

Modernism, Postmodernism, and Metamodernism: A Critique

Tawfiq Yousef¹

Abstract

In this article, I want to outline a few currents in contemporary literary theory. Three varieties of modernism will be investigated. In addition to the original approach labelled modernism, the paper investigates two other approaches that grew out from this theory, namely postmodernism and post-postmodernism or what is more commonly called metamodernism. Being the practice of a wide variety of literary critics for over a century, modernism has generated its two corollaries namely postmodernism and metamodernism which have become two predominant modes of critical analysis. As such, this subject requires an updated conceptual vocabulary and a critical analysis that can respond to the new changes in the critical readings of literary works. If individualism and sincerity were the distinguishing characteristics of modernism, and fragmentation and irony were the main features of postmodernism, it is true to say that engagement and oscillation are perhaps the watchwords of metamodernism. The paper will explore the main features of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism with special reference to some representative works that reflect these different modes of writing and reading literary works. More space will be given to the third concept.

Key words: Modernism, postmodernism, metamodernism, oscillation, Vermeulen and Akker.

Introduction and Review of Related Literature:

This paper investigates the major principles of three successive literary movements namely, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism and the relationships between them. Together, these three concepts constitute three important moments in critical thought in the 20th and 21st centuries. Though these concepts occur in various forms of human thought including philosophy, literature, architecture, the arts and several other disciplines and human activities, concentration in this research will be laid on the representation of these moments in modern and contemporary literary theory and criticism. Modernism has been around since the turn of the 20th century and goes back to as early as the last decade of the 19th century as exemplified in the works of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats, among many others. Much has been written on modernism and modernist literature. T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction" (1921) are two of the most influential essays in literary criticism which show a clear break of modern literature from the Romantic and Victorian literature. The practical criticism of British critics as well as the works of the American New Critics shaped the study and the writing of poetry and other literary genres for over half a century during the modern period. Needless to say, writing about modernism and adopting its techniques continued after the decline of modernism in the second half of the 20th century. Following the devastation caused by World War II, a new mode began to arise. Many people began to wonder about the future of humanity, and a deep sense of pessimism prevailed. New views of human reality began to appear and philosophers, intellectuals, theorists and writers came up with different views about reality and human life. Some of them tried to break away from the ideals of modernism while others continued to use them but with a greater degree of emphasis. As modernist thinking dominated the first half of the 20th century, postmodernism prospered in the second half of the same century.

¹Middle East University, Jordan

After the New Criticism lost its impact in the 1960s, Ihab Hassan and some other theorists appeared on the cultural and critical scenes to fill the vacuum, thus connecting modernism and postmodernism. Hassan wrote several books and articles on postmodernism in which he defined and traced the history of postmodernism. His works such as *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971) together with Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and Brian McHale "From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction" (2000) have had a great impact on postmodernist writing and the theoretical literature on postmodernism, and in effect, on the interrelation between modernism and postmodernism. In his article McHale (2000, p. 11) argues that "the transition from modernist to postmodernist fiction is marked by a "change of dominant", that is, a shift from the epistemological to the ontological. Mary Klages' article "Postmodernism" (2001) sets out to define postmodernism through defining modernism first because it is "the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge" (Klages 2001 Website).

When postmodernism began to falter as an intellectual and cultural system, a strong call for a new critical and cultural sensibility began to emerge. Since the 1990s, several conferences and many critical studies have dealt with the transition from the postmodern to the metamodern era expecting or announcing the end of postmodernism. In 1997, the University of Chicago hosted a philosophy conference under the title "After Postmodernism". In 2007, a conference was held at the Free University of Berlin with the task of assessing the cultural situation after the ending of postmodernism. And more recently, in 2014, a conference on metamodernism was held at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Since the turn of the century, many studies have been published announcing the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Raoul Eshelman's *Performatism, or, the End of Postmodernism* (2001) argues that we are now leaving the postmodern era with its essentially dualist notions and entering anew era in which monist notions are coming to the fore. Both "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond" (2006) by Alan Kirby, and *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism* (2007), a collection of articles, mourned the death of postmodernism. In his study *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*, Stephen J. Burn (2011) attempts to articulate the direction in which American fiction is heading after postmodernism through a thorough discussion of each of Jonathan Franzen's novels suggesting how Franzen's work is indicative of the direction of experimental American fiction in the wake of the so-called end of postmodernism. Mary K. Holland's *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature* (2013) suggests a new way of reading "antihumanist" late postmodern fiction, and a framework for understanding postmodern and twenty-first century fiction as participating in a newly reinvigorated tradition of humanism and realism in literature. In his paper "Oscillating from a Distance: A Study of Metamodernism in Theory and Practice", Noah Bunnell (2015) addresses the critical debate surrounding the post-postmodern moment in American fiction. Many critics agree that postmodernism has now been replaced by something else. In all, they point out that as early as the 1990s, writers and literary critics were contemplating the death of postmodernism and anticipating the rise of its elusive successor. In this article, I will examine the major principles of modernism and postmodernism and how these two movements finally gave way to metamodernism and the critical debate surrounding the transition from postmodernism to metamodernism and the interrelationships among these three movements.

