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Exploring Metamodernism in Apartheid Literature

Case Study: *The Promise (2021)* by Damon Galgut

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for Master's Degree in English Literature and Civilisation**

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Dedication

“Praise to Allah, who has guided us to this; and we would never have been guided if Allah had not guided us” 7:43

First, I would like to thank Allah the Almighty for giving me the strength, the guidance and the strength to realize this work

I dedicate this work:

to my parents who always surrounded me with love and support and taught me to work hard.

to my little brother Yahya.

to my friends:

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to all colleagues and friends whom I had pleasure to meet throughout my academic career.

to all literature and philosophy enthusiasts and ambitious researchers.

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Abstract

Many researchers, such as Linda Hutcheon, have reported a noticeable change in many aspects of contemporary art, architecture, and literature that goes beyond the deconstruction and irony of postmodernism. The term Metamodernism was suggested to theorize this post-postmodern phenomenon. In this light, this dissertation aims to explore this metamodernist trend in apartheid literature, more particularly, in Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021) as a case study. To achieve this goal, it takes a qualitative approach in which descriptive analytical methods are used in order to analyse the themes and the stylistic techniques of the novel. This study concludes that the themes of the novel, such as death, history and morality as well as the stylistic techniques, such as post-irony, multiple narrators and intertextuality, demonstrate the return to some modern traditions, like that of authenticity and engagement, however without the total demise of postmodern scepticism. This resonates with metamodernism that is characterised by an oscillation between optimism and sincerity of modernism and scepticism and irony of postmodernism. Thus, this novel includes both of modern and postmodern features, and surpasses both of them.

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General Introduction

Chapter Introduction

Apartheid has been one of the major subjects in South African literature. It refers to the system of institutionalised racial segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 until its dissolution in the early 1990s as a result of a long domestic and international struggle to end it. During the apartheid era, the white minority, the Afrikaners, dominated the political, social, and economic scene in South Africa, and they treated the black majority as an inferior race.

The impact of apartheid on South Africa was devastating, and it took decades of struggle and sacrifice to end the system. In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections, and Nelson Mandela was elected as the first black president of the country. While the end of apartheid marked a major milestone in South Africa's history, the country still faces many challenges today as it continues to negotiate with the legacy of this system.

In literature, a number of black and even white South African writers started to reflect their perceptions about and experiences of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa in their writings. All poems, novels, short stories and dramas that have apartheid as their main subject were labelled as 'apartheid literature'. This literature continues to be studied and celebrated for its contribution to the literary canon of South Africa and its role in documenting and challenging the injustices of the apartheid era. Some notable examples of apartheid literature include the novels of Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Bessie Head. Just like most of the literature in the second half of the twentieth century, Apartheid literature was a part of the postmodern canon that was one of the dominant philosophical and literary movements around the world. Under the postmodern frame, South African writers attempted to deconstruct apartheid and/or post-apartheid systems, to give voice to the subaltern, mainly the blacks, and to rewrite South African history, rejecting any totalitarian form of it.

However, the ambiguous, pessimistic, and unproductive nature of postmodernism has made the recent massive political and economic changes around the globe refuse to be positioned within the framework of the postmodern perspective. Additionally, many researchers, critics,

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and philosophers have reported a noticeable change in many aspects of contemporary art, architecture, and literature. Thus, they signalled the inevitable birth of a new era that is called "post-postmodernism". However, they seem to be in less agreement as to what the theory behind the post-postmodern era is. In 2010, the term 'metamodernism' was suggested to theorize the post-postmodern era by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker. In short, they compare metamodernism to a pendulum that oscillates between modernism and postmodernism. In other words, they suggest that metamodernism can be considered as synthesis between modern and postmodern ideas, rather than a simple rejection of one in favour of the other.

In the South African context, the legacy of apartheid still has an impact on the everyday life of the South African individual. The high expectations that were prevalent at the time of the abolishment of the apartheid government in 1994 have not met with the current reality. In these circumstances, Damon Galgut, a white South African novelist and playwright, published his latest novel *The Promise* (2021) for which he won the Booker Prize in the same year.

