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# Revisiting the Divide: Modernism – Postmodernism

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**Abstract:** Modernism and Postmodernism are evaluated as intellectual, philosophical, and artistic movements of the twentieth century. This paper marks the progress from Modernism's origin, location and nature to the changes and improvements during the postmodern era. With an underlying base of theories by Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Saussure, Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, Baudrillard and Lyotard the themes and techniques of modern and postmodern literature are elucidated thoroughly. Modernism lamented the loss of faith while Postmodernism relished in a Godless world, both differ in mood even when many of the narrative techniques used, are similar. The guiding questions of this paper are: What are the different social, political theories that affected and influenced literature in the twentieth century? How do both movements different, and are they anti each other or just a modification? At the same time, there's a slight mention of the changes in arts, architecture and culture that enabled and affected the changes in literary forms. Modernism became a cage even while resisting conventions of the previous age, while Postmodernism's encompassing umbrella fostered various other movements, including gender studies, LGBTQ studies, postcolonial and Critical Race theories, ecofeminism, ecocriticism, reader response theory, and others. The present study also focuses on the canonical texts (though both movements resist the category of 'canonical') during the twentieth century, and the precursors that brought about such masterpieces. The paper seeks to establish the fact that there is a very seamless and unapparent transition from Modernism to Postmodernism; both movements are only separated on a historical basis for convenience.

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**Keywords:** Modernism, Postmodernism, stream of consciousness, fragmentation, simulacrum, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, experimentation, alienation, polyphony, death of the author.

**Introduction:**

Literary movements are almost never clearly demarcated as they evolve and transition slowly. The effects of some literary movements can be felt years down the road; therefore, it is inaccurate to say a movement has ended. Though for the sake of simplicity and to limit the scope of study the movements in question are demarcated as: Modernism (1900-1945) and Postmodernism (1945-2000). Modernism and Postmodernism are arguably the most significant movements of the twentieth century, dismantling the conventional notion of truth, construction of social roles, what constitutes as a fictional text and even the role of author and reader. Both of these intellectual movements affected the art, literature, and culture of their times. Modernism began as a break away from Victorian rigid ideals, to experiment and be independent of conventional norms and yet Postmodernism deemed Modernism itself as constricting freedom.

While Modernism seeks to establish a stable structure to exist, Postmodernism seeks to dismantle any form of structure and relish in free play. Both movements' literature focuses on fragmentation, symbols and allusion, randomness, juxtaposed images, and reject the omniscient narrator, but they do so in different moods. Modernism laments the loss of faith, and in contrast Postmodernism revels in a Godless society. Postmodernism (Pomo) takes the limits of Modernism further, while also subverting the modernist ideals. Through the works and theories of Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Saussure, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard a theoretical framework sustains the various authors and artists of Modernism and Postmodernism, launching works by Eliot, Lawrence, Hemingway, Pound, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Pynchon, Atwood, Nobokov, Calvino, Vonnegut, Beckett, and so on. This paper, for the most part, limits itself to literature. Mentions of the fine arts, architecture and scientific developments are only made to further the explanation and explain the themes, basis and mode of literary works. To elucidate the seamless, and unclear transition between Modernism and Postmodernism, similar

approach is kept while describing certain strains and elements of both movements. The guiding question of this paper are: What are the different social, political theories that affected and influenced literature in the twentieth century? How do both movements different, and are they anti each other or just a modification?

**Literature Review:**

Critics and researchers have been trying to map the boundaries of Modernism and Postmodernism since the late nineteenth century, yet the only clear truth discovered is that there are no certain limits that can define both movements clearly. Researchers contest on many aspects related to the movements, but what they agree on is that both movements were marked by a tendency to experiment and break away from constricting social conventions in literary and social lives. Fragmentation, non-linearity, randomness, use of disparate images were common symptoms of these movements. Novels employed complex temporalities and spatialities, using anachrony, unreliable narrators, mentally disabled protagonists, stream of consciousness technique, and other methods that depicted the mental fragmentation of the age. Shakur et al., in their 2026 paper, focus on anachrony, focalization, and narrative voice to explore Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, locating flashbacks (anachrony), different narrative voices, physical and sensory triggers as sources of disruptive chronological sequence in the narration. They point out that "trauma also works as a disruptive force in the form of internal analepses" (1523). These techniques make novels of both modern and postmodern era fragmented, allowing them to accurately depict the psychological conditions of the masses affected with the chaos of the twentieth century, including warfare, cold wars, technological advancements. Rasifovna and Masharipqizi also iterate the same opinion, that Modernism challenged traditional conventions, and Postmodernism "further destabilized fixed notions of identity" (617).

