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## “Post-Truth: A Reading of Select Contemporary English Novels”

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### Abstract:

*The term post-truth has gained significant traction in contemporary discourse, particularly in the realms of politics, media, and literature. Defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as relating to circumstances in which emotional appeal and personal beliefs hold more influence than objective facts, post-truth has transformed how reality is perceived and constructed. This research paper examines the manifestation of post-truth in contemporary English novels, focusing on *The Plot* by Jean Hanff Korelitz, *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy. Each of these novels interrogates different facets of post-truth culture—narrative manipulation in literature, the role of digital surveillance in controlling information, and the power of political discourse in shaping history.*

**Keywords:** Post-Truth, Post-Modernism, fake news, misinformation.

### Introduction:

Using a theoretical framework that incorporates epistemic relativism, Foucault's discourse theory, and Baudrillard's simulacra, this study explores how contemporary fiction critiques and reflects post-truth anxieties. The analysis reveals that these novels do not merely depict a world where truth is contested but actively challenge readers to recognize the mechanisms of misinformation and ideological control. As misinformation proliferates and digital realities shape perceptions, literature emerges as a powerful medium for questioning dominant narratives. Ultimately, this research argues that contemporary novels serve as critical interventions in the post-truth era, urging audiences to resist the erosion of objective reality and critically engage with the stories that shape their world.

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented crisis of truth. While the manipulation of facts and the power of persuasion have always played roles in shaping human history, the rise of digital media and political populism has amplified these forces. The term post-

truth, declared the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2016, captures this condition, where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional and ideological appeals (McIntyre 5). The post-truth era has seen an erosion of the authority of experts, an increase in misinformation, and a growing distrust of traditional sources of knowledge. In this landscape, literature has emerged as a critical site for examining how truth is manufactured, manipulated, and consumed.

Fiction has long engaged with the complexities of truth and lies, but contemporary novels uniquely reflect the anxieties of the post-truth age. Novels such as *The Plot* (2021) by Jean Hanff Korelitz, *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy explore different aspects of post-truth culture. Korelitz's *The Plot* examines truth in storytelling and questions the ethics of authorship, while Eggers' *The Circle* critiques the role of technology in shaping truth through surveillance and data manipulation. Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* exposes the political contestation of truth, particularly in postcolonial and conflict-ridden societies. Each of these novels presents a world where reality is constructed and contested, reflecting the instability of truth in contemporary society.

The concept of post-truth is rooted in a philosophical and cultural shift that challenges the idea of objective reality. Scholars such as Lee McIntyre argue that post-truth is not merely about lying or misinformation but a broader epistemological condition where truth itself becomes a matter of perspective (McIntyre 12). The rise of social media, political propaganda, and digital algorithms has created an environment where truth is fluid, contingent, and subject to manipulation. Ralph Keyes, in *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, highlights how truth has become a subjective construct, shaped by personal beliefs rather than empirical evidence (Keyes 18).

Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra further illuminates the post-truth condition. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that contemporary society no longer distinguishes between reality and representations of reality (Baudrillard 6). Instead, hyperreality—a state in which signs and symbols replace the real—dominates. This phenomenon is evident in political discourse, where narratives are often manufactured to serve ideological ends, and in digital culture, where curated online identities obscure objective truth. Foucault's discourse theory also provides insight into how truth is constructed through language, institutions, and power structures (Foucault 27). These theoretical perspectives form the foundation for analyzing how contemporary literature engages with post-truth culture.

Literature has always played a role in interrogating truth, from the unreliable narrators of modernist fiction to the metafictional experiments of postmodernism. However, contemporary fiction engages with truth in a uniquely urgent manner, reflecting the anxieties of an era in which

misinformation and ideological manipulation have tangible social and political consequences. Novels that address the post-truth condition do not merely depict a world where facts are contested; they actively challenge readers to question how truth is shaped and disseminated.

