**Hama Lakhdar University of El Oued**

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**Subject**: Contemporary British Literature

**Level**: Master 01

**Course 01**

**I-Introduction to Postmodernism as an Intellectual Movement and Its Features**

**Definition of Postmodernism**: We think that postmodernism is not only a reaction against modernist enlightenment ideas but also a continuation to the modern intellectual thought but with new looks to life, literature and human condition in general.

This new framework of ideas started by the late 1960s and early 1970s from France spreading to England, Germany and the United States. (Butler, 2016).

Hamdaoui (2011) suggests a comprehensive definition to postmodernism: “ The postmodernism refers to the theories, the trends, and the philosophical , intellectual, literary criticism and artistic schools which appeared to reject and destroy some concepts as language, identity, origin, voice and mind,…and for that, it uses the mechanisms of scepticism, difference and alienation. The philosophy of postmodernism is linked with chaos, nihilism, disembly, non-sense and non-order” (p: 12-13).

Postmodernism appeared in complex political conditions, after the second world war within the context of the cold war, the spread of nuclear weapons, the declaration of human rights, and the appearance of the irrational theatre ( demonstrated through S amuel Beckett, Adamov Unisco, Arabel,…), and the appearance of irrational philosophies like syrialism, nihilism, and deconstruction. (ibid).

Indeed, the world was an uncertain place by the 1960s due to:

* In the USA, there was a fear from nuclear attack from UUSR.
* The Cuban Missil Crisis in 1962;
* The Birmingham riot in 1963 and the Kennedy assassination;
* The riots continued in the wake of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964;
* France detonated its first atomic bomb in 1960;
* Che Guevara attempts to spread revolution in South Africa in the 1960s;
* And the decolonization of many African countries. ( Butler, 2016).

**Features of Postmodernism as an Intellectual Thought**

Among the features that are discussed by Butler (2016), we state the following:

* A change in the thought from ethical and individualist existentialism towards more sceptical and anti-humanist attitudes.
* Postmodernist philosophers took side with the subordinated and the marginalized against those with power.
* Universal truths is impossible and relativism is our fate. In fact, relativism comes at the heart of Derrida’s deconstruction, that is the truth is relative to the differing standpoints.
* Moreover, Derrida’s scepticism allowed his followers to attack philosophy, science, the novel and history, because they contend that they cannot be true.

In his part, Hamdaoui (2011) adds the following principles:

1. **The Philosophy of Nihilism:** The postmodern philosophies are chaotic and nihilistic based on the absence of the meaning, attacking the mind and logic, order and harmony. In addition, they are against the idea of wholeness, and in return, they call for variety, difference, disorder and deconstruct all what is ordered and agreed on.
2. **Dominance of the Image**: The development in mass media continues to appear from modernism to postmodernism. Thus, the language is no longer the only means by which man’s life is ordered, but the image becomes the basic total to knowledge accumulation and truth.
3. **Destruction of the Central Big Idealogies**: Through requestioning and criticism of some concepts as essence, truth, existence, identity, …through anatomy, deconstruction and delay.
4. **Openness**: The modern structuralism believed on the philosophy of the structure, internal closeness, non-openness on meaning and the external and referential contexts whereas postmodernism took openness as a means to interact, understanding, coexistence and tolerance. And intertextuality is one of the means of openness, in addition to the consideration of external contexts is another proof of this pluralistic openness.
5. **Power of Emancipation**: The postmodern philosophies aim to free man from the oppression of the institutions which own discourse, knowledge and power, and also to free him from the illusions of ideologies, and the philosophy of the centre, and works on enlightening him about the philosophies of margin, causal and popular.
6. **Undermining Meanings/Connotations**: Obscurity and ambiguity are the most characteristics of the postmodern discourse; they have no definite, or singular meaning/reference. In fact, there are only different and paradoxical connotations as is clearly seen in the writings and the deconstructive perspective of Derrida.
7. **Beyond the Truth**: The postmodern philosophies deny the existence of a constant unchangeable truth. As with Jean Braudillard who denies the truth and considers it as illusion. He connects the truth with the media which uses the language of deception and dilution and exaggeration.

**Leading Figures of the Postmodernist Thought**

* Jean Braudillard.
* Jacques Derrida.
* Jean Francois Lyotard.
* Michel Foucault.
* Gilles De Leuzes.

**Some Prominent Postmodern Theories**

* Deconstruction.
* Interpretive Semiotics.
* Cultural Criticism.
* Feminist Criticism.
* Dialogic Criticism.
* Post- colonial theory.
* New Criticism.
* New Aesthetics.
* Reception Theory.
* Racial Theory.
* Racial Theory.
* Genital Criticism.
* Thematic Criticism.
* Pragmatic Criticism.

**Jean Francois Lyotard ( 1924- 1998)**

A French post-structuralist philosopher best known for his highly formulation of postmodernism, namely, The Postmodern Condition. Thus, he contributed in the making of the image of postmodernity. Among his postmodernist ideas:

* The rejection of the totalizing theory.
* Questioning the powers of reason.
* He asserts the powers of irrational as sensations and emotions.
* He rejects humanism.
* He rejects the idea that human being is the central subject of knowledge.
* He champions heterogeneity and difference.

**References**

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* Djamil Hamdaoui (2011). Theories of Literary Criticism in Postmodern Era. Aluka.
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