Most critics consider Postmodernism as Modernism taken to the extreme, as a movement that challenges even the limits and elitist conventions of Modernism. Bhagat asserts that pomo is a "broad perspective working towards the intensification of the traits of modernism that have become uncontainable within the same sphere" (277). Bafoeva asserts the importance of social and political upheavals in the diversity, hybridity and fracture that Postmodern literature

contained. According to them, "postmodernism in English literature evolved through a complex interplay of philosophical skepticism, technological advancement and cultural globalization" (15). Bafoeva also highlights Postmodern literature's tendency to "double code", in contrast to high Modernism which created distinctions between high and popular art. Zilolova concludes in their paper that the problems of self-identification became acute during the modernist period due to the rapid changes. It became a defining characteristic of Modernism – "rejection of finality…the refusal of fixed and completed forms of self-identification, cultural consciousness, and artistic practice" (368). This problem is taken to the extreme in the Postmodern period, especially with the presence of existential theory. Postmodernist human being "as a bearer of multiple identifies, is characterized as a discontinuously evolving and cumulatively disconnected being" (Zilolova370).

Other opinions contest if *avant-garde* and Modernism should be considered the same or should be separated, since "The term Modernism was coined and has been primarily used within the Anglophone scholarly tradition … [while]… In place of the concept of Modernism, much of continental Europe has historically privileged the category of the Avant-gardes" (Cotoi452). Cotoi proposes to study Surrealism and Modernism together, to consider no difference between Modernism and *avant-garde.* F. Ferfouda looks at modernist discourse through the views of Husserl and Heidegger and capitulates the conventional attitude of modernists. They recognize the need for Postmodernism since Modernism "consisted in rescuing man from the Church's grip by liberating reason, only to cast him, shortly after, into technology's grip. From this sprang 'postmodernity' as a reaction against this irrational and unethical loss of control" (686). Ferfouda elucidates the adverse effect of technology on the modernist mind – something that is more relevant today than it was during the twentieth century. Technological enslavement replaced religious enslavement and man remained shackled. Postmodernism arouse out of this to free man, to allow him to revel in the state of not-knowing, in the state of endless freeplay.

**Discussion:**

Modernism is a global artistic, philosophical, intellectual and cultural movement that fostered a period of experimentation and newness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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centuries. This experimental spirit was seen in various ways, such as anti-representationalism in painting, atonalism in music that challenged melody and harmony, *vers libre* in poetry, stream of consciousness narrative in the novel, minimalism and use of modern technological advancements in architecture. There was an overwhelming loss of faith, a sense of anomie, to use Émile Durkheim's term, and alienation in the society due to rapid changes. The era is marked by "a loss of faith in objective reality and in the 'word', established language; a fascination with the unconscious; a concern with the pressures of industrial environment and accelerating change; a desire to discover significant artistic structures in increasing chaos" (Bradbury & McFarlane 202). To depict this chaotic environment artists used different techniques to display the underlying sense of normlessness present in the society, for instance, spatial form, non-linearity of plots, unreliable narrators, lack of proper perspective in art (used by artists like Picasso), stream of consciousness and interior monologues, free verse, the doctrine of impersonality, the use of collage narratives, focus on the form of a literary work in criticism, emphasizing the inner, subjective world rather than objective reality, and emphasis on the economy of words like in Imagist poetry.

M. H. Abrams, in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, uses the term Modernism to "identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, but especially after World War I (1914-18)" (226). Though Bradbury and McFarlane posit the beginning and peak of Modernism to be before WWI. They define the changes that twentieth century brought about as "cataclysmic", the effect and magnitude of those cultural changes were "those fundamental convulsions of the creative human spirit that seem to topple even the most solid and substantial of our beliefs and assumptions, leave great areas of the past in ruins…question and entire civilization or culture, and stimulate frenzied rebuilding" (19). The works produced in this age were catastrophically new and jarring. "Modernism was in most countries an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical" (Bradbury and McFarlane 46). The origins of what is now understood as Modernism is as complex and varied as the works under its banner. The earliest instances of

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the modernist style and thought were seen in Germany and France, Modernism then moved to the British Isles and made its home in America later. "In Scandinavia, in Germany, and to a substantial extent in Austria, it was the eighties, nineties and early 1900s that witnessed a debate about the nature and name of Modernism of quite unparalleled passion and vehemence" (Bradbury and McFarlane 37). As early as 1883 saw the publication of a series of essays by the Danish critic Georg Brandes with the title *Men of the Modern Breakthrough.* The movement was in full swing in Germany too: "one of the most influential periodicals of the day, *Die Gesellschaft,* which began publication in 1885, was defined by its editor as '*ein Organ der modernen Bewegung in der Literatur'* ('an organ of the modern movement in literature')" (Bradbury and McFarlane 38). This time lag between the Germanic Modernism and the Anglo-American Modernism was so vast that the first decade of the twentieth century simultaneously saw it's beginning in England and it's exit in Germany (marked by the work of Samuel Lublinski titled *The Exit of the Modern*) from the literary scene.