• The Plot by Jean Hanff Korelitz examines truth in storytelling, exploring the ethical dilemmas of authorship and the power dynamics behind who gets to tell a story. *The Circle* by Dave Eggers critiques the ways in which technology companies manufacture and control truth, reflecting contemporary concerns about surveillance capitalism and digital authoritarianism. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy presents a polyphonic narrative that challenges official histories and state-controlled truths, particularly in the context of political violence and marginalization. These novels serve as case studies for understanding how literature responds to and critiques post-truth culture. Through a close reading of these texts, this paper examines how contemporary fiction not only represents the post-truth condition but also functions as a means of resistance against it.

### Research Questions and Methodology:

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do contemporary English novels reflect and critique the post-truth condition?
2. What narrative strategies do these novels employ to challenge dominant notions of truth?
3. How do different socio-political contexts shape the representation of post-truth themes in literature?

The methodology employed in this research includes close textual analysis, comparative literary analysis, and theoretical engagement with post-truth studies. By examining the selected novels through the lenses of epistemic relativism, discourse theory, and media studies, this paper situates literary narratives within broader cultural and philosophical debates about truth.

The concept of post-truth does not emerge in isolation; rather, it is deeply rooted in broader philosophical, epistemological, and cultural shifts that have shaped modern thought. Theoretical perspectives from epistemic relativism, discourse analysis, and media studies provide valuable insights into how truth is perceived, manipulated, and contested in contemporary society. This section explores key theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis of post-truth in literature, including Friedrich Nietzsche's perspectivism, Michel Foucault's discourse theory, Jean Baudrillard's simulacra, and contemporary media scholarship on misinformation and digital truth-making. These theories provide a foundation for understanding how contemporary English novels engage with and critique post-truth culture.

At the heart of the post-truth condition is the philosophical concept of epistemic relativism, which challenges the notion of absolute truth. Epistemic relativism suggests that truth is not an objective reality but rather a construct shaped by cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the first thinkers to challenge traditional notions of truth, arguing that



“there are no facts, only interpretations” (Nietzsche 267). His perspectivism suggests that truth is contingent on the perspective of the individual or the group that constructs it. This idea has become central to post-truth discourse, where different interest groups construct their own versions of reality, often in opposition to empirical evidence.

The influence of epistemic relativism can be seen in contemporary literature, where narratives often challenge the authority of a single, objective truth. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy constructs a fragmented, polyphonic narrative that presents multiple perspectives, undermining the possibility of a singular historical truth. Similarly, Jean Hanff Korelitz’s *The Plot* interrogates the ethics of storytelling, questioning who has the right to define truth in literary narratives. These novels reflect the broader philosophical shift from universal truths to subjective, competing realities.

Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse is instrumental in understanding the mechanisms of truth production. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that truth is not an inherent property of statements but a product of power relations within society (Foucault 34). He asserts that institutions—such as governments, media, and academia—play a crucial role in shaping what is accepted as truth. This aligns with the post-truth condition, where truth is often dictated by those in positions of power rather than by objective facts.

In literature, Foucault’s discourse theory helps explain how narratives challenge dominant truths. *The Circle* by Dave Eggers exemplifies this by portraying a society where corporate interests control truth through digital surveillance and algorithmic manipulation. The novel critiques the idea that transparency leads to truth, showing instead how information can be curated to serve specific ideological agendas. Likewise, Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* critiques the state’s control over historical narratives, revealing how official discourses marginalize certain voices and realities.

Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra is crucial for understanding the blurring of truth and fiction in the post-truth era. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that modern society no longer distinguishes between reality and representations of reality; instead, we live in a state of hyperreality, where simulated truths replace the real (Baudrillard 6). This idea is particularly relevant in the digital age, where social media, fake news, and algorithm-driven content construct realities that are often detached from objective facts.