In this light, the problem that this dissertation aims to address is exploring the metamodern trend in apartheid literature. It assumes that Galgut's *The Promise* (2021) is influenced by the emerging philosophy of metamodernism. Therefore, it argues that this novel might give us more insights on the literary adaptation of the metamodernist philosophy. By the same token, there are a number of sub questions that this research attempts to answer: To what extent does *The Promise* (2021) embody the metamodern spirit? How do the themes of the novel express metamodern oscillation between modernism and postmodernism? What are the stylistic techniques that are prominent in the novel? How does the usage of these themes and techniques differ from their usage in a postmodern or modern framework? How does metamodernism perceive post-apartheid South Africa?

In an attempt to find sufficient answers to the previously stated question, this dissertation argues that themes used in the novel, such as death, history, and morality, serve the return of

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authenticity, engagement and other modernist features, however, without the demise of postmodern skepticism. In other words, they have metamodernist features that oscillate between modernism and postmodernism. Similarly, as far as stylistic techniques are concerned, there is a return of some modern techniques that are manifested in the use of streams of consciousness, and intertextuality. Yet, there is also the presence of postmodern irony albeit it is utilized for different outcomes.

Much literature on the death of postmodernism and the rise of its successor, metamodernism, has been written. In fact, one of the works that has made a huge influence on theorizing the post-postmodern era is “Notes on Metamodernism” (2010) by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker. In their essay, they provided the reader with previous terms that were proposed by different scholars to name the successor of postmodernism. They, then, proposed their own suggestion, which is 'metamodernism'. The reason behind their choice of the word is that the prefix ‘Meta’ comes from the Greek word Metaxis that means in-betweenness. They argue that metamodernism is situated between modernism’s desire for meaning and postmodernism’s incredulity about the existence of that meaning in the first place. They supported their claim by reporting what they observed in contemporary architecture, such as the work of Rem Koolhaas and Herzog & de Meuron, and films, including *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Tree of Life*. Despite their success in providing a framework for understanding this new emerging cultural phenomenon, further investigations to provide more details and insights are still needed, especially in the field of literature.

Moreover, in her essay "To Engage in Literature", Nadine Feßler provides an overview of contemporary literature and its relationship to metamodernism. She argues that contemporary literature in recent years has experienced the return of what she called outdated modern concepts such as authenticity, ethics, engagement and aesthetics in contemporary literature, yet that does not suggest the total demise of postmodernism. As a result, she contends that contemporary literature should be looked at with a new lens, that of metamodernism. She

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supports her arguments by showing how this shift is reflected in a number of contemporary literary works, like the works of David Foster Wallace, Nicole Krauss, and many other contemporary writers. Her essay has indeed contributed to understanding metamodern literature, yet it has also opened the door for further investigations on the topic.

Another article worth mentioning is “Modernism, Postmodernism, and Metamodernism: A Critique (2017)” by Tawfiq Youssef. In his article, the author explores the three literary movements of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism providing a brief definition of each movement. However, he did not explore a specific metamodernist work. Instead, he discussed the principles of metamodernism and how they differ from modernism and postmodernism. He also mentioned some of the distinguished metamodern novelists, including David Foster Wallace, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Mark Z. Danielewski, but without going in-depth. To sum up, he just provided a general understanding of the topic.

In addition, Noah Bunnell, in his article “Oscillating from a Distance: A Study of Metamodernism in Theory and Practice” (2015), explores this new emerging metamodern movement in theory and in practice. He uses David Foster Wallace’ short story ‘Lyndon’ as a case study. For which he argues that it incorporates metamodern thoughts despite the fact that it was published decades before the term, metamodernism, was accepted in academia as one of postmodernism's proposed successors. Indeed, this study contributes to some extent to our understanding of metamodern literature. However, analysing one short story written decades ago in an attempt to explore metamodernism is neither sufficient nor satisfactory. Thus, a new exploration of the topic in other works done by other authors is required.