The proper beginning of Modernism in England is also highly contested; Virgina Woolf in her essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' says: "on or about December 1910 human character changed… All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature." (Woolf45). D. H. Lawrence, in Kangaroo, wrote "It was in 1915 the old world ended" (243). While Richard Ellmann demarcated the year 1900 as the beginning of Modernism, for the sake of both convenience and accuracy, whereas Harry Levin considers 1922 as the Modernist year due to the prolific publication of canonical modernist texts. Though whenever Modernism properly began in England, its roots can be traced back to the Italian Futurist movement, especially Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's manifesto called 'Manifesto del Futurismo', published in Le Figaro in 1909.

Modernism is characterized by a break away from the past Victorian prudery and constrictions, and at the same time a continuation of the Romantic subjectivity and positivist Naturalism. The arrival of Modernism was facilitated by the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of the time. It was the time of imperialism; Britain was a super power slowly

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losing its hold on its colonies. Even so, it had immense influence. Imperialism was not simply "a system of power politics and economic exploitation: it was also an ideology, a faith, fascinating intellectuals and writers, businessmen, soldiers, missionaries and politicians alike" (Bradbury and McFarlane 60). The great majority of the world believed in the "cultural and racial superiority of the white races of European stock" (Bradbury and McFarlane 60). The Victorian age was marked by idealism, a cut off from emotions and sexuality of any kind, and a strong emphasis on morality which became oppressive, therefore Modernism came as a revolt and rebellion against such oppressive environment, as Toril Moi says "Modernism began when idealist aesthetics came under attack" (69). To exacerbate matters, a series of devastating events happened during the age like the mass destruction caused by the Great War (1914-18) and the anxieties of its aftermath, the Bolshevik regime, which pushed Modernism to the west, the market crash after the 1920s. The rapid industrialization and urbanization also caused massive societal and cultural alienation. "The Modern movement was part of a disturbed, transformational period of European history, and contained and incorporated its sensibility of transition and its rising sense of crisis" (Bradbury and McFarlane 13). The movement had a pervasive effect, "in the arts [it] transformed consciousness and artistic form just as the energies of modernity — scientific, technological, philosophical, political — transformed for ever the nature, the speed, the sensation of human life." (Bradbury and McFarlane 11). Technological advancements, seemingly improved living conditions of man, actually exacerbated the sense of alienation that modernist felt. "Modern man, when he put the file of existence on the shelf and became master over nature and installed freedom of action by making technology a tool for his development, imprisoned himself in the focus of reification and alienation" (Ferfouda697).

The intellectual precursors of Modernism are thinkers and theorists who had questioned the traditional conventions, modes of thinking and organization, the state of being and even the way of conceiving the human self — Charles Darwin ( *On the Origin of Species,* 1859 ), Karl Marx ( *Das Capital,* 1867 ), Friedrich Nietzsche ( *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* 1883-85 ), Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory ( *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 1899 ), James G. Frazer's analysis of mythological archetype ( *The Golden Bough,* 1890-1915 ) and Ferdinand de

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Saussure's work on linguistics ( *Course in General Linguistics*, 1916 ) — shaped Modernism as reiterated by critics like J. A. Cuddon and M. H. Abrams in their dictionary essays. Bradbury and McFarlane also include various authors such as Émile Zola, Walter Pater, Lawrence Sterne, John Donne, Charles Baudelaire, and Fyodor Dostoevsky as precursors for the two major strains of what we now consider Modernism. Modernism covers a variety of other 'isms' — Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism — that shapes, precedes, sometimes overlaps and other times follow Modernism. These 'isms' were somewhat more apparent in the fine arts where the artists focused more on colors, shapes, geometric representation of real things, incorporating the idea of motion and change, instead of portraying life-like reality like the earlier period. Modernism in the arts can be traced back to Édouard Manet, back in the early 1860s. In architecture too, the modernist trend breaks away from ornamental style to a simple design of steel, glass and concrete with geometric structures and minimalist style. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's assertion "less is more" and Le Corbusier's glass-and-steel buildings embodying his statement "a house is a machine for living in" (Barry86) became the quintessential representation of Modernist style.

