HISTORY AND CONCEPT OF MODERNISM

Munthir M. Habib[1], Ala Eddin Sadeq[2], Kamal Ahmad Alruzzi[3], Marwan Harb Alqaryouti[4]

[1]Munthir M. Habib. Professor English Language, Literature and Translation, Zarqa University, Zarqa, Jordan.. Jordan. khaledhamaidah@yahoo.com
[2]Ala Eddin Sadeq. Department of English Language, Literature and Translation, Zarqa University, Zarqa, Jordan. Alaeddin71@yahoo.com, alaeddin_english@zu.edu.jo
[3]Kamal Ahmad Alruzzi/ Department of English Language and Translation, Zarqa University, Jordan. Kamalruzzi@yahoo.com
[4]Marwan Harb Alqaryouti. Department of English Language, Literature and Translation, Zarqa University, Zarqa, Jordan. Email: mqaryouti@zu.edu.jo

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Abstract:

The present research article attempts to trace manifestations of literary innovation linked to major cultural and social changes on a global scale. Modernism is most ambiguous term to define. For number of critics, modernism stated with renaissance whereas for some others modernism started with the publication of Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' published in 1895. Virginia Woolf made a comment on the changed nature of human being:"in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (Woolf 1966, 320).The term modernism denotes newness in terms of theme and technique employed in literature. Modernism is one of the most important fields of literary and cultural studies. However, the term is very ambiguous from literary and cultural situation. Critics and scholars attempt to define modernism in different ways but there is not a single comprehensive definition covering all aspects of modernism. For some critics, modernism came to an end with 1930. It belongs to the past, to tradition. However, there are critics who consider modernism as "dominant but dead" (Hal Forster 1983, ix). Nonetheless, this definition is misleading. Modernism is alive and kicking. Aesthetical, ideological and historical issues are approached and studied using the concept of modernism. Hence the concept of modernism is pressing rather than dead. The present research paper attempts to study the rise and development of modernism and its influence on new literature. It also makes an enquiry into the aesthetic and cultural poetics of literary modernism.

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Modernism "after all, now has the charm of history on its side even as it remains, at theend of the twentieth century, our Primal Scene" (MarjoriePerloff 1992, 175).

Though numbers of questions are raised regarding the existence of modernism, it is the prime concern of literary and cultural studies. Even if the scholars reject the term modernism as alive and dominant, it has

gradually been trickling down intohistorical accounts, anthologies, and various other institutional and educational tools. The question of end of modernism is being asked at the time when postmodernism has lost its importance. In fact, it is difficult to draw borderline between modernism and postmodernism. Some critics call post World War II writings as high modernism. Stanford Schwartz wrote a book on high modernism as *The Postmodernity of Modernism* published in 1998. He points out that "the prevailing division between modern and postmodernis simply 'modernism cut in half,' and what we call the postmodern is nothing other than theforgotten side of modernism" (Schwartz 1998, 16).However, he rejects the disappearance of boundary line between modernism and postmodernism. Both terms are quite incompatible. In late 1960s, Kermode used the plural term called modernisms which became popular after thirty years. He wrote: "there has beenonly one Modernist Revolution, and that it happened a long time ago. So far as we can see there hasbeen little radical change in modernist thinking since then. More muddle, certainly, and almost certainlymore jokes, but no revolution, and much less talent" (Kermode 1968, 24). Modernism bridges the history and the present.

It is clear from the above definition that modernist shift began in post-World War II and reflected in literature written after War. However, it would not useful to compare the writings of Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka and T. S. Eliot with those of Thomas Pynchon, Harold Pinter and Toni Morrison – to select a few popular writers of each who contributed to the modernist revolution and shift.