Modernism

Spanning the first half of the 20th century or more, modernism has been associated with the twentieth-century reaction against realism and romanticism within the arts. Modernism is often used to refer to a twentieth-century belief in the virtues of science, technology and social change. Writers of this period tended to pursue more experimental and usually more highly individualistic forms of writing. In this period, time is not conceived in a static model which separates past, present, and future as discrete elements in linear order; rather, these elements are viewed as influencing and changing one another. Modernist writers became dissatisfied with linear plots and clear resolutions and used instead open and often unresolved endings. They also moved away from the authoritative omniscient point of view to the individual's consciousness advocating the use of different viewpoints and multiple narrators. A good example of this trend is William Faulkner, whose stories, such as his novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930), are narrated by multiple, unreliable narrators. In addition to Faulkner and those mentioned earlier, the pioneers of modernism include T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, Scott Fitzgerald, e. e. Cummings and Ernest Hemingway. As Modernist literature focused on the inner self and consciousness, the modernist works of art are basically psychological and experimental. Under the influence of the modern theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan, the modern novel tends to reveal the hidden inner motives behind the characters' actions.

For instance, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), mark adventurous trips through the inner psyche. Most of the modernist literary works are filled with moments of sudden flashes of insight which came to be called "epiphanies". In her essay "Modern Fiction" (1921) Woolf advises the modern novelists to look within and see what life is like. For her, reality lies not in the outer actions but in the inner perceptions of the human mind; the objective of the writer is to give a psychologically true account of character by delving into the complexities of inner life. She further maintains that the modern novel depends on stream of consciousness and is therefore purely psychological ("Modern Fiction" (qtd. in Andrew McNeille 1984, pp. 157-165). With regard to language, the modernists showed deep awareness of the problematic nature of language by averting a direct one-to-one correspondence between words and objects choosing instead to utilize the suggestive language of symbol, myth and allusion to make the literary works more impressive. Nonetheless, they did not ignore the important role of ordinary or prosaic language. In modernist literary texts, emphasis is laid on both colloquial and formal language. In her essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (1927), Woolf advocates that the modernist novel, which she viewed as the novel of the future, would need to combine "something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose" (qtd. in Parsons 2007, p. 3). The modernists prefer the techniques of juxtaposition and multiple points of view that motivate the reader to re-establish a coherence of meaning from diverse forms. Formal characteristics of modernism include frequent use of indirect speech, stream of consciousness, discontinuous narrative, multiple narrative points of view, wide use of quotations and classical allusions as clearly noticeable in the works of T. S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and Virginia Woolf where the prosaic and the poetic are often intermixed or juxtaposed. The modernists proclaimed new subjects for literature and looked for new forms to express those subjects. A great emphasis was laid on poetic form where literary works are seen as autonomous and autotelic without trying to impart moral or intellectual lessons. Thematic characteristics include life as incoherent, experience as diversified, reality as a matter of perception. We also notice frequent use of social alienation and spiritual loneliness as well as disillusionment and the breakdown of social norms as major themes. Ultimately, the modernists started to look for relative truth instead of absolute reality. They also viewed the psyche as diverse, contradictory, multiple and inconsistent.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a school of thought or a movement that took place after World War II, but it gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. Postmodernism is often used alternatively with poststructuralist as "a two perspectives from which to view the history of modern literary and cultural criticism" (Habib 2011, p. 246). Postmodernists advocated the belief that there are no universal truths and argued that many things are irrational. Believing in chance and transience, they questioned the rationality of modernism, its principles and its ways of thinking. Postmodern writers envisioned that there is no connection between the past and the present and that past events are irrelevant in the present. In contrast with the modernists, the postmodernists tried to give the other a voice and abrogated any distinctions between high and low culture. Postmodernist works exhibit incongruence, incoherence, a world of surfaces without depth or roots. In postmodernism, the ideas of order, sequence, and unity in works of art are sometimes abandoned. Fragmentation in postmodernist literature is meant to reflect the reality of the flux and splintering of human life. Postmodern writers often leave their stories open-ended, without any satisfying conclusion. Postmodern stories and novels rely heavily on irony, parody, pastiche and satire. Postmodern authors often reject the boundaries between the different genres. The postmodern texts reveal skepticism about the ability of art to create meaning, the ability of history to reveal truth, and the ability of language to convey reality. All that skepticism led to fragmented, open-ended, self-reflexive stories that are intellectually fascinating but often difficult to grasp. The stylistic techniques of postmodernism include the frequent use of intersexuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, magical realism, faction, reader involvement and minimalist techniques of reduction, omission and suggestion. These techniques can be found most clearly in the works of such writers as Samuel Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut, Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, Jane Rhys, Don DeLillo, Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon and many others. Postmodernism challenges the basic assumptions of "modernism" concerning the role of reason, rationality, or scientific reasoning in guiding our understanding of the human condition. Mary Klages (2001 Webpage) distinguishes between "modernism" which refers to the movement as outlined above and "modernity" which she uses to refer to the period which started with the Enlightenment in the mid-eighteenth century. Modernity is fundamentally about order, coherence, stability, rationality, objectivity and scientific truth.