Baudrillard’s theory is particularly useful for analyzing *The Circle*, where digital technology not only mediates reality but actively constructs it. The novel presents a world in which constant surveillance and curated digital identities create an illusion of truth, reinforcing Baudrillard’s claim that in hyperreality, signs and representations become more real than the reality they supposedly reflect. Similarly, *The Plot* examines how fabricated stories can become accepted as truth, mirroring

the ways in which media narratives shape public perception in the post-truth world.

In addition to philosophical and literary theories, contemporary media studies offer insights into how truth is constructed in the digital age. Scholars such as Lee McIntyre and Mark Andrejevic have examined how misinformation and digital algorithms contribute to the post-truth condition. McIntyre argues that post-truth is not simply about lying but about creating an environment in which truth is so contested that objective facts lose their authority (McIntyre 19). Andrejevic's *Infoglut* explores how the overwhelming availability of information paradoxically leads to a state in which distinguishing truth from falsehood becomes increasingly difficult (Andrejevic 42).

The role of emotional persuasion in post-truth discourse is particularly relevant to literary analysis. Research has shown that in the digital age, people are more likely to believe information that aligns with their emotions and preexisting beliefs rather than objective evidence (Keyes 27). This phenomenon is reflected in *The Circle*, where corporate narratives manipulate public emotions to sustain digital surveillance, and in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, where state propaganda reshapes historical narratives by appealing to nationalist sentiment.

The post-truth condition is deeply rooted in philosophical, cultural, and media transformations that challenge traditional notions of objective reality. Nietzsche's perspectivism, Foucault's discourse theory, Baudrillard's simulacra, and contemporary media studies all provide frameworks for understanding how truth is constructed, manipulated, and contested. These theories not only inform the broader discourse on post-truth but also serve as essential tools for analyzing contemporary literature.

The novels examined in this research engage with these theoretical concepts in distinct yet interconnected ways. *The Plot* interrogates the ethics of storytelling and the malleability of truth in literature. *The Circle* critiques the role of digital surveillance and corporate control in shaping reality. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* challenges official historical narratives and highlights the political dimensions of truth-making. By examining these novels through the lens of post-truth theory, this study demonstrates how literature serves as both a reflection of and a response to the uncertainties of the contemporary world.

Here's the Literary Analysis section of your research paper. This section examines how *The Plot*, *The Circle*, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* engage with post-truth themes, using the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier.

Contemporary literature serves as a crucial medium for exploring and critiquing the post-truth condition. Novels often provide a space for examining the complexities of reality, perception, and manipulation in ways that other forms of discourse cannot. The selected texts—*The Plot* by Jean Hanff Korelitz, *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy—engage with post-truth themes in distinct yet interconnected ways. Each novel reflects the

anxieties of a world where truth is contested, information is weaponized, and narratives shape public perception.

### The Plot by Jean Hanff Korelitz: Ethics of Storytelling and Fabricated Truth

Jean Hanff Korelitz's *The Plot* (2021) explores the ethical dilemmas surrounding truth and authorship in literary culture. The novel follows Jacob Finch Bonner, a struggling writer who stumbles upon a brilliant plot idea from a deceased student and claims it as his own. As Bonner's stolen novel becomes a bestseller, an anonymous accuser threatens to expose his deception, forcing him to confront the ethical implications of his actions.

Korelitz's novel raises fundamental questions about the nature of truth in storytelling. The act of writing itself is portrayed as an exercise in fabrication, blurring the line between reality and fiction. In a post-truth society, where narratives often take precedence over objective facts, *The Plot* interrogates how truth is constructed, owned, and manipulated in literature. The novel suggests that the truthfulness of a story is often secondary to its emotional impact—an idea that aligns with post-truth discourse, where persuasion and belief outweigh verifiable facts (McIntyre 32).

A key aspect of post-truth culture is its reliance on emotional appeal rather than empirical evidence (Keyes 45). *The Plot* exemplifies this through its protagonist's rationalizations and justifications for his actions. Bonner convinces himself that since the original author never published his idea, his appropriation of it is justified. This manipulation of ethical boundaries reflects the broader post-truth phenomenon, in which narratives can be reframed to serve particular agendas.