The feelings of alienation, disillusionment, and loss of faith were universally depicted in most Modern fiction. Writers in this era tried to find a sense of stability, unity, center and structure amidst the chaos that was the modern world. Therefore, Structuralism formed an underlying base for much of modernist literature and art. T. S. Eliot, in his 1923 review of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), says that the previous model of prosewriting, embodying linearity and a sense of order, could not be suited to the novels of the then contemporary age and Joyce's narrative technique suited the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Deming270). The modernists tried to express the sense of fragmentation by novel forms and styles of literature, one of them being stream of consciousness technique. This form came to be as a corollary of Naturalism. Writers of Naturalism sought a form that went beyond the limits of it, that expressed not just the outer reality but also a person's inner truth. They had always focused on the domestic interiors: "the heredity, environment, strict moral imperatives, the coercions of politics, press, religion… [but with this new preoccupation with the interior of a

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human being, they captured] … the picture not of an action but of a condition…a state of nerves as well as of soul, a state of temper, of health, of charging, of despair" (Bradbury and McFarlane 196). The ideas of the psychologist William James, who also coined this term in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), stimulated much of this narrative style. Characteristic of this narrative style are the use of fragmented utterances, linguistics gymnastics, non-linearity, break in narrative order, subjectivity, Impressionistic details, distortion and parody of traditional forms, and using myths to explain certain themes in the text. Prose this became almost musical, lyrical or poetic, in contrast poetry became prose like. Some of the best examples of this technique are: Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and even more radical *Finnegans Wale* (1939), Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' also employs this technique to explore the inner workings of a paralyzed middle-aged man.

There are two different strains of Modernism that emerged from the same intellectual culture: Literary Modernism and Architectural Modernism. One attacked science, catering to the artistic side (called the 'circle', reflected in the works of Joyce, Woolf, Picasso), while the other worshipped science and scientific movements (called the 'square', reflected by Le Corbusier, Bertrand Russell and Samuelson). A different kind of dual strain of Modernism is its division based on the target audience. On one hand it is "an arcane and a private art... On the other hand, specialism and experimentalist can be held to have great social meaning…" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27-28). The former is what's termed High Modernism or the spirit of *avant-ga*rde – reflected in the works of T. S. Eliot (The *Waste Land*, 1922), James Joyce (Ulysses, 1922), and Ezra Pound (Hugh *Selwyn Mauberley*, 1920*)*. John Carey, in his 1992 book, states on the matter: "The intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy. But they could prevent them reading literature by making it too difficult for them to understand" (16). The obscurity of Modernist art and literature kept it in the hands of the cultured. Postmodernism rejects this elitist spirit of Modernism;it is a joyful celebration and subversion of authority of any kind. In Postmodernism "the *avant-garde* [enters] the streets" (Bradbury and McFarlane 35). Though even these elitist texts display the psychological condition of the masses,

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the anxieties, the lamentation, the grief and the chaos. Eliot's *The Waste Land* captures this feeling perfectly, as evident in a single line: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (69) – reflecting the modern man's lamentation of the loss of faith and search for meaning.

In the American literary scene, there was a foreboding sense of disillusionment, dissociation, alienation, and hopelessness and a focus on the human condition. Authors like Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald captured the disillusionment and existential uncertainty of their generation in the aftermath of WorldWar I. Fitzgerald mocks the great American dream in his seminal novel, *The Great Gatsby* while Hemingway's novels were inspired by his own experiences as a war journalist. His novels like *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *The Sun Always Rises* (1926), along with other works by the Lost Generation, capture the disenchantment of the inter-war years. Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) showcases war anxieties with a unique lens, it explores how unquestioning loyalty to a charismatic figure can veer into dangerous, totalitarian, and even fascist territory. Aldous Huxley's *Chrome Yellow* (1921) described the tone of cynicism and sense of bewilderment of the war years. Existentialism, a philosophical doctrine and literary movement, was launched by figures such as Jean-Paul Satre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. It emerged as corollary to "the collapse of grand narratives and asserted that responsibility for constructing one's existence rests entirely upon the individual" (Zilolova 369). In the Postmodern world, an individual does not have a fixed sense of identity, they exist in multiplicity. In such a state, it falls upon the individual to create their own identity. This is accurately exemplified in the works of Camus, for instance, his short story 'The Guest', his non-fictional work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where Camus posits that we must imagine Sisyphus happy in his situation, that's the only way to make sense of and carry on living in his condition. Camus explains the state of unfamiliarity and absurdity felt by modern man; "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (6). Surrealism (or super realism), launched as an artistic movement, entered literature later. Its main aim was to shock the false values of the modern bourgeois society. Surrealists also

turn to automatic writing (of which Gertrude Stein is a major proponent) in which the unconscious mind's dreams, thoughts, and memories are explored. Proponents of this in art were André Breton, Louis Aragon and painter Salvador Dali. In prose and verse writing, it is characterized by the experiments with free associations, non-logical and non-linear narratives, broken syntax with dream like a hallucinatory sequence, juxtaposing of bizarre, unrelated images; for instance, in the poetry of Dylan Thomas, the black humor in the novels of Henry Miller (Black *Spring* 1936), and in the works of William Burroughs. Works under the Surrealist banner span both Modern and Postmodern period, including Thomas Pynchon's works, and other absurd, speculative, encyclopedic fictions.