In his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Francois Lyotard, one of the major exponents of postmodernism, explains that most of the values of order and stability that characterize modernism and modernity derive from what he calls "grand narratives" which were emphasized in the age of the Enlightenment and beyond. For him, grand narratives are stories each culture tells about its ideologies and practices in order to explain and justify a society's belief systems. Instead of these grand narratives, Lyotard proposes "small narratives" maintaining that we have outgrown our needs for "grand narratives" due to the advancement of techniques and technologies since WWII. Little narratives, he asserts, have now become the appropriate way for explaining social transformations and political problems. Lyotard defines the "postmodern" simply as "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (Crane and Amawi 1997, p.303). These meta-narratives or grand narratives are large-scale theories and philosophies of the world, such as the belief in democracy, the progress of history and the knowability of everything by science. Lyotard argues that we have ceased to believe that narratives of this kind are adequate to represent and contain us all. He points out that we have become alert to difference, diversity, the incompatibility of our aspirations, beliefs and desires, and for that reason postmodernity is characterized by an abundance of micro narratives. Lyotard argued that grand narratives were stabilizing factors in the overall structure of modernism but have become less effective in the postmodern era. By proposing "mini- narratives", he was rejecting modernism and its ideals. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are invariably provisional, contingent, and making no claim to stability, reason, universality or truth.

In contrast with modernism, postmodernism rejects the idea of stable relationships between signifiers and signifieds and claims there are only signifiers. For postmodernism, there is no direct correspondence between signifier and signified in the Sussurian definition of the terms; there are only signifiers with no signifieds, surfaces without depth. For Jean Baudrillard, another major figure in the postmodernist movement, there are no originals, only copies-- or what he calls "simulacra" (Baudrillard 1994). To Baudrillard, simulation leads inevitably to the extinction of the original. Thus, postmodernism is a movement toward fragmentation, provisionality, performance, multiplicity and instability. It casts doubts on the validity of many social and cultural systems (religion, democracy, class system, etc.). A more recent definition of postmodernism has been given in an article published by Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "It [postmodernism] can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyper reality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2015, Webpage).

Nevertheless, postmodernism as described by some critics mentioned in this paper is a chaotic era hard to comprehend and define. Since it grew and emerged from modernism, it can be considered both as an extension of and a reaction to modernism. Viewed in this manner, postmodernism has been sometimes seen as following most of the ideals of modernism but reacting and interacting with them in various ways and forms (Klages Webpage 2001). While Klages points out some similarities between "modernism" and "postmodernism", she also explains that there are still some basic differences between the two ways of thought: While postmodernism seems very much like modernism in these ways, it differs from modernism in its attitude toward a lot of these trends. Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history ... but presents that fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss. Many modernist works try to uphold the idea that works of art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which have been lost in most of modern life.... Postmodernism, in contrast, doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that. (Klages 2001, Webpage) Opposed to Klages' view is the belief of some theorists that postmodernism is against almost all the tenets of modernism. For example, Ihab Hassan speaks of modernism and postmodernism as two antagonists: "The word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself.

The term thus contains its enemy within" (Hassan 1987, p.94). While modernists believe in rational thought, postmodernists believe many things are irrational. Modernists place a strong emphasis on science, whereas postmodernists are anti-scientific. While modernists believe that there are universal values and tend to be somewhat optimistic, postmodernists believe that only local values have importance. Modernists favor organization; postmodernists believe life is chaotic and fragmented. Modernists favor unity and wholeness whereas postmodernists believe in multiculturalism and plurality. Modernists believe that life is purposeful; postmodernists believe that life is meaningless or that meaning is purely subjective and relative. Modernists believe one can define morality whereas postmodernists believe morality is relative.

Modernist philosophy is determined by cause and effect but postmodernists emphasized the role of chance. Modernists believe in permanence; postmodernists believe in transience. Modernists believe that truth is objective; postmodernists considered truth relative.