Korelitz employs a metafictional approach, embedding a novel within a novel, which forces readers to question the authenticity of narratives. The book's structure mirrors the instability of truth in contemporary culture, where reality is often mediated through layers of representation, echoing Baudrillard's concept of simulacra (Baudrillard 9). Ultimately, *The Plot* serves as both a critique of literary deception and an exploration of how post-truth dynamics operate within the publishing industry.

Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013) presents a dystopian vision of a world where truth is mediated entirely through digital platforms. The novel follows Mae Holland, a young woman who joins *The Circle*, a powerful tech corporation that seeks to create a fully transparent and interconnected society. As Mae rises within the company, she becomes complicit in a system that prioritizes surveillance, data collection, and digital truth-making over individual autonomy and privacy.

Eggers critiques the role of technology in shaping truth, highlighting how algorithms and digital surveillance dictate what is perceived as real. In *The Circle*, truth is no longer based on objective reality but is instead determined by the company's data-driven ecosystem. This reflects contemporary concerns about algorithmic bias and misinformation in digital spaces, where powerful



corporations control the flow of information (Andrejevic 61).

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is central to *The Circle*, as characters construct and curate their digital personas in ways that replace genuine human interaction. The novel critiques the idea that more information leads to greater truth, showing instead how constant digital exposure creates an environment where perception is manipulated. The company's motto—"Secrets are lies, sharing is caring, privacy is theft"—exemplifies the post-truth ethos, where transparency is equated with truth, despite its coercive implications.

The Circle's influence extends beyond surveillance to shaping public opinion. The company fosters an environment where truth is based not on facts but on collective digital consensus, mirroring how social media platforms amplify misinformation through emotional persuasion. Mae's increasing acceptance of The Circle's ideology highlights how individuals can be conditioned to accept manipulated truths when they are embedded in a system that rewards conformity (McIntyre 54).

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) presents a complex, fragmented narrative that challenges state-controlled truths and historical revisionism. The novel weaves together the lives of multiple characters—Anjum, a hijra who builds a refuge for outcasts, and Tilo, an activist caught in political conflicts—creating a tapestry of voices that resist singular narratives.

Unlike *The Plot* and *The Circle*, which critique post-truth through individual and technological lenses, Roy's novel addresses the political dimensions of truth-making. The book's non-linear structure and multiple perspectives undermine the idea of a singular, authoritative truth, reflecting Foucault's argument that truth is constructed through discourse and power relations (Foucault 39). By presenting competing versions of history, Roy challenges the reader to question official narratives and consider marginalized voices.

The novel critiques how governments manufacture truth to maintain political power. Roy exposes the state's role in shaping public memory, particularly in the context of the Kashmir conflict and religious violence. The government's portrayal of events often contradicts the lived experiences of the characters, highlighting the disjunction between official discourse and ground realities. This aligns with post-truth politics, where state-controlled narratives override factual evidence (Keyes 72).

In contrast to the passive acceptance of post-truth realities in *The Circle*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* portrays literature and storytelling as acts of resistance. By documenting the lives of the marginalized, Roy's novel asserts the importance of alternative narratives in countering dominant ideologies. This reinforces the idea that literature can serve as a counterforce against post-truth manipulation, providing a space for critical engagement with contested realities.

While each novel engages with post-truth in distinct ways, they share common themes:

1. Manipulation of Reality: The Plot explores truth in literary storytelling, The Circle critiques digital truth-making, and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness examines political truth manipulation.
2. Emotional Persuasion: All three novels highlight how truth is shaped by emotional appeal, whether through self-justification (The Plot), algorithmic influence (The Circle), or political propaganda (The Ministry of Utmost Happiness).
3. Resistance to Post-Truth Culture: Korelitz's novel ends with an exposure of deception, Eggers' novel warns against technological control, and Roy's work advocates for alternative narratives. Together, these novels provide a comprehensive critique of post-truth culture, illustrating how literature reflects, critiques, and resists the erosion of objective reality.

