UNIT : 11 LITERARY MOVEMENTS: 5 MODERNISM & POSTMODERNISM

:: STRUCTURE ::

1.0 OBJECTIVES

- The unit aims to examine the origin of modernism and postmodernism.
- The unit also focusses on understanding the characteristics of modern literature and postmodern literature.
- The unit highlights the important literary works belonging to modernism as well as postmodernism.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Modernism and postmodernism are literary movements that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modernism is the purposeful departure from traditional forms of poetry and prose that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Postmodernism, a mid-twentieth-century trend, is frequently regarded as a reaction to modernism. The primary distinction between modernism and postmodernism is that modernism is distinguished by a radical departure from old forms of prose and verse, whereas postmodernism is distinguished by the purposeful use of earlier styles and traditions.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Man is, by nature, a thinking being. Every day, he generates a new notion and attempts to construct a social structure around it. Criticizing old ideas and proposing new ones that are more conducive to the current world order has always been a part of a man's mentality. This component of his personality has led in the formation of new ideals and, as a result, a new age. Because of man's inquisitive propensity, modernism and postmodernism may be mentioned here. In truth, modernism is a revolutionary transformation that involves a process of rational rearrangement of society, with no regard for whether tradition is irrational or non-rational. Tradition denotes the habitual acceptance of a set of beliefs and action patterns from the past. Modernism refers to late 19^{th} century and early 20^{th} century. T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeatswere the major modernist writers. Post-modernism was impacted by two world wars, political ideas and social changes. Post-modernism was also influenced by socialism, capitalism, communism and absurd literature.

1.3 MODERNISM

Modernism is a literary trend that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, primarily in North America and Europe. Modernism represents a significant and purposeful departure from traditional prose and poetry genres. The atrocities of World War I, as well as the evolving beliefs about reality created by important personalities like as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and others, demonstrated the necessity for the society's conventional assumptions to be reconsidered.

Modernists experimented in new shapes and styles. In modernist literature, literary methods such as irony, satire, stream-of-consciousness, interior monologue, numerous points of view, and comparison were popular. The movement's common themes were championing the individual and celebrating inner power, alienation, grief, and sorrow. During this movement, the concept of reality experienced significant transformation. Since modernists believed that reality is generated in the act of perception, they saw reality as a manufactured fabrication; in other words, they felt that the world is what we think it is.

1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISTIC LITERATURE

The following are the characteristics of modernistic literature:

Modernist literature depicts modern life, particularly urban life, with ambivalence. Modernist literature appears to be addressing the fundamental challenge of the justification of art in the modern world by

reflecting modern life: it is seeking to demonstrate that it is equal to the conditions surrounding it rather than retreating into pastoral. Because urban life was not traditionally regarded as attractive, depicting it implicitly solves the question of what makes a work of art valuable: if the worth of *Dubliners* or "The Waste Land" does not reside in the subject matter, it must reside in the form or treatment.

Modernism is difficult to understand because it employs a wide and sometimes unexpected range of references such as literary, cultural, and linguistic; it eliminates many of the devices that would normally have assisted the reader in making sense of the text; and it is verbally ambiguous and paradoxical. As a result, the modernist text appears fragmented.

It contrasts a calm past with a tumultuous present. This modernist feature was identified early in its critical history. The contrast is evident not only in direct depictions of the past, but also in references to its literature. The most famous example is "The Waste Land's" allusion to Spenser's "Prothalamion," in which the Thames of Spenser's sixteenth-century poetry is contrasted with the river of today, which is filled with the waste of modern life. Such contrasts address the fundamental question regarding great narratives implicitly: history is a story of decline.

In addition to the negative contrast shown above, modernist literature frequently incorporates the compensatory belief that art may transcend the disarray of the present. Many clear examples can be found in Yeats' poetry. The "beautiful crystalline cry" of the curlew, symbolising poetry in "Paudeen" (written 1913), contrasts with the debased world of commerce. The mechanical bird "Of hammered gold and gold enamelling" symbolises an art that surpasses the pain of old age in "Sailing to Byzantium" (written 1926). A variation on this theme is the notion that art is superior to nature: nature is essentially disorderly, but art is organised.