Modernist literature also has a tendency to self reflect, whereby the literature raises questions of its own status and nature. This reflectivity is called metafiction, it often highlights its own artificiality. Metafiction is one of the quintessential features of modernity as reiterated by Lyotard. This tendency of self-reflexivity is not only present in the prose and verse works of the era, but also in theater. Theatre took new forms in this era, breaking the fourth wall, as in the works of Bertolt Brecht, the proponent of Epic Theatre. Shifting the stage from straightforward storytelling into an arena of political, psychological, and artistic provocation. W. B. Yeats also employed myths and traditional Irish folklore in his plays like *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), and *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1917).

Jean-Francois Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), in particular the essay "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (1982), attacks Habermas. Habermas asserted in his 1980 paper, 'Modernity – an Unfinished Project" posits that Modernism is a continuation of the Enlightenment age and the French theorists like Foucault and Derrida attacked the ideals of truth, clarity, and progress.Lyotard rejects this notion and asserts that "Enlightenment" is just another authoritative, totalizing explanation of things. These meta-narratives (orsuper narratives) do not explain the differences, plurality and opposition that is entailed in the postmodern society. He asserts that "from every direction we are being urged to put an end to experimentation" (Barry88). Lyotard rejected these "meta-narratives" in the favor of "mini-narratives" which are relative, temporary, and explained local or small-scale practices

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instead of claiming universality, truth or reason, stability like the meta-narratives do. In fact, Lyotard defines Postmodernism as "an incredulity towards meta-narratives" (Barry88).

Dr. Stockmann, a character from Henrik Ibsen's 1882 play *An Enemy of the People,* goes on to say: "A normally constituted truth lives, let us say, as a rule seventeen or eighteen, or at most twenty years—seldom longer" (59). Stockmann's outburst marks one of the most conspicuous features of the modernist mind, in which a growing instability was to be common. Such was the effect of Modernism too. By the 1930s Modernism saw a major decline in England, further pushed behind by the onset of Postmodernism after the two world wars. The term Postmodernism is applied to art and literature produced after the World War II (1939-45). Postmodernist literature and art reflected a decentralization, a destabilization of social institutions and structures. It emerged due to several social, political, and moral situations including, but not limited to, Nazi totalitarianism, the Cold War, Nuremberg trials, atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and so on. The rise of a movement that encompassed the new existential and nihilistic mindset was necessary. A form, or several, that depicted and reveled in the absurd existence of man and also included the existence of non-human elements such as the environment, technology, and other species was necessary. Here the term Postmodernism gains high currency. It represents "a compound of that art of chance or minimalization, that 'literature of silence', in which, as in Beckett or Borges, the idea of absurd creation, random method, parody or self-exhausting fictionality is paramount" (Bradbury and McFarlane 34). On the other hand, theorists like Jürgen Habermas posits that we have not even fulfilled the project of modernism yet, that we have moved on to post modernism too soon.

Postmodernism involves both a continuation and a rejection of the modernist trends. It attempts to break away from the modern conventions which had become restrictive. Postmodernism rejects the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' art which was important to modernism. It rejects the elitism of modernism and recourses to 'mass culture' of film, TV, newspaper, cartoon and popular music. Postmodernism, like Modernism, also focuses on fragmentation, symbols and allusions, randomness, juxtaposed images and first-person narrator,

but it does so in a very different mood. While Modernism looks at the past with a deep nostalgia for the loss of faith, Postmodernism relishes the fragmentation and looks at the past with irony and humor. Postmodernism "believes in excess, in gaudiness, and in 'bad taste' mixtures of qualities" (Barry 86). It is characterized by Robert Venturi's assertion "less is a bore", in his book of the same name, instead of the earlier assertion "less is more" during modernism. The main spirit of Postmodernism is reflected by Frederick Nietzsche's assertion: "Away with *such* a God! Better to have no God, better to set up destiny on one's own account, better to be a fool, better to be God oneself!" (211). Derrida calls this the Nietzschean affirmation, in his *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. It is "the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation" (Das and Mohanty 411). Postmodernism is a theoretical lens for cross-cultural readings. It connects vastly different elements such as Marilyn Monroe, Mona Lisa, *The Satanic Verses* and cyber space in the same framework.