In her dissertation entitled *The Reconstruction of Values in Post-Postmodern Literature, with a Focus on Dave Eggers' Works*, Pauline Coenen, a student of Dutch-English Linguistics and Literature at Ghent University, explores post-postmodernism’s reconstruction of values and reinterest in moral lessons in Dave Eggers’ works that include *A Heart-breaking Work of*

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Staggering Genius, Zeitoun, What Is the What and the Circle. Her focus on this American author, who is praised for his powerful storytelling, helps the reader gain more insights about post-postmodernism in American literature, yet, it does not go beyond the borders of American literature.

As far as *The Promise* (2021) by Damon Galgut is concerned, Jon Day published his review of the novel on The Guardians website. In his review, he provided the reader with the background of the author, the summary of the novel as well as a criticism of it. He compares the themes of *The Promise* to a Joycean universalism characterizing the novel as a neo-modernist novel. Although he uses the term neo-modernist novel, this term does not oppose “metamodernism” due to the fact that both of these terms are just proposed terms to theorize the post-postmodern era. Still, we argue that the term metamodern is more suitable due to its meaning and its level of acceptance in the academic field. Besides, Jon Day’s description of the themes in the novel as Joycean needs further investigation and clarification.

In light of what has been said about these previous studies, this dissertation aims to trace metamodernism in apartheid literature. It stands for the proposition that metamodernism is not peculiar to Western literature, but it also has an international trend that affects different parts of the world, in this case study, South Africa. Furthermore, it explores the themes and the stylistic techniques that Galgut uses in *The Promise* (2021) as an attempt to prove that it is a metamodern work and to get more insights on the literary adaptation of metamodern philosophy.

This dissertation clearly has some limitations. It aims to explore *The Promise* by Damon Galgut as a study case to trace metamodernism in apartheid literature by analysing the themes and the stylistic techniques of the novel. However, the results of this work might or might not be generalized to other contemporary works of South African literature and international literature due to the fact that it focuses on one South African novel written by one individual. Still, we hope that it can contribute to a better understanding of the topic.

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In order to investigate the rationale of this dissertation the latter takes a qualitative approach. Thus, descriptive analytical methods are used in order to offer a comprehensive discussion about the topic. The structure of this dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter offers an overview of metamodernism and the background of the novel. In this light, it offers the reader a brief revision of modernism and postmodernism before it discusses metamodernism as a synthesis between the two movements. It also offers a historical background about the apartheid era in South Africa as well as the post-apartheid era in order to contextualize the plot of the novel.

Then, the second chapter explores the prominent metamodern themes in the novel. It offers a description of the way the themes of death, history, and morality are employed in the novel and it analyses how employing such themes suggests the return of authenticity, ethics and engagement through a metamodern perspective.

The third chapter describes and analyses the stylistic techniques used in the novel then relates them to metamodernism. It takes the same approach as the second chapter. It analyses the use of modern stylistic techniques that have a postmodern touch. These techniques include post-irony, stream of consciousness and the different types of narrators used in the novel. It also discusses the impact of employing such stylistic techniques on the reader's experience.

Chapter one:

*A Theoretical Background of Metamodernism and
contextualisation of The Promise (2021)*

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Introduction

This chapter discusses two main points: the theory of metamodernism and the history of apartheid in South Africa. Firstly, to have an adequate understanding of metamodernism, it is crucial for this chapter to offer a brief revision of the definitions of modernism and postmodernism before it explains how metamodernism grew out as a synthesis between the two movements. Moreover, it discusses how some literary themes and techniques of modernism differ from those of postmodernism, and how metamodernism comes as an attempt to synthesize between the two movements. Secondly, this chapter attempts to contextualize the novel *The Promise* (2021) by Damon Galgut within the history of apartheid in South Africa. It does so with relevance to the events taking place in the plot of the novel. The reader, by the end of the chapter, will have a good understanding of the theoretical framework of the dissertation as well as the historical context of the novel.

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I. Theorizing Metamodernism

I.1 Towards Defining Modernism

Throughout history, different philosophical movements emerged to guide mankind. These movements usually come successively and each one of them comes as a reaction to the one that precedes it. Each one typically challenges the prevailing assumptions, theories, or methods of its predecessors and proposes alternative explanations or approaches. Modernism is not different. This philosophical and artistic movement emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction to its predecessors, romanticism and realism. It also reflects the broad transformations that had taken place in the Western world during the modern era. These broad transformations include industrialisation, urbanisation, secularism and scientific and technological advancements. Modernism is a vast topic that appears in a variety of disciplines or areas of study. For the purpose of this dissertation, it will be tackled in terms of its main characteristics in philosophy and literary theory.