Modernism experiments with time, implying a greater philosophy of non-linear time. This is true for both narrative and poetic works. It has been suggested that modernist literature has'spatial form,' which means that we are obliged to read it as though every aspect of the text is there at the same time, even when this feat is impossible to achieve on a single reading of *The Cantos*.

The most obvious implication of this trait is that it requires the reader to be an active function of meaning, for example, by rearranging narrative events into chronological order. It again implies, as a self-conscious exhibition of formal mastery, that what makes a work of art valuable is its form rather than its subject matter. The assumption that all times are present at the same time indicates a great narrative of history in which there is no progress or decline, only perpetual recurrence.

As a 'organising structure,' it employs legendary allusion and mythic patterning. T. S. Eliot stated this trait early in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth"

(1923), and while the essay was less immediately influential on narratives of modernism than those included in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and *Collected Essays* (1932), it has proven significant over time. Modernist literature (and, more broadly, modernist art) frequently uses man in his most primal state as a point of reference. This is sometimes accomplished through the use of myth, but the two features of modernism are not synonymous. The primitive state is dreaded in colonial narratives of Europeans 'becoming native,' the best-known example being *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. Elsewhere, most notably in D. H. Lawrence's work, the primitive is welcomed as affording 'relief from enervating rationality'. The use of primitive states clearly answers the question of which model of the self is most relevant to current living, while the precise response relies on the value ascribed to primitive states.

Modernist literature demonstrates an understanding of the mind's and self's complexities. It is aware of the 'fluidity of awareness', of the force of the unconscious, and of a division between the social and the personal self, between 'behaviour' and 'consciousness'. This awareness is embodied by the use of free direct or free indirect discourse, as well as the use of several language registers to signal distinct levels or centres of consciousness. The term "stream of consciousness" is problematic for several reasons, the first being that it is a psychological hypothesis rather than a formal stylistic description, and the second being that it does not distinguish between different levels of consciousness and does not indicate whether individual or collective consciousness is being referred to.

Most clearly, this element of modernist literature is related to the underlying issue of which model of the self is best adapted to modern living, but the complexity of self evident in much modernist writing reveals a profound ambiguity about the correct solution. Similarly, self-complexity can be interpreted as a symptom of ambiguity about major narratives of human history. Similarly, if we cannot agree on what it is to be human, we will never be able to narrate the tale of human life. A common aspect of modernist writing is a contrast between the individual and the 'herd' or'mass;' another variation is a contrast between the elite and the masses. *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) by John Carey is the most comprehensive analysis of these systems; yet, because it is polemical in nature, it pays little regard to counter-arguments and is occasionally reductive. Carey contends that the difficulty of modernist literature arose from the desire of modernist writers to alienate large audiences. I would argue that they did not want to exclude the general public, but rather wanted to avoid the homogenization and trivialization of literature that characterised the mass market. For example, the circulating library system encouraged users to consider literary works interchangeable.

Modernist writers distinguish between abstraction and empathy, with the former frequently claiming to be preferable. The mechanisms by which

previous generations of writers would have allowed readers to identify with a character are abandoned or drastically reworked in the novel; in poetry, the unmistakable speaking voice of lyric poetry is ignored or framed in strange circumstances. In fiction, for example, the employment of complex time systems tends to disrupt continuity, and hence our identification with a character. When events that belong later in the chronological order are portrayed earlier in the story, the reader looks back with sarcastic detachment, knowing more than the players. The narrator's language may also inhibit empathy in some writers, most notably Wyndham Lewis, by presenting the characters as cultural creations rather than free people.

It favours the concrete over the abstract: Ezra Pound's Imagist manifesto, in which he urges writers to "go in horror of abstractions," is a typical starting point. As we will see, New Criticism solidified this inclination. It prioritises 'the individual over the universal, the perceptual over the intellectual,' according to Perloff's explication. To reconcile this feature with the previous one, it is vital to recognise that 'abstraction' and 'the abstract' are not synonymous. Abstraction is a process, and abstractions are relics of preceding generations. The artist takes control over the materials of his or her art through abstraction; the weak writer betrays that he or she has failed to assert control and is simply repeating old ideas through abstraction. Yet, while we can distinguish between the two notions, the distinctions are not totally stable. The modernist penchant for the specific has the potential to devolve into passive reproduction of the actual.