Metamodernism

Metamodernism is a recent movement in various spheres of human philosophy, art, literature, architecture, politics and many other human activities. In critical theory, the literary/cultural movement that appeared after postmodernism is often called metamodernism. Post-postmodernism and neomodernism are also terms used interchangeably with metamodernism to describe the developments that emerged from or came about as a reaction to postmodernism. Rejecting postmodernist skepticism, originally a reaction against modernist optimism, metamodernism is often seen as mediation between aspects of both modernism and postmodernism. By and large, metamodernism is the dominant cultural logic of contemporary modernity. It tries to surpass modernism and postmodernism so as to respond to the current cultural mode. Its main tenet is that faith, trust, dialogue and sincerity can work to transcend postmodern irony and detachment. While modernism was basically epistemological (concerned with the nature of knowledge) and postmodernism was primarily ontological (concerned with the nature of being), metamodernism, which appeared in the first decade of the 21st century, questioned the universality and truthfulness of old modernism and the fragmentation and skepticism of postmodernism. Metamodernism seeks to overcome postmodern distances so as to recreate a sense of wholeness that allows positive change both locally and globally. Some of the most distinguished metamodern novelists include David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Franzen, Jeffrey Eugenides and Mark Z. Danielewski.

There is no definitive clue as to when the term "metamodernism" was first used. However, it seems that the term "metamodern" appeared in critical texts as early as 1975, when Mas'ud Zavarzadeh used it to describe a cluster of aesthetic attitudes which had been emerging in American literature since the mid-1950s (Wikipedia, "Metamodernism"). Aware of the changes of sensibility that were taking place in what he called the post-absurd world, Zavarzadeh wrote: "Recent American experimental fiction ... moves beyond the interpretive modernist novel in which the fictionist interpreted 'the human condition' within the framework of comprehensive private metaphysics, towards a metamodern narrative with zero degree of interpretation" (my italics, Zavarzadeh, 1975, p. 69). This early use of the term "metamodern" seems to have paved the way for its later usage in the early years of the millennium when it began to accrue new and additional meanings. In their essay, Vermeulen and Akker explicitly state that they did not coin or invent the term metamodernism and that it already had a history that dates back at least three decades before their essay. They indicate that although they were the first to use the term to describe the current state of affairs, they were not the first to use the term per se. However, they stressed that their use of the concept was by no means aligned to any previous usage nor was it derived from previous uses of the term. "The function, structure, and nature of the negotiation we perceive are entirely our own and, as far as we can see, wholly unrelated to the previous perception" (Vermeulen and Akker, p.13). As one can clearly see, they were using the term to illustrate the metamodern "swinging" between modernism and postmodernism.

Criticizing postmodernism in as early as the 1970s, Ihab Hassan continued his argument against postmodernism over many years to come. According to Regina Rudaityte, "it was Ihab Hassan ... who started the critique of postmodernism back in the 1970s" (2008, p.2). Writing later on around the turn of the 21st century, Hassan maintained that cultural postmodernism had lost its critical force to sterile "nihilism" and "feckless joyless play" (Hassan 2001, p.10). In putting forward this view, Hassan was not alone: He was joined by a group of critics and scholars such as Fredric Jameson, Jürgen Habermas and Linda Hutcheon who were singing the demise of post-structuralism. Hassan and Hutcheon were perhaps the most influential proponents of using a new term to replace the outmoded "postmodernism". With the advent of the 1990s, there was a rapidly growing realization that postmodernism was no longer adequate for describing the dominant cultural sensibility at the time. Artists, scholars and thinkers had grown weary with irony, detachment and pastiche. Linda Hutcheon felt that the old label (i.e. postmodernism) was incompatible with the then current mode, and so a new term was needed to replace the outmoded one. In the epilogue to the second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernity* (2002), Linda Hutcheon observed that the postmodern feeling was over and there was a need for a different term to describe the then dominant mode in critical sensibility.

Though Hutcheon did not suggest a specific term to describe the new condition following what she saw as the termination of postmodernism, she expected other literary theorists and cultural scholars to find a new label for it. In her own words: "The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on—as do those of modernism—in our contemporary twenty-first-century world. ... Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it—and name it for the twenty-first century. (Hutcheon 2002, p. 181) Before Timotheus Vermeulen and van den Akker launched their understanding of the new concept in (2010) in their article "Notes on Metamodernism", different theorists had come up with new terms including "the hypermodern," "pseudomodernism," "altermodernism," and "post-postmodernism" (Vermeulen and Akker 2010, p.3). Arguing that most of these conceptions of the contemporary discourse were structured around technological advances or appear to radicalize the postmodern rather than restructure it, or seem to be hardly understood, slippery or evasive and therefore problematic, Vermeulen and Akker (2010, p.4) suggested the term "metamodernism". Their rationale for using this term was based on the meaning of the Greek term "meta". They maintained that the Greek-English prefix "meta" refers simultaneously to such notions as "with", "between", and "beyond" and so they called this structure of feeling metamodernism (Vermeulen and Akker). In their opinion, the new period marked a tension, an oscillation between—and beyond—the modern and the postmodern, and can therefore be appropriately called metamodernism. Thus, metamodernism indicates a motion or a movement between as well as beyond.