Review of Literature:

There is an increasing interest in the study of modernism and high modernism among critics, academicians and scholars. Benstock wrote an important book on the contribution made by women writers for the development of modernism. The book is entitled as *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* and is dedicated to 'forgotten and silenced makers of modernism' (DeKoven, Marianne 1991, 52). An association was held devoting to New Modernism at Penn State, Pennsylvania in October 1999. The critics like Dickie, Margaret, and Thomas Travisano edited book entitled*Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets andTheir Readers*published in 1996 in which they concentrated on gendered nature of modernism. These writes'endeavour involves awareness of high modernism. The term high modernism refers to the group of towering modernist works. Theodor Adorno wrote a book on modernism called*AsthetischeTheorie*(1970). The development of modernism and its reflection in various texts have been analyzed by Malcolm Bradbury in *Modernism 1890–1930.*Gender and history are studied with reference to modernism in the book called *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism*by DeKoven. However, the history and concept of modernism is studied with limitations. The study of modernism is also limited to literature though it is also used in culture, art and many other fields.

History and Concept of Modernism

Literary modernism attracts the attention of Western scholars and academicians as it occupies the prime concern of their discussion and study. The term is explained with reference to literature written beyond Britain and America. This process of internationalization of meaning of the term has two reasons: one is the new examples will make their points more effective and other is research conducted outside Britain and America would display a tendency to adopt the comprehension of modernism in the sense established by Anglo-Americanliterary tradition. According to RyszardNycz, real modernism in literature began in 1910 though the seeds of modernism were found earlier. To Nycz, notion of modernism has been a literary formation which reached its crystallization around 1910, but "still had before itself a long lasting future" (Nycz 1997, 15).The various artistic currents like

symbolism, impressionism, expressionism, futurism, Dadaism, imagism are being studied in the broader term modernism which came into being at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is essential to describe if not define modernist period and to delineate its boundaries. Bradbury and McFarlane maintained that since the beginning of 19th century, genre of novel and experimental tendencies inart have reached their height in modernism and attained in it the state of crisis, that is, the dissipating away and lack of harmony, the inability to accept one common point of view. These authors refer to W. B. Yeats' lines, "Things fall apart, the center cannothold" (The Second Coming) in order to support their view.Thus, the term modernism is very difficult to define and categorize. No doubt, it has provoked great interest among scholars. The most discussed term called postmodernism and subsequently publication of postmodernism, it becomes imperative to discuss the preceding period – modernism.In Brian McHale's analysis of postmodernism, the interdependence of these two terms are made clear:

Postmodern is not post modern, whatever that may mean, but post modernism; it does not come after thepresent (a solecism), but after the modernist movement. Thus the term "postmodernism" if we take it literallyenough, a la lettre, signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, thepoetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future (McHale 1987, 5).

Critics and scholars are not agreed with exact definition and characteristic features of modernism. The term has been used in all European literatures. When the term modernism is confined to one national literature, it refers to chronologicallydiverse literary trends, and often it decides somewhatdifferent or at least seemingly unique artistic phenomena. For some it refers to small literary trendsor groups whereas for some others it means vast literary movements, determined mainly by the specificity of a given cultural tradition. It seems that one can distinguish five cultural specialties inwhich this term is used in a more extensive and generalized sense. However, no one agrees of the five cultural spheres of modernism. Some critics used the term modernism as an opposition to naturalism and consider it as forms of impressionism, symbolism and decadence. Literature was studied not as an outcome of external reality but as expressions of psychological feelings and emotions. Modernism in literature refers to souls's difficult andvagueexpressions, at times opposing moods, full of melancholy, doubts and resignation.The literature of early 20th century is influenced by these moods and writers like Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and many more attempted to voice these moods in their literature.

According to some critics modernism refers to extreme individualism rather than expression of social and institutional realities. Freedom and honestsubjective inner experience created a new relation between language and objects. This newsensibility and mood found its most marked recognition in the works of Spanish writers like Antonio Machado, Juan RamonJimenez and Ramon del Valle-Inclan. In his essay *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925), J. Ortega Gasset gave one of the first and most penetrating descriptions of the modernist aesthetics.