The subject matter of modernist works can be contentious at times. It is possible to exaggerate this point, given that censorship affected only a small percentage of modernist writers. Yet, among the writings officially restricted are two canonical works, *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Ulysses* (1922), as well as Wyndham Lewis' "Cantleman's Spring Mate" (1917). Furthermore, many other novels, most notably *Dubliners* (1914) and *Sons and Lovers* (1915), were significantly rewritten to overcome publisher or printer complaints (1912). While prose works were more frequently influenced than poetry, Ezra Pound's *Lustra* (1916) was published in a limited, privately printed version after printers and publishers objected to four poems; the public edition was omitted of nine additional poems. Modernists were in trouble with the censors because they wanted to describe the body and sexuality as thoroughly as possible, and, more broadly, they wanted to depict the full range of human behaviour without putting it in a moral frame.

1.5 POST MODERNISM

Postmodernism is both a philosophical and a cultural movement. It specifies its target - modernism and its realisation in the Enlightenment, as well as its legacy - and builds convincing arguments against all of modernism's main aspects. Any important cultural movement raises

problems about intellectual history. In the case of postmodernism, independent advancements in several intellectual domains converged around the middle of the twentieth century, especially in epistemology and politics, but also in metaphysics, the physical sciences, and our understanding of human nature and values. Knowing how and why those distinct strands came to be braided together is critical to comprehending postmodernism.

The essentials of postmodernism are diametrically opposed to those of modernism. Opposite of natural reality, there is anti-realism. Instead of experience and logic, there is linguistic social subjectivism. Instead of individual identity and autonomy, there are diverse racial, gender, and class groupisms. Instead of seeing human goals as intrinsically harmonious and oriented towards mutually beneficial contact, there is conflict and injustice. Instead of emphasising individualism in ideals, markets, and politics, advocates communalism, solidarity, and equitable constraints. Instead of celebrating scientific and technological advancements, scepticism has turned into downright animosity.

1.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF POST MODERNISM

The idea that literary writings have objective meanings and correct readings is rejected by postmodern literary criticism. Any claims to impartiality and truth can be dismantled. Literary critique becomes a type of subjective play in one version of deconstruction, represented by those who agree with Fish's quotation, in which the reader pours subjective connections into the text. Another variant replaces objectivity with the belief that an author's race, gender, or other group affiliation most strongly impacts the author's beliefs and feelings. As a result, the literary critic's role is to deconstruct the work in order to disclose the author's race, gender, or class interests. Writers and characters who exhibit the least proper attitudes are naturally vulnerable to the most deconstruction.

Postmodernism, like modernism, holds that there is no objective truth and that truth is relative. According to postmodernism, truth is not mirrored in human comprehension of it, but rather produced as the mind attempts to grasp its own specific reality. Postmodern literature has the following characteristics:

Pastiche:

Pastiche, which is related to postmodern intertextuality, implies to blend or "paste" together multiple parts. Several postmodern authors blended, or "pasted," pieces of previous genres and styles of literature to create a new narrative voice, or to remark on their contemporaries' writing. William S. Burroughs, for example, employs aspects of science fiction, detective fiction, and westerns; Margaret Atwood employs elements of science fiction and fairy tales; and Thomas Pynchon employs elements of detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction. In his 1977 novel *The Public Burning,* Robert Coover combines historically false descriptions

of Richard Nixon's interactions with historical personalities and invented characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker. Pastiche can also refer to a compositional style, such as Burroughs' cut-up technique.

Intertextuality:

The moulding of the meanings of texts by other texts is referred to as intertextuality. It can relate to an author borrowing and transforming a previous text or to a reader referencing one book while reading another. Since poststructuralist Julia Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" in 1966, it has been borrowed and changed numerous times. According to critic William Irwin, the phrase "has evolved to have nearly as many interpretations as uses, from those faithful to Kristeva's original vision to those who just use it as a fashionable way of talking about allusion and influence."