That is, metamodernism is after postmodernism, beyond it and between modernism and postmodernism. It is a fluctuation between the modern and the postmodern. Indeed, oscillation and movement, in addition to engagement, have become keywords in Vermeulen and Akker's use of the new word/concept. Elaborating on their understanding of the new concept, they observe: "Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity". (ibid., p.6). In other words, this oscillating back and forth between two opposing poles is actually a movement between the modern and the postmodern. But it should also be clarified that this movement is not meant to produce a steady sense of balance or a permanent duality. As the two theorists maintain: "One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance between; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the modern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm". (p. 6)

To coherently situate their theory in the established field of postmodernism, the authors argue that both epistemologically and ontologically, metamodernism should be conceived of as a "both-neither" dynamic. It is at once modern and postmodern and neither of them. The result of this is a constant movement from the postmodern to the modern and vice versa without being any of them. In the two authors' words, "The metamodern is constituted by the tension, not the double-bind, of a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all" (p. 6). Vermeulen and Akker distinguish between this (both-neither) oscillating tension with some kind of postmodern in-between (a neither-nor).

Both postmodernism and metamodernism, they argue, turn to irony and pluralism to counteract a modernist fanaticism but for different purposes: "In metamodernism, this pluralism and irony are utilized to counter the modern aspiration, while in postmodernism, they are employed to cancel it out" (ibid., p.10). With regard to engagement, Vermeulen and Akker maintained that the years of multiplicity, pastiche, and parataxis were over and that the new dominant condition was characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment. Metamodernism means a fluctuation between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony. According to them, the distinction between the two modes is like the difference between seriousness and detachment. In actual practice, they see this difference reflected in the new generation of artists who increasingly abandon the aesthetics of deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche in favour of the aesthetics of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis. As the new art has developed in such a way that it can no longer be named postmodern, a new terminology should be used to describe the new situation or the new modernism (ibid., p.2). Apparently, the two theorists seem to have been responding to Hutcheon's and other theorists' demands for a change in critical nomenclature. They write:

New generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis [in-betweenness]. These trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern. They express an (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse. (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010, p.10)

Consequently, metamodernism was used as both a heuristic label to come to terms with recent changes in aesthetics and culture, and as a notion to epitomize those changes. Metamodernism was seen as the dominant cultural logic of contemporary modernity. The metamodern structure of feeling can be grasped as a generational attempt to surpass postmodernism and a general response to our present, crisis-ridden moment. For metamodernist theorists, the contemporary structure of feeling evokes a continuous oscillation between modern strategies and postmodern tactics as well as a series of practices and sensibilities ultimately beyond these worn out categories. The result is a steady movement between a network of polarities. Referring to Vermeulen and Akker's article, Kadagishvili (2013, p.561) suggests several possible dichotomies including: "a desire for sense / a doubt about the sense, enthusiasm/irony, hope/melancholy, naivety/knowingness, empathy/apathy, totality/fragmentation, unity/plurality, authenticity/pastiche, involved/detached, elitist/democratic". To this list, one may add other polarities ad infinitum to describe the human condition of in-betweenness such as the one / the many, eternity / time, freedom / fate, intellect / instinct, risk / safety, love / hate, the angel / the beast, light / darkness, etc. Metamodernism stays between such polarities, between the modern and the postmodern without abrogating its tendency to go beyond postmodernism and surpass it.

Metamodernism does not mean a complete break with the traditional notions of modernism and postmodernism. Rather, it draws upon both schools to spell out its own notions and concepts. Throughout the last decade, observers of contemporary culture have drawn attention to an apparent shift from postmodern irony and play to a reinvigoration of the sincere and authentic. Faced with the task of providing assessments of the contemporary cultural situation, several scholars and critics have proposed various names for the current state of affairs such as "the return of the real", "the end of irony", and "the passion for the real". The broad outlines of the new transformation are becoming clear: If postmodernism admired the simulacra, pastiche and fragmentation, then the new mode is nostalgia for the real and the authentic in contemporary culture without abrogating the values of postmodernism and modernism. In metamodernism, the skepticism which dominated the period of postmodernism is still making a comeback in what Ulla Haselstein and others call "sincerity" and "authenticity." In their *The Pathos of Authenticity: American Passions of the Real*(2010), Ulla Haselstein and others point out that

authenticity is making a comeback, in the guises of memory, ethics, religion, the new sincerity, and the renewed interest in 'real things'. Although sometimes envisioned as the rejection of postmodernism, the 'new' authenticity remains profoundly shaped by postmodern skepticism regarding the grand narratives of origin, telos, reference, and essence (qtd. in Febleron 2012).