The third meaning of modernism refers to the period of 1910-1940 when Anglo American experience was dominating. Sometimes modernism is seen as a decline of middle class and working and labor's culture. In this case the interpretation ofmodernism follows from an ideological and socialworld-outlook motivated by firm Marxist philosophy. Georg Lukacs was a prominent exponent of this approach was (1969, 17–92), and it found its officialapproval and institutionalization in the Soviet Union where the term "modernism" was reducedto a negative concept, summarizing under one label all possible "isms" as manifestations of decadentbourgeois culture (Edward Możejko15). Thus thisterm refers to a

lexical cluster without precise semantic boundaries, devoid ofmeaning and used as a tool of ideological propaganda. It is worth adding that prominent Russian writers were pessimistic about modernism. Aleksander Blok, for example, claimed that it was aproductunnaturally implanted on Russian soil, alien to its national culture.

According to critics like Adorno, modernism is an aesthetic theory which and an ideological signifier which denotes an entire epoch from the mid-19th century to the late 1950s and 1960s. He writes that art "opposes the empirical through the element of form" (Adorno 1996, 5). He asserts autonomy of art but at the same time he sees the reflection of society in literature as prime concern. Adorno links the origins of modernism with the rise of high capitalism in the mid-19thcentury, when literatures acquire their identification with consumer goods. This generates the principle of unending newness – orto use more adequate words – it calls for incessant "modernization" and "freshness" of the product. To maintain its marketable value, newness becomes the dominant and vital in the sphere of cultural creativity. Modernism substitutes the idea of *representation* with the concept of *negation*, conditioned by what Adorno identifiesas "dissolution of the subject in collective society" (Adorno 1996, 5). There is similarities and dissimilarities in Anglo-American notion of modernism and Adorno's notion of modernism. The former rejects socio-philosophical aspects of modernism and sees the beginning of modernism in early 20th century whereas for Adorno the roots of modernism goes as back as 19th century and begin to grow with thepoetry of Charles Baudelaire.

The Danish poet and the critic PoulBorumtraces the beginning of modernism in the writings of Baudelaire. His *Poetic Modernism* (1966) proves a turning point the study of literary modernism. According to Borum, the term modernism is a historic and literary term like renaissance or romanticism. These terms denotes great literary periods and imply "novelty" or "renewal" of art and literature. The beginning of modernism has been found in mid-19th century and reaches to climax in 1950s-1960s. It does not "express a single idea or style; it isa complex of simultaneously existing and mutually complementing but at the same time opposingstyles of expression and views" (Edward Możejko 2007, 17). The cultural and ideological meaning of the term modernism implies to newness whereas the aesthetic and creative meaning of the term is manifested in narrative styles, poetic codes and dramatic forms quite different from earlier traditional conventions of artistic expression. This kind of study opens a new way to the better understanding of literary phenomena.

The rise and development of modernism hasbeen accompanied by remarkably flowering and dynamic critical trends like the formalist schoolin Russia, new criticism in Anglo-American literature and structuralism in France. Both these approach have responded to the need to explain as to how the new vision and practice of art and literature oughtto be understood. While Russian Formalism concentrates exclusively on the study of a devicewhich eventually leads to the rise of structuralism, New Criticism develops a rich andvarious critical trend useful for interpretation of the literary work ofart. Fragmentation is the hall mark of modernism. It is vital in poetic technique of T. S. Eliot. It is used as a sign of distrust in the realist mode of literary creation. Hugo Friedrich in his classical study *The Structure of Modern Poetry*writes aboutthe question offragmentariness to so - called reality, "the modern poet does not turn his back to it but hetakes shards of the real world, working them over again and again, and making sure that the brokensurfaces do not fit together" (Friedrich 1974, 157–8).

In modernist literature, the world is seen as problematic. The author raises questions in texts without giving any valid resolutions or remedies. It avoids to provide a holistic, comprehensive artistic vision. The main character is left with without any guidance and is alienated from the external world.

In short, the nature of modernism can be understood from both Anglo-American and Adsorno's position formulated in *Aesthetic Theory*. Modernism has been treated as a long-lasting literary period.Modernism is not the same in different locations and different cultures. It develops differently in different geographic locations and social situations.

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