In postmodernist works the genres are so blended that it is hard to categorize them in the traditional literary rubrics. Detective fiction mixes with horror, with science fiction and other genres, speculative fiction, encyclopedic novels, aleatory writing, pastiche and collage narrative became the norm. Other literary forms like *nouveau roman* in France, the non-fiction novel in Germany and USA – where facts, objects or historical events are placed in the context of a questioning narrative and the concept of anti-hero (like Humbert Humbert in Vladimir Nobokov's Lolita). Multimedia forms like the street theater, the third theater movement in India, the anti-rationalistic anti-art of psychedelics, pornography and so many more all emerged during the Postmodern era. Metafiction was pushed even further in works such as Vladimir Nobokov's *Pale Fire,* Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller.* There is little to no plot construction in some of the postmodernist novels, for instance, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, or Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death.* Another concept used especially by the Postmodern theatre is Viktor Shklovsky's *defamiliarization* (or it's near-synonym from Brecht's Epic theatre, 'alienation effect'/*Verfremdungseffekt*) that also drew attention to the art form. Through this technique the audience is reminded of the fictionality of

the text/play, so as to make them think rather than feel. The purpose of this technique was to draw attention to the social ad political problems of the time. India's third theatre movement under Badal Sircar achieves a similar effect in drawing attention to the issues of postcolonial India.

The true precursor to postmodernist fiction is considered to be *Tristram Shandy* by Lawrence Sterne, a novel featuring the typical postmodernist fragmentation, narrative breaks and almost encyclopedic information that is unrelated to the main plot; the narrator breaks the fourth wall to speak directly to the reader and draws attention to the novel's own fictionality. Literary figures like Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Jaques Lacan, Martin Heidegger, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche are also precursors to the Postmodernism thought.

Postmodernism carries an interest in the surface, the image and the copy rather than in the depth, the reality and the original– as was the case in modernism. There is an emphasis on discourse, the language, and the narrative rather than on the reality these supposedly convey. The chaos of the post war world was inevitable, the only recourse was to play with the chaos as accomplished by the postmodern spirit especially in the movements of absurdism and existentialism. Absurdism or theatre of the absurd is a post WWII movement, rooted in art– expressionism and surrealism – and literature –Kafka's *The trial* and *Metamorphosis.* Eugene Ionesco's *The Bold Soprano*, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are some of the key texts under this banner. The view is that human condition is absurd and meaningless therefore to best represent it absurdity is required.

Poststructuralism coincides with Postmodernism and forms a basis for the same. Modernism or Structuralism bases itself on linguistics and therefore makes logical deductions and establishes reliable truths. On the other hand, Postmodernism or Poststructuralism is based on philosophy which is usually skeptical and question established notions and assumptions. This is encapsulated in Nietzsche's famous remark, "[there are no facts], only interpretations" (Will to Live 267). Poststructuralists in the same vein assert "meanings are fluid, and subject to constant 'slippage' or 'spillage'" (Barry64).

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This assertion comes from the theory of Deconstruction, given by Jacques Derrida, who reworked (like other poststructuralists) Saussure's linguistic theory of signs. Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics*, insisted that signs are arbitrary, and meaning is relative. One of the postmodernist characteristics is to employ this theory into the art and fiction of its time. For instance, artists like René Magritte wittily exploited the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifiers (words) and signifieds (meanings), especially in his word paintings in *The Interpretation of Dreams (La Clef des songes,* 1935). Another such artist is Marcel Duchamp who employed this technique to mock and subvert what was really considered to be art, in works like 'The Fountain' (1917) and 'Mona Lisa' (1919) are responsible for ushering in the concern for the postmodern predicament. 'The Fountain' was an inverted urinal while 'Mona Lisa' was a cheap and sexualized reworking of the original with an addition of a moustache.

Derrida was influenced by thinkers like Saussure, Heidegger, Freud, and Nietzsche. In 1966, his lecture *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* is set to have kick started post structuralism. Deconstruction can be roughly defined as applied poststructuralism, it is often referred to as "reading against the grain" or "reading the text against itself", it aims to uncover the unconscious dimension of the text. Arbitrariness of meaning and signs would lead to elusiveness; the same thing could mean a number of things, therefore, "there are no fixed absolutes" (Barry67) and meaning is will-o'-the-wisp. The universe will live in is 'decentred', instead of movement or deviation from a known center, all we have is "free play". This is precisely the soul of the Postmodern movement. Authors and works like Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), John Barth's *Letters* (1979) and *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988) and David Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) employ this decentredness, heavily mixing different genres to create deeply paranoid narratives with no structure holding them together, other than the sequence of events employing the same characters. The attitudes that since life has no inherent meaning, we might as well play with the pieces. There's a celebration of the death of the author, the text itself is free from any constraints, free to be interpreted in any way or form; invitation for

multiple interpretations, multiplicity and detection of polyphony that does not depend on the author's intentions.