Febleron's "To Engage in Literature" (2012) supports the above view observing that "what makes this quote so insightful is that it reflects on how contemporary literature does not dismiss postmodern ideas, but rather incorporates those ideas, through utilizing them for completely different outcomes, for example for installing authenticity or sincerity"(Febleron2012). In Febleron's opinion, this means that contemporary literature is trying to engage the reader again: "It is precisely this that most contemporary literature tries to do. It tries to find ways that allow (or even force) the readers to be involved in what is presented to them, without falling back into a distanced mode. Unlike postmodern writers such as DeLillo who tried to seek detachment, metamodernist writers seek engagement" (ibid.). Febleron believes that "contemporary literature cannot be understood as postmodern. In fact... labeling it 'postmodern' is unserviceable. This term limits the possibilities to interpret and reflect on these texts and simplifies the complexity of today's literature" (Febleron 2012). She further explains how some ostensibly outdated concepts such as authenticity, ethics, engagement and aesthetics have been brought to the fore to go along with the new changes in critical and cultural sensibilities: "Many concepts that postmodernism declared 'dead' seem to have returned from what now appears to have been nothing more than a deep sleep" (ibid.). Thus, in metamodernism we witness a new enthusiasm for real, essential issues.

For instance, some writers have expressed real interest to engage in post-9/11 events and in other issues pertaining to climate changes and environmental and ecological problems. This revived interest in authentic, historical and political stories or narratives has triggered a comeback of conventional literary forms like the historical novel, the realist novel and the family saga. In the wake of September /11 which is often considered the point where postmodernism came to an end, Anglo-American fiction witnessed a revival of the historical novel as a way of reading the present events in light of past events as old as the medieval times or even earlier. Richard Warren Field's *The Swords of Faith* (2010), Kamran Pasha's *Shadow of the Swords* (2010), Jack Hight's *The Saladin Trilogy* (2011-2013) and Stewart Binn's *Lionheart* (2013), among many other similar works, revisit the past to shed light on current issues such as violence, clash of civilizations and East-West relations. They also combine the fictional and the factual apparently in line with the tenets of the recently established metamodern cultural sensibility particularly those of sincerity and authenticity.

Even in some works written in the 1990s and before, we can notice a serious interest in ecological, racial, and postcolonial issues, another indication of a shift in sensibility and a deep interest in exploring real and relevant questions that engage the reader's attention. Such new trends can be seen in the works of some writers as distant as Terry Tempest Williams, Richard Powers, Amitav Ghosh, and Assia Djebar. The writings of the American author Terry Tempest Williams, for example, are deeply rooted in the American West and her native Utah and its Mormon culture. Her works concentrate on issues of ecology, wilderness preservation, women's health, and humans' relationship to culture and nature. Her novel *Refuge* (1992) deals with familial issues, climate problems and environmental and nuclear pollution. Febleron (2012) finds evidence of the re-emergence of authenticity (a term associated with metamodernism) in the works of Jonathan Franzen, Jeffrey Eugenides, Richard Powers and Amitav Ghosh. In her opinion, they are all a living proof for the growing popularity of seriously engaged works of fiction (ibid. Website). They speak of issues that many people can be involved with nowadays. Thus, Richard Powers' novels explore the effects of modern science and technology while Ghosh's works are imbued with rich historical details that have a direct bearing on current postcolonial scene. Reflecting the growing interest in metamodern literature and the strong desire to surpass the boundaries of postmodernism, Febleron writes:

Contemporary literature is trying to reintegrate precisely those themes and styles that postmodernism either was never interested in or was trying to get rid of. As a consequence, today's novelists are finding inventive ways to create refreshing narratives that allow those themes a comeback under very specific circumstances, and by doing so are enabling a going 'beyond' postmodernism. (Febleron 2012 Website).