In philosophy, the term modernity is often used to refer to a collection of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas that constitute the basis that modernism tends to express in art and literature (Klages). It is characterised by its rejection of past values and traditions in favour of progress, social change and unquestionable belief in science and reason. As a consequence of the Enlightenment age¹, Religion, mainly Christianity, lost its position as the supreme authority in Western society. Science and reason became the ultimate judge of what is true, and, similarly, of what is right and what is not. Therefore, the knowledge produced by objective rational and/or empirical thinking became absolute and total. This led to the appearance of what Jean-François Lyotard² termed as grand-narratives. Also called meta-narratives, grand-narratives are overarching stories, concepts or ideologies that attempt to provide a comprehensive and totalizing explanation of the world, and suggest solutions to the problems of humanity (Oxford Dictionary). To illustrate, concepts such as democracy, equality, freedom of speech, and secularism started to dominate the sociopolitical scene in the West. The ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity” held by the French Revolution (1786-1799) and “life, liberty and pursuit

¹ The enlightenment age, also known as the age of reason, is an intellectual movement that flourished in Europe around 17th and 18th centuries when philosophers and scientists, such as Immanuel Kant, Francis Bacon, and Rene Descartes, began to place science and reason above religion and traditions.

² Jean-François Lyotard is a 20th century French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist.

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of happiness” of the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) represented a break from the past where people were oppressed by monarchy, aristocracy, and the church. These ideals exhibited a strong sense of naivete and optimism about the inevitable progress in all spheres of life. It was the age of a utopian dream. Moreover, modernity encouraged the growth of individualism in philosophy, art, industry and other spheres of life as it witnessed the demise of feudalism in favour of capitalism in the West. As a summary, Jos De Mul³ encompasses all aspects of modernity “from utopism to the unconditional belief in reason” under what he describes as “modern enthusiasm” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 4)

In literature, Modernist writers considered the traditional and conventional forms of writing, plots and literature to be outdated. They also carried the progressive spirit of modernity and sought to implement it in literature. To illustrate, modernist writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner tended to develop individualistic forms of writing as a repudiation of traditional conventions of writing. They rejected realism’s claim of achieving ‘verisimilitude’ arguing that realist fiction does not reflect reality adequately because of its focus on the exterior description of the characters and the events of the plot. Instead, modernist writers opted for psychological realism. In other words, they focused on the interior description of the characters. Under the influence of Sigmund Freud’s theories on the conscious and the subconscious mind, the modernist novel aimed to expose the hidden inner motives behind the characters’ actions (Yousef, 34). This results in the use of the techniques of stream of consciousness, multiple narrators with different points of view and fragmentation. Furthermore, some modernist writers sought to reflect the complexities of modern life by using themes such as alienation, disillusionment, fragmentation and isolation as a tragedy to be mourned (Klages). For example, T.S Eliot’s poem *The Hollow Men* portrays the death of spirituality and morality in the modern world. Nevertheless, other modernists believed that works of art can provide unity, coherence and meaning that had been lost in the modern era (Klages 2). A good example of this is James Joyce’s use of the technique of epiphany^[1] in his novels like that of *Ulysses*.

Gathering the above points together, the zeitgeist⁴ of modernity was characterised by a rejection of the past and embracing progress, individualism, and totalisation. By the same token, modernist literature rejected the traditional artistic and literary conventions and opted for new individualistic forms of writings. These include using fragmentation, stream of

³ Jos de Mul is a Full Professor of Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

⁴ Zeitgeist is the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

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consciousness, nonlinear plots and other techniques. All of them endeavoured to offer new methods for exploring and reflecting the complexities of modern human life.