A prominent group active during the postmodern era was the Beat movement, which identifies a loose-knit group of poets and novelists, mostly of African-American heritage, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They shared a set of social attitudes — anti-establishment, anti-political, anti-intellectual, and anti-foundational. They opposed the prevailing cultural, literary and moral values and favored unfettered self-realization and self-expression. In a way, they sought to create a sense of identity out of the meaninglessness of the world. Many writers also cultivated ascetic states by the way of Buddhism, Jewish and Christian mysticism, and/or hallucinatory drugs. Some of the key works include *Howl* (1956) by Allen Ginsberg and *On the Road* (1958) by Jack Kerouac. The Beat writers left a lasting impact on many of the later writers and movements including Counter culture, Steampunk, Pulp Fiction and so on. Postmodern poetry in general was full of vivid imagery and viewpoints, using vocabulary in a jumbled in bizarre way, juxtaposing of different pieces from the past ages. For instance, Martian poetry, invented by Craig Raine and Christopher Reid. These poems needto be worked out, a reader's interpretation or role is called into action– aligning with the contemporary Reader-Response Theory. The reader needs to figure out all the puzzling references and derive her/his own meaning. These juxtaposed images are at one glance almost meaningless and nonsensical.

A sense of meaningless pervades much of absurdist fiction and theatre of the absurd. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* are the quintessential plays of the Absurd theatre. 'Waiting', futility and purposelessness are recurring themes in such works. Even in Anton Chekov's *Three Sisters* the same sense of futile waiting is depicted by the characters' waiting for someone to save them from their mundane lives. These sisters view Moscow as an almost mythical place, full of glitter and glamour, representing a mix of memory and desire – a kind of simulation or hyperreality, to use the terms by Jean Baudrillard.

Baudrillard, in his book *Simulations* (tl 1983), talks about this "loss of reality" which happens as a result of forms of media — films, TV, advertisement — distorting reality and our

perception of what's possible. In some extreme form (he gives four stages of this distortion/disintegration of the distinction between reality and illusion), it becomes difficult to differentiate between reality and illusion. In the last stage, signs just stand in for other signs and are completely illusionary. He calls this entire system a 'simulacrum'. In his notoriously controversial text, *The Gulf War did not Take Place* (1995), he critiqued the absolute distortion of reality, the "virtual television scenarios" that obscured the actual war events and misled the masses. Clearly, the effects Baudrillard mentions are the result of extremism of even the postmodernist free play. Baudrillard, in an almost prophetic spirit, predicted and displayed the limits and adverse effects of both Postmodernist attitude and technological advancements.

It is natural that this free play would be used as a manifesto of gender studies since gender fluidity is a sort of free play between the two visible genders that bind people into specific roles, and the idea of endless free play allows infinite possibilities of being and subversion of authority. Self-identity would become fluid under this free play. "Identity can be conceived of as a set of psychological characteristics, or as a social role, as recognition of the appropriateness to oneself of a classification, or a membership of a group" (Belsey 51-52). In this sense, if identity is fluid, if meaning is not fixed then one can have any gender, any sexuality, and any social role as one desires. "Frequently, social movements are about identity. The American Civil rights movement, the Women's movement, and the Gay and Lesbian movements have essentially been 'identity movements'" (Nayar108). Through these movements hegemonic cultural norms are consistently subverted and a sense of community is built based on racial, gender or sexual identities. The seeds of gender fluidity were actually sown in much of the modernist fiction, including *Ulysses*, in the character of Bella Cohen (the mannish woman who transforms into a womanish man); and the blind seer Tiresias of *The Waste Land* whose androgynous identity transcends gendering. Postmodern fiction is full of such gender fluidity narratives, for instance, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) by Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) by Angela Carter, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dhalgren* (1975) by Samuel R. Delany.

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Deconstructive reading reveals the hidden meanings, contradictions or inconsistencies in the text, so as to show the inherent meaningfulness and unity dissipates when looked upon closely. This unity and meaninglessness becomes the chief characteristics of postmodern literature. Another important poststructuralist is Roland Barthes. In his later works, like *The Death of the Author* (1967) Barthes posited that "linguistically the author is never more than the instance writing" (Belsey19), thus, Postmodernism rejoices in the text alone. A text rife with interplay of meanings and other works hence the postmodern era is marked by a number of techniques and quirks like pastiche, collage, aleatory writing, intertextuality, and allusions.

