



A Postmodern Reading of James Agee's "A Death in the Family"

Michael Meyer

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Theorists increasingly recognize that a significant transition has been underway in western philosophy and culture since about midway through the twentieth century. The postmodern worldview deeply influences all academic disciplines, including literature. Studies have not closely examined James Agee's seminal work, *A Death in the Family*, published in 1957, with the explicit purpose of determining whether it suggests a work of the modern or postmodern period. With philosophical and literary constructs developed by Brian McHale, Ihab Hassan, Jean-François Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Susan Sontag, and John Burkhard, this short book of literary criticism examines the presence of modern and postmodern traits in *A Death in the Family*. This book argues that *A Death in the Family* represents a transitional work between modernism and postmodernism. Elements in it make of it a fundamentally modern novel, but postmodern characteristics so broadly infiltrate *A Death in the Family*, that it very nearly is an artifact of the postmodern.

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