The same applies to contemporary poetry. The metamodern in contemporary English and American poetry is manifested through some features, most important of which are oscillation between modern and postmodern elements as well as a strong desire for transcendence and an integration of human experience. The poles most commonly discussed by metamodernist poets are: knowledge / ignorance, truth / falsehood, sincerity / irony, optimism / cynicism, love/hate life/art, past/ present. Such features can be easily recognized in the poetry of some representative poets such as the English poet Geoffrey Hill, the American poets Seth Abramson and Kay Ryan, to give only a few examples. These poets and several other metamodernist poets try to foster a mixture of globalization and localization, to transcend the modernist-postmodernist spectrum and to address the elite and the ordinary readers. As Seth Abramson clarifies, "The spectra include, but are by no means limited to, ignorance and knowledge, truth and falsehood, art and life, optimism and cynicism, and sincerity and irony" (2014, "Talks on Metamodernism with Seth Abramson" Website). In their poems, metamodernism involves transcending extremes, sublimating them into a new form and perhaps moving beyond them, a true progression rather than mere vacillation.

Luke Turner, a London-based artist and co-editor of "Notes on Metamodernism" Website, has collaborated with other intellectuals on a project called "The Metamodernist Manifesto" which was first published in 2011. The manifesto contained several principles most important of which are the recognition that oscillation is the natural order of the world instead of the modernist "ideological naivety" and the "cynical insincerity" of postmodernism. It concluded that metamodernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons. The manifesto embraced Vermeulen and Akker's earlier conceptions of metamodernism as aforementioned. It put no limits to human ingenuity and the natural change of all systems and viewed the past, the present and the future as closely intertwined.

It believed that art should look for scientific truth as much as science strives for poetic elegance (Turner 2011 Website). As Vermeulen and Akker observe, "Metamodernism is not so much a rejection of postmodernism as it is an attempt to curtail the unintended consequences of postmodernism. It still embraces parody, irony and metafiction. It just seeks for moderation to them and the other extremities of postmodernism" (ibid.).

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that it is difficult to draw barriers between these three modes of cultural sensibility. Ihab Hassan had already highlighted the difficulty of drawing boundaries between modernism and postmodernism: "We cannot claim that everything before 1960 is modern, everything after, postmodern (Hassan 2001, p.10). Similarly, in her study, Lathan (2015) argues that the modernist still persists in postmodernist and metamodernist writings as evidenced in the impact of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* on the novels of a host of postmodernist and "neomodernist" writers by creating new forms adapted to their new ages and audiences. In this way, we see a sense of continuity between the three cultural modes. As postmodernism confronts and writes back to modernism, metamodernism synthesizes and surpasses the other two movements: "While I perceive postmodernist rewriting as a deconstructive form of exposing the fabric and playing with the source-text's writing and interpretations, the intention and force of neomodernism[metamodernism] writing is primarily constructive" (Lathan 2015, p. 9). Thus, metamodernism rescues what is valuable in the past and integrates those elements into the present. I suggest, therefore, that these three concepts we have explored are not mutually exclusive, but complete and define one another.

Conclusion

Modernism appeared in the first half of the 20th century as a reaction to 19th century romanticism and early 20th-century realism; postmodernism arose in the second half of the 20th century challenging modernism; and metamodernism emerged around the turn of the millennium as a response to postmodernism. Though each philosophy has its distinctive features which might sometimes overlap, none of them is isolated from the other. Metamodernism has appeared under different labels including post-postmodernism and neomodernism and all of them pointing in the same direction. Metamodernism has gained a significant role in contemporary culture as a move beyond postmodernism. Instead of postmodern irony, pastiche, deconstruction, skepticism and rejection of grand narratives, we see sincerity, authenticity, hope, universal truths, oscillation and openness of metamodernism coming to shape the contemporary cultural mode.

Metamodernism is an inclusive discourse articulating the ongoing intellectual and cultural developments for which neither the postmodern nor the modern critique is adequate. Metamodernism synthesizes the best qualities of modernism and postmodernism. Despite the apparent demise of postmodernism and modernism, their strategies and ideological critiques continue to live on in metamodernism which endeavors to polarize and eventually surpass them. Vermeulen and Akker deserve appreciation for forming the core definition of metamodernism and for generating discussion on this groundbreaking subject.

References

- Amian, Katrin. (2008). *Rethinking Postmodernism (s)*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Abramson, Seth. (2014). "Talks on Metamodernism with Seth Anderson". As It Ought to Be Website. Retrieved from <https://asitoughttobe.com/2014/03/12/talks-on-metamodernism-with-seth-abramson-part-3-of-3/>
- Baudrillard, Jean. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Originally published in French 1981.
- Bunnell, Noah. (2015). "Oscillating from a Distance: A Study of Metamodernism in Theory and Practice". *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies*, vol. 1, 1-8.
- Crane, George T. and Abba Amawi. (1997). *The Theoretical Evolution of International Political Economy*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University.
- Febleron, Nadine. (2012). "To Engage in Literature." Notes on Metamodernism. Retrieved from <http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/05/29/to-engage-in-literature/>
- Habib, M.A. R. (2011). *Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hassan, Ihab. (1987). *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