The recognition of prior literary works is an important aspect of postmodernism. The relationship between one text (a novel, for example) and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history is referred to as intertextuality in certain works of postmodern fiction. This, according to critics, demonstrates postmodernism's lack of creativity and dependence on clichés. In postmodern literature, intertextuality can be a reference or parallel to another literary work, a prolonged study of a work, or the adoption of a style. This is most typically seen in postmodern writing as references to fairy tales - as in works by Margaret Atwood, Donald Barthelme, and others - or references to popular genres such as science fiction and detective fiction.

"Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" by Jorge Luis Borges, a story with strong connections to *Don Quixote* that is also a good example of intertextuality with its references to Medieval romances, is an early 20th century example of intertextuality that influenced later postmodernists. Don Quixote is a popular postmodernist allusion, as shown in Kathy Acker's novel *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*. Another example of postmodernist intertextuality is John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which is based on Ebenezer Cooke's poetry of the same name. Intertextuality is frequently more complex than a single allusion to another text. For example, Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* connects Pinocchio to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. In addition, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* follows the structure of a detective fiction and includes references to Aristotle, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Borges.

Metafiction:

Several postmodern authors include metafiction in their work, which is essentially writing about writing, an attempt to make the reader aware of its fictivity, and, at times, the author's presence. This strategy is occasionally used by authors to allow for dramatic shifts in narrative, implausible temporal jumps, or to maintain emotional distance as a narrator. Whilst metafiction is most commonly linked with Modernism

and Postmodernist writing, it may be found as far back as Homer's *Odyssey* and Chaucer's 14th century *Canterbury Tales*. Some examples of metafiction literary texts are *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien, Stephen King's *Misery and Secret Window, Secret Garden*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, *The Counterfeiters* by André Gide, John Irving's *The World According to Garp, Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea* by Michael Morpurgo, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *Oracle Night* by Paul Auster, *More Bears!* by Kenn Nesbitt, and Cy Coleman's 1989 Tony Award best musical, *City of Angels*.

Historiographic metafiction:

Linda Hutcheon coined this phrase to describe novels that fictionalise true historical events and individuals. Famous examples include Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon*, which includes a scene in which George Washington smokes marijuana. Linda Hutcheon coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to describe works that fictionalise actual historical events or figures; notable examples include *The General in His Labyrinth* by Gabriel Garcá Márquez (about Simón Bolvar), *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes (about Gustave Flaubert), and *Ragtime* by E. L. Doctorow (which features historical figures such as Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Booker T. Washington as well as other real-life political leaders. This theme is also used in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon*, which includes a scene in which George Washington smokes marijuana. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles deals with the Victorian era in a similar way. This technique is similar to Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" in critical theory.

Temporal Distortion:

This is a prevalent strategy in postmodernist fiction: fragmentation and nonlinear storylines are important elements in both modern and postmodern literature. Temporal distortion is employed in postmodern fiction in a number of ways, frequently for sarcasm. The author may go forward or backward in time in this literary work, or there may be cultural and historical references that do not suit. In *Flight to Canada*, for example, Ishmael Reed plays with anachronisms, such as Abraham Lincoln using a telephone. Time can also overlap, repeat, or split into several possibilities. For example, in Robert Coover's "The Babysitter", the author offers numerous simultaneous events—in one portion, the babysitter is murdered, while in another piece, nothing happens, and so on—yet no version of the story is selected as the accurate version.

Technoculture and Hyperreality:

Fredric Jameson referred to postmodernism as the "cultural logic of late capitalism" in his article of the same name. His theory holds that society has progressed beyond capitalism into the information age, in which we are continuously assaulted with commercials, films, and product

placement. Several postmodern authors express this in their work by designing items that resemble true marketing or by placing their characters in situations where they are unable to avoid technology. Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, for example, depicts characters who are assaulted with "white noise" in the form of television, product brand names, and clichés. Science fiction techniques are used in the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and many others to address this postmodern, hyperreal information onslaught. With its blend of futuristic technology with Victorian civilization, steampunk, a subgenre of science fiction popularised in novels and comics by writers such as Alan Moore and James Blaylock, exhibits postmodern pastiche, temporal distortion, and a concentration on technoculture.

