of four generations of women in one family in the midlands and centre on the main character The Mai, a forty-year-old woman, struggling to save her marriage and the happiness of herself and her children. The play explores how history repeats itself - no matter how tragic the results.

9. Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974)

Tom Stoppard (1937 -) is a Czech-born British playwright. He is one of the well-known absurdist dramatists and is quite popular for his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. During 1943-1946, he had studied at a boarding school in Darjeeling in India. His *Travesties* is a play that centres on the figure of Henry Carr, an elderly man who reminisces about Zurich in 1917 during the time of the First World War. It also presents his interactions with three famous personalities: James Joyce when he was writing his masterpiece *Ulysses*; Tristan Tzara during the rise of Dadaism, and Lenin in the wake of the Russian Revolution. All these personalities were living in Zurich in the second decade of the twentieth century.

10. Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1965)

Samuel Shepard Rogers III (1943-2017) was an American playwright, actor, short story writer, and essayist. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979 for his play *Buried Child*. As a dramatist, he is famous for bleak, poetic, and surrealist qualities of his plays. He is famous for depicting the life of the characters who are living on the outskirts of American society. His *Buried Child* presents the fragmentation of the American nuclear family in a context of disappointment and disillusionment in context of American Dream. It highlights the 1970s rural economic slowdown and the breakdown of traditional family structures and values.

• Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in one or two sentences.

1. What make the postmodern drama unique?

2. What is 'memory' play?

3. Who is your favourite postmodern playwright? Why?

4. On the basis of above discussion make a list of the British postmodernist playwrights.

5. On the basis of above discussion make a list of the American postmodernist playwrights.

4.4 POSTMODERN POETRY:

It seems a challenging task to define postmodern poetry and to identify the ‘major’ postmodernist poets from the large pool of postmodern poets. This is the reason why Tim Woods states that “the issue of what constitutes postmodern poetry is as vexed and controversial as the issue of postmodern fiction. Postmodern poetry has largely emerged from the verbal experiments of the European avant-garde, yet in another sense all poetry or use of language is in some sense experimental.” Postmodern poetry has taken the experimental to a new height even to the extent of creating dream poetry. It has extensively experimented with the structure and form as well as with the use of language. This is a short list of postmodern poet one should be familiar with.

1. Allen Ginsberg

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was an American poet and a pivotal figure between the 1950s Beat Generation and the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s. His mother mental illness brought him towards the field of poetry. He wrote an elegy, ‘Kaddish,’ named after the Jewish prayer of mourning, for his mother. Ginsberg’s first book of poems, *Howl and Other Poems*, faced a famous obscenity trial due to its frank treatment of his homosexuality and explicit content. The charges against his collection of poems were dismissed by the observation of the judge who claimed that the book is redeeming the social importance. Ginsberg also wrote on the issues such as drug liberalisation and sexual freedom. His *Plutonium Ode* (1981) won the National Book Award and in 1993. Ginsberg’s poetry with its exhilarating openness of subject and form and visionary qualities owes much to Walt Whitman to William Blake. In addition, his Jewish background, the rhythms of jazz, his sexual orientation and his deep engagement with Zen Buddhism also influenced his poetry.

2. Charles Olson

Charles Olson (1910-70) was an American poet. During the Second World War, he worked for the Democratic Party and for the Office of War information as assistant chief of the Foreign Language Division. Some of his poems also reflect his experiences during the war period. Olson’s famous manifesto, *Projective Verse*, was published in pamphlet form in 1950. His works include the names like *In Cold Hell, in Thicket* (1953), *The Distances* (1960), and *The Maximus Poems*. His *The Maximus Poems* began as a sequence of verse letters to his friend Vincent

Ferrini, and was modelled formally on Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. In Oslon's words, *The Maximus Poems* is "a poem of a person and a place." Maximus is named after an travelling Phoenician mystic of the fourth century, but it also refers to Olson, who was six feet eight inches tall. He wrote total six volumes of *The Maximus Poems* which was published as a complete work in 1983.

3. Ed Dorn

Ed Merton Dorn (1929-1999) was an American poet. Ed Dorn came in contact with Charles Oslon at Black Mountain College was considerably influenced by him in writing his poems. His popularity rests upon his series of the books that were published under the title, *Gunslinger*. *Gunslinger* is a long political poem about a demigod cowboy, a saloon madam, and a talking horse named Claude Levi-Strauss, who travel to the Southwest in search of Howard Hughes. The conversation among this group forms the poems. Dorn mixes the jargon of drug addicts, Westerners, and others to mark the essence of American speech. He intentionally tries to frustrate the readers in his poems.

4. Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder (1930 -) is an American poet, essayist and environmental activist. His first book, *Riprap* (1959), demonstrates the clarity of his seeing, his desire to crystalize moments, his striking ability to convey the physical nature of an instant. Simplicity, distance, accuracy of atmosphere: these are hallmarks of the work throughout. The laid-back, jotted-down tone masks an acute sensitivity to rhythm and, in particular, assonance. Snyder's poetry blends America's native past with the grandeur and detail of nature, and the mental disciplines of Zen Buddhism. He writes in the first person, as individual in the wilderness, but the beauty and glory of the wilderness allows that individual the status of common man. He tells no tales: what he says is what he heard or saw; imagination is not for invention, but for finding the forms of expression that most perfectly mirror the world outside. For Snyder, symbol and metaphor cause a distancing from the thing itself: as Pound suggested, the thing itself is at least enough.