- . (2001). "From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/Global Context." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 25, 1-15.
- Hutcheon, Linda. (2002). *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge. First published 1989.
- Kadagishvili, Dali. (2013). "Metamodernism as We Perceive It". *European Scientific Journal*, vol.2, 558-565.
- Klages, Mary. (2001). "Postmodernism". Web. Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Klages% 20on% 20Postmodernism.html](file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Klages%20on%20Postmodernism.html)
- Lathan, Monica. (2015). *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism: Rewriting Mrs Dalloway*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Liotard, Jean-François Lyotard. (1979). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Tans. from the French Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. (1984). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McHale, Brian. (2000). "From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction: Change of Dominant." *Postmodernist Fiction*. 3–11.
- Parsons, Deborah. (2007). *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf*. Abingdon: Routledge.: Rewriting Mrs. Dalloway .
- Rayan, Judith. (1991). *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rudaityte, Regina. (2008). Ed. *Postmodernism and After: Visions and Revisions*. New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Web Page. "Postmodernism". (2015). First published 2005. Retrieved from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>
- Turner, Luke. (2011). The Metamodernist Manifesto. Retrieved from <http://www.metamodernism.org/>
- Vermeulen, Timotheus and Robin van den Akker. (2010). "Notes on metamodernism". *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol.2. Online. Retrieved from [http://www.aestheticsandculture.net /index.php/jac /article/ view/ 5677](http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5677)
- Wikipedia. "Metamodernism". Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamodernism>
- Woolf, Virginia. (1984). "Modern Fiction". In Andrew McNeillie, Ed. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Volume 4. London: The Hogarth Press, 157-165.
- Zavarzadeh, Mas'ud. (1975). "The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives." *Journal of American Studies*, vol.9, 1.69-83.

Appendix

The following two tables are attached to further illustrate the patterns of similarities and contrasts between modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism.

Modernism	Postmodernism
Proform	Antiform
Purpose	Open
Design	Play
Hierarchy	Chance
Mastery	Anarchy
Finished work	Process
Distance	Participation
Creation	Deconstruction
Synthesis	Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Depth	Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against Interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
Readerly	Writerly
Grand Narrative	Small Narrative
Reason	Myth
Diversity	Fragmentation
Origin	Trace
Sincerity	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Universal	Limited
Equitable	Arbitrary

Table 1: adapted with some modifications from a more comprehensive and complex one provided by Ihab Hassan (The Postmodern Turn 1987, p. 94).

Modernism	Postmodernism	Metamodernism
Belief in rational thought	Belief in the irrational	Belief in real things
Emphasis on science	Anti-scientific	Interest in origin
Belief in universal values	Belief in local values	Belief in ethics
Favors organization	Accepts fragmentation	Belief in elusive horizons
Reflects individuality	Believes in multiculturalism	Believes in pragmatism
Life is purposeful	life is meaningless/absurd	Belief in authenticity
Meaning is objective	Meaning is subjective	Meaning is wavering
Favours simplicity/elegance	Favours complexity /variety	favours real/essential values
Interest in cause and effect	Belief in chance	Seeks reality
Linear thinking	Circular , haphazard thinking	Belief in opposed polarities
Belief in permanence	Belief in transience	Belief in oscillation
Apolitical	Politically oriented	Socially oriented
Seeks truth and certainty	Seeks irony and doubt	Seeks in-betweenness
Unity	Plurality	Proliferation
Hope	Skepticism	Sincerity
Empathy,	apathy	Engagement
Accepts grand narratives	Accepts small narratives	Accepts both narratives
Interest in man	Interest in metaphysics	Interest in existence
creative	Experimental	Historical
in the present Interest	Interest in the past	Interest in all times
Emphasis on human relations	Emphasis on man's relations with other objects	Emphasis on Man's relation to nature & culture
Values construction	Values deconstruction	Values reconstruction
Espouses uniformity /purity	Espouses plurality /variety	Espouses duality
Opposes history	Interest in parody& pastiche	Interested in social memory
Concern with allusion	Concern with intertextuality	concern with origin

Table 2: Devised and reconstructed from preceding discussion.

*The above outlined dichotomies cannot be presumed to represent the whole truth about the real differences between modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism and sometimes they may overlap.

Modernism vs. Postmodernism. The term "Postmodern" begins to make sense if you understand what "Modernism" refers to. In this case, "Modernism" usually refers to Neo-Classical, Enlightenment assumptions concerning the role reason, or rationality, or scientific reasoning, play in guiding our understanding of the human condition and, in extreme cases of Postmodern theory, nature itself. Postmodernism basically challenges those basic assumptions. Modernism (or Enlightenment Humanism). Postmodernism. Reason and science provide accurate, objective, reliable foundation