Paranoia:
Another common postmodern concept is paranoia, which is the assumption that there is an organising system behind the chaos of the world. Because no organising system exists for the postmodernist, the search for order is futile and ludicrous. Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, long-considered a precursor of postmodern literature, offers a scene which may be "coincidence or conspiracy — or a cruel joke". This is frequently associated with the themes of technoculture and hyperreality. For example, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, the character Dwayne Hoover turns aggressive after being persuaded that everyone else in the world is a robot and he is the only human.

Magical realism:
Magical realism, arguably the most fundamental postmodern method, is the incorporation of strange or impossible aspects into a narrative such that it appears genuine or normal. Dreams occurring during everyday life, the reappearance of previously deceased people, extremely convoluted plots, crazy time shifts, and myths and fairy tales becoming part of the narrative are all examples of magical realist literature. Many commentators say that magical realism derives from the work of two South American writers, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and that it is a Latin American style. Many consider Jorge Luis Borges' *Historia Universal de la Infamia* to be the earliest work of magical realism. Aside from that, Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as well as Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth Graver's "The Mourning Door," are examples of magical realism.

1.7 KEYWORDS

Abstraction	the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events.
Allusion	an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference.
Ambiguous	open to more than one interpretation; not having one

	obvious meaning.
Anachronisms	a thing belonging or appropriate to a period other than that in which it exists, especially a thing that is conspicuously old-fashioned.
Atrocities	an extremely wicked or cruel act, typically one involving physical violence or injury.
Cliché	a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought.
Debased	reduced in quality or value.
Enlightenment	The great 'Age of Reason' – is defined as the period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterised European society during the 'long' 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.
Epistemology	the theory of knowledge. It is concerned with the mind's relation to reality.
Hypothesis	a supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation.
Inquisitive	having or showing an interest in learning things; curious
Metaphysics	the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, identity, time, and space.
Paradoxical	seemingly absurd or self-contradictory.
Penchant	a strong or habitual liking for something or tendency to do something.
Stream	of-consciousness-A narrative device that attempts to give the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue (see below), or in connection to their actions.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Modernism is a literary movement that began in the early 1900s and lasted until the early 1940s. Modernist writers in general rebelled against the 19th century's clear-cut storytelling and formulaic verse. Instead, many of them offered fractured storylines that paralleled society's fragmentation during and after World War I. Several Modernists wrote in free verse, and their poetry incorporated many other places and civilizations. Several writers used multiple points of view or even wrote in a "stream-of-consciousness" style. These writing styles further demonstrate the way the scattered state of society affected the work of writes at that time.

Postmodernism is a broad phrase that encompasses literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among other things. Postmodernism is essentially a reaction against scientific, or objective, attempts to explain reality's presumed certainty. In essence, it originates from the idea that reality is not simply replicated in human comprehension of it, but is formed as the mind attempts to comprehend its own unique and personal reality. As a result, postmodernism is dubious of explanations that claim to be accurate for all groups, civilizations, traditions, or races, preferring to focus on the relative truths of each individual.

1.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Choose the correct option:

1) "Sailing to Byzantium" is a work of _____.

a) W. B. Yeats b) T. S. Eliot c) Dylan Thomas d) John Dryden

2) *Heart of Darkness* is a work of _____.

a) Joseph Conrad b) D. H. Lawrence c) John Carey d) Ezra Pound

3) *Ulysses* was published in _____.

a) 1920 b) 1921 c) 1922 d) 1923

4) *The Public Burning* is a work of _____.

a) Richard Nixon b) Robert Coover c) Booker T. Washington d) Julia Kristeva

5) *Canterbury Tales* is a work of _____.

a) James Joyce b) Kenn Nesbitt c) Paul Auster d) Geofrrey Chaucer

Answer in Brief:

1) What is stream-of-consciousness?

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2) Does modernism prefer the concrete rather than the abstract?

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3) What is pastiche?

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4) What is intertextuality?

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5) What is metafiction?

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Write a detailed note on the following questions:

1) What are the characteristics of modernism?
2) How is postmodernism a revolt against modernism?

Answers:

1) – a 2) – a 3) – c 4) – b 5) – d

1.10 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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