Individuals are conditioned into certain types through 'soft rule'. Althusser said "ideology is internal; we are its effects; we cite it unwittingly every time we reaffirm the 'obvious'" (Belsey 39). Literature became a source to monitor this. Authors came out with dystopian fictions depicting totalitarian regimes to question the then contemporary conditions and grand truths. The most important of such fictions include, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury, *1984* (1949) by George Orwell. Postcolonialism is another such 'ism' that borrowed a lot from deconstructionist and postmodernist theories. It seeks to dismantle and subvert the power difference in operation created by the imperial authorities. Although from the behaviorist theory of Sapir and Whorf we know that language not only reflects our thoughts but also shapes them. "Ideas are the effect of the meaning we learn and reproduce" (Belsey 7), and "if values emanate from language and language divides the world differently from culture to culture, there can be no appeal to a universal, grounding reality" (Belsey 90). Therefore, it feels natural that postcolonialism would seek help from deconstruction, Foucaultian theories of power, and Althusser's ideological state apparatus theory to dismantle "the masters house" (Dawson 372). Michael Foucault argued that what the structures of power do is generate a set of ideas and beliefs about age, sickness, sanity and normalness. These structures of power allow and sustain a sense of control over the masses that is not apparent. Though Foucault stresses, throughout his work, the possibility of resistance, since "power is always power over something or someone capable of disobeying" (Belsey 89). Postmodernism also acknowledges the fluidity of meaning

and rejects the notion of the one universal truth or meta narrative, it accepts that "one can only utilize local knowledge to know a *part* of the truth thus the individual's experience, knowledge and voice is to be retrieved as a resistance and *delegitimization* towards grand narratives that simply pass off *one* version of truth and reality as universal" (Nayar 61). This then becomes the focus of postcolonial theorists. Other theorists like Homi K Bhabha focus on the ambivalent and hybrid nature of colonialism. Major works of the postcolonial nature are *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih, *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, *Orientalism* by Edward Said, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and *Can the Subaltern Speak?* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

There were different phases of Postmodernism: (i) the 1960s phase where Postmodernism was an attitude – attack on 'art as institution' of the modernists, emergence of counter culture, eclectic approach to literature and art – (ii) the 1970s onwards phase within the poststructuralist orbit. The poststructuralist Postmodernism had two stages: one with Deconstructionist practices of Derrida and Barthes, and the next with Foucault, Lacan, and Deluze that enabled close links with Feminism and multiculturalism. Thus, Postmodernism is not just the era of endless 'free play'; a wide range of theories and criticisms surfaced with vigor in this period. Theorists of social sciences – sociology, politics, economics – and the human sciences – psychology, philosophy– gained currency in the literary scenario. John Ruskin, Walt Whitman, Mathew Arnold, Louis Althusser, Michael Foucault, Carl Jung, Jaques Lacan, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Émile Durkheim became important in how literature and culture was created and perceived. Feminist and postcolonial theories took borrowings from them while newer theories like Queer and Transgender studies, Critical Race theory, Ecocriticism, New Historicism, Posthumanism, and Cultural Studies claimed space in literary studies.

**Conclusion:**

Literary modernism is often summed up in a couple of lines from Yeats' 'The Second Coming': "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (184). Modernists often try to find and hold onto a metaphysical centre but experience its collapse instead. In contrast, postmodernist rejoice and celebrate this collapse, exposing the failure of metaphysics, using theories such as Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysical claims. Both modernism and postmodernism differ mostly in their outlook towards life and the world, while modernism still hopes for a divine intervention, postmodernism relishes in a godless world. Postmodernists believe in Nietzsche's claim: "There is no God". Modernism and postmodernism are still relevant and continuing movements; their effects and influences are still felt in contemporary literature. Indian literature can be seen as a mixture of both tendencies in the current era.

Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum, simulations and hyperreality are valid even more so today than they were in his time. His *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* mirrors today's political and warfare scenario. The presence of AI tools, and deep fakes, where one's reality is nothing but an illusion also reflect his assertions. Modernism in particular and modernity in general achieved the greatest progress in the history of human knowledge by devising and inventing new scientific methods and theories. The initial intention was good – to achieve freedom from the conventional modes of being – and yet eventually modernism itself became a cage that restricted freedom of the masses. Postmodern philosophy opened up human dimensions which were earlier unattainable and off limits to the common man. Postmodernism emerged to diagnose and remedy the conventionality that modernism had fallen into. Overall, both movements allowed an accelerated blooming of literature like no other century or era had ever seen, both allowed infinite possibilities in art, literature, culture and life.

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