The analysis of *The Plot*, *The Circle*, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates that contemporary literature serves as a critical lens through which the post-truth condition can be explored and resisted. In each of the novels, truth is portrayed as fluid, malleable, and often contested, reflecting the larger cultural and political shifts that characterize the post-truth era. These novels engage with the philosophical and theoretical frameworks of epistemic relativism, discourse theory, simulacra, and media studies, demonstrating how truth is shaped by power dynamics, emotional persuasion, and the proliferation of misinformation.

The post-truth condition is rooted in the disintegration of objective, verifiable truth and the rise of alternative facts, emotional appeal, and manipulated narratives. *The Plot* critiques the construction of literary truth, exposing the ethical implications of fabrication and the commodification of storytelling. In *The Circle*, the digital landscape emerges as a powerful force that shapes public perceptions, where truth is dictated by corporate interests and algorithms, blurring the boundaries between reality and representation. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* confronts the political dimensions of truth, exposing how governments use propaganda to control historical narratives and silence dissenting voices. Each novel illustrates the fluidity of truth, reflecting the challenges of discerning objective reality in a world where truth is often mediated, manipulated, or outright fabricated.

Despite the prevalence of post-truth in the novels examined, literature also emerges as a powerful tool for resisting the manipulation of reality. By presenting competing versions of truth, the novels push back against the singular, dominant narratives often perpetuated by media, corporations, and governments. In *The Plot*, the ethical questions surrounding authorship and truth force readers to confront the complexities of literary deception and its implications for real-world ethics. In *The Circle*, Eggers critiques the totalitarian potential of technology and its ability to control what is perceived as truth, warning of the dangers of digital surveillance and algorithmic manipulation. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, with its fragmented narrative and diverse voices, challenges official state narratives and advocates for the importance of marginalized perspectives in resisting hegemonic



truths.

These novels underscore the idea that literature does not simply reflect the post-truth world but actively engages with it, offering a space for resistance and critique. In a world where information is increasingly fragmented and contested, literature serves as a counterforce to the normalization of deception and misinformation. By foregrounding alternative perspectives, revealing hidden histories, and questioning dominant ideologies, these works assert the value of critical thinking, empathy, and the search for truth beyond the surface.

The rise of post-truth politics, media manipulation, and digital misinformation presents significant challenges for society. As traditional sources of authority—such as journalism, academia, and government—are increasingly undermined by competing narratives, the need for critical engagement with truth becomes more urgent. In this context, literature plays a vital role in fostering a more nuanced understanding of reality. The novels examined in this study demonstrate that while truth may be elusive and contested, the pursuit of truth remains essential for resisting the erosion of democratic values and the manipulation of public opinion.

Moreover, these novels highlight the importance of empathy and diverse perspectives in constructing a more inclusive, ethical understanding of truth. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* emphasizes the significance of listening to marginalized voices, while *The Circle* warns against the homogenization of truth through digital technologies. *The Plot*, with its focus on authorship and deception, raises questions about the ethical responsibilities of writers and the power of narrative in shaping reality. Together, these novels call for a more inclusive, critical approach to truth, one that resists the pull of convenient falsehoods and embraces the complexity of lived experiences.

In conclusion, the post-truth condition represents a profound challenge to the way we understand and engage with truth in contemporary society. However, the novels discussed in this paper offer a powerful critique of this cultural shift, demonstrating that literature is a vital tool for resisting the erosion of objective reality. By examining how authors construct and deconstruct truth, these novels expose the dangers of manipulated narratives and highlight the importance of alternative perspectives in reclaiming truth. As we navigate the complexities of the post-truth era, literature offers a space for reflection, resistance, and renewal. It encourages readers to engage critically with the information they encounter, to question dominant narratives, and to seek out diverse voices that challenge the status quo. In this way, literature remains an essential force for fostering a more ethical, inclusive, and truthful society in the face of the post-truth crisis.

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