5. Gregory Corso

Gregory Corso (1930-2001) was an American poet and a member of Beat movement. Corso's spontaneous, insightful, and inspirational verse once prompted fellow Beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, to describe him as an "awakener of youth." Although Corso enjoyed his greatest level of popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, he continued to influence contemporary readers and critics late into the twentieth century. Writing in the *American Book Review*, Dennis Barone remarked that Corso's 1989 volume of new and selected poems was a sign that "despite doubt, uncertainty, the American way, death all around, Gregory Corso will continue, and I am glad he will." His first book, *The Vestal Lady on*

Brattle, and Other Poems, was heavily indebted to Corso's reading. Despite Corso's reliance on traditional forms and archaic diction, he remained a street-wise poet, described by Bruce Cook in *The Beat Generation* as "an urchin Shelley."

6. Hilda Morley

Hilda Morley (1916-1998) was an American poet. *A Blessing Outside Us* (1976) is Morley's first published collection of poetry. This volume contains sixty-three poems, many of which are elegies to Morley's late husband, Stefan Wolpe, who died in 1972 of Parkinson's disease. In her second volume of poetry, *What Are Winds and What Are Waters* (1983), Morley remembers Wolpe and their days spent together, and conjures for the reader the image of a light emanating from Wolpe during his mortal life and carrying her through during the dark days after his passing. Her *To Hold in My Hand: Selected Poems 1955-83* (1984), focuses on Wolpe as well as Morley's love for him; others are introspective meditations on art-related themes. In this collection, a visit to an art exhibition brings back more memories of grief and loss for Morley. The visual and performing arts connect Morley to her own life – not only to her departed husband, but to other friends and loved ones over the years. In *Cloudless at First* (1989), she deals with different subjects and issues.

The above mentioned are some of the well-known poets of the postmodern era. This can be stretched further to include the names like Jack Spicer, John Wieners, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael Palmer, Paul Aster, Richard Brautigan, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Susan Howe and many others.

• Check Your Progress 3

Write short notes on the following topics.

1. Characteristics of the Postmodern Fiction

2. Features of the Postmodern Drama

3. Characteristics of the Postmodern Poetry

4.5 LET US SUM UP:

In this unit, we have seen the difficulty involved in identifying the ‘major’ writers of the postmodern era. We have got the brief idea of the well-known literary writers of the postmodern age. We have also discussed the representative literary works that brilliantly manifest the postmodernist characteristics.

4.6 KEYWORDS

- **Blasphemous** /'blasfəməs/ (adjective) sacrilegious against God or sacred things; profane.
- **Entropy** /'entrəpi/ (noun) lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.
- **Fetishism** /fetiʃɪzəm/ (uncountable noun) Fetishism involves a person having a strong liking or need for a particular object or activity which gives them sexual pleasure and excitement.
- **Heretical** /hɪ'retɪk(ə)l/ (adjective) believing in or practising religious heresy.
- **Misogynistic** /mɪ,sɒdʒɪ'nɪstɪk/ (adjective) strongly prejudiced against women.
- **Nemesis** /'nemɪsɪs/ (noun) the inescapable agent of someone's or something's downfall.
- **Scot-free** /skɒt'fri:/ (adverb) without suffering any punishment or injury

4.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Wood, Tim. *Beginning Postmodernism*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1999. Print.
2. Nicol, Bran. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.
3. Watt, Stephen. *Postmodern/ Drama: Reading the Contemporary Stage*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998. Print.
4. Simard, Rodney. *Postmodern Drama: Contemporary Playwrights in America and Britain*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1984. Print.
5. Dictionaries for Reference

6. *English Oxford Living Dictionaries:*
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>
7. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*
8. *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*

❖ **ANSWERS:**

Check Your Progress 1

(1) *Gravity's* (2) *Dance* (3) *Lieutenant's* (4) *Noise* (5) *Orders* (6) *Jest* (7) *Mumbo* (8) *Midnight's* (9) *Handmaid's* (10) *Nowhere* (11) *Lightness* (12) *Rings* (13) *Five* (14) *Foucault's* (15) *Don Quixote* (16) *Sot-Weed* (17) *Assassin* (18) *Fire* (19) *Hundred* (20) *Parrot* (21) *Cat's* (22) *Sargasso* (23) *User's* (24) *Chronicle* (25) *Loathing* (26) *Psycho* (27) *Follies* (28) 49 (29) *Name* (30) *Naked*.

Check Your Progress 2

1. The postmodern drama is a “synthetic” form of drama which utilises and combines the methods of modernist realism, experimentalism, and Epic Theatre, without adopting the absolutist stance that each of these movements tended to assume. This quality makes the postmodern drama different.
2. A play in which the chief character narrates the events of the play which are drawn from the character’s memory is known as the ‘memory.’ The term ‘memory’ play was coined by Tennessee Williams to describe his work *The Glass Menagerie*.
3. No fixed answer.
4. Harold Pinter, Peter Levin Shaffer, Caryl Churchill, Howard Baker, Howard Brenton, and Tom Stoppard are some of the well-known British playwrights.
5. David William Rabe, Samuel Shepard, and Edward Albee are some of the well-known American playwrights.