I.2 Towards Defining Postmodernism

By the mid-20th century, it became clear that modernity and the Enlightenment project had failed to deliver the promises of progress towards utopia. World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) can be seen as manifestations of the failures of modernity in many ways. Both of wars demonstrate the destructive potential of modern technology that was praised by modernity. The unprecedented death casualties, the horrors of the Holocaust, and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in Japan caused widespread disillusionment and loss of faith in humanity. From this disillusionment and loss of faith, postmodernism emerged as a reaction to modernism. According to the American literary critic Richard Rorty, postmodernism's task is to find what to do "now that both of both the Age of Faith and the Enlightenment seem beyond recovery" (qtd in Hicks 14). This philosophical, intellectual and artistic movement is hard to define because of its complexity and its influence in many disciplines or areas of study (Klages). Nevertheless, in general terms, Jean-François Lyotard writes in the introduction of his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." In other words, postmodernism has called into question all the truth claims of all grand narratives including science, art, politics and literature. The central nature of postmodernism, therefore, is scepticism. This scepticism is pronounced mainly in its rejection of the notion of the Truth and its conception of language both in philosophy and literature.

Postmodernism rejects any attempts to claim a universal truth. It argues that such a claim is unattainable from the beginning. the grand narratives of modernity failed to contain the differences, diversity, and incompatibility of different cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. In this aspect, Michel Foucault^[1] stated that all of his analyses were against the idea of universal necessities in human existence, and "it is meaningless to speak in the name of—or against—Reason, Truth, or Knowledge" (qtd in Hicks 2). In fact, postmodern thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault argue that the grand narratives of modernity were not universal but Eurocentric. They were constructed in favour of white male Europeans, and they were used to justify the oppression of others, including black community, women, and other races. For example, the words of *The Declaration of Independence* "that all men are created equal" did not apply to the black community in America. Throughout most of the history of the USA, black

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people suffered from slavery, racism, and Tyranny. Instead of grand narratives, Lyotard proposed mini-narratives that provided a platform for the oppressed marginalized groups to share their voices. Thus, postmodernism upheld the possibility of having multiple truths. It acknowledges the subjective and relativistic nature of knowledge and suggests that multiple truths can exist simultaneously. As a result, during the postmodern era, the world witnessed the rise of mini-narratives like that of feminism, postcolonial literature and diasporic literature. This abundance of small narratives, consequently, led to the death of the centre and the rise of the periphery– the minorities.

Another aspect of postmodern philosophy is its conception of language. Influenced by post-structuralism, postmodernism rejects the structuralist view that promotes the idea that there is a fixed relation between the signifier and the signified. Rather, it refutes the ability of language to convey a fixed meaning and instead argues that meaning is always related to context. Viewed in this manner, language is a system of signs that refer to one another internally in a process of signification that never arrives at a stable meaning (Zagronin, 5 qtd. in Yilmaz, 181). Thus, since postmodernism recognizes the undecidability, and the incapability of language to reflect reality; it rejects the possibility of having a universal objective truth. It emphasizes instead the relativistic nature of language and thus accepts the multiplicity of relativistic truths.

In addition, in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard argues that the line between signifier (simulation) and signified (reality) has become so blurred to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. He suggests that representations and simulations have replaced the underlying reality that they are meant to represent. Thus, according to Baudrillard, in the postmodern age, there are no signified rather there are only signifiers; surfaces without depth (Baudrillard 1994 qtd in Yousef, 36). Similarly, in his book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson identifies the concept of “depthlessness” as one of the characteristics of postmodernism (Rudrum et al. 44). In this light, Jameson argues that postmodernism rejects the pursuit of depth, authenticity, and hidden meanings that were emphasized in modernist culture. Instead, he maintains that postmodernism focuses only on the surface level, and he relates that to the social, economic, and cultural changes associated with late capitalism and the influence of mass media, consumerism, and the blurring of boundaries between high and low culture (ibid).

By the same token, postmodernist literary works express scepticism towards literature's ability to generate meaning and language's effectiveness in reflecting reality. This scepticism has resulted in fragmented, open-ended, and self-reflective narratives that are interesting but

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hard to understand. According to the Canadian literary critic Linda Hutcheon, postmodernist literature employs various stylistic techniques, including intertextuality, metafiction, manipulation of time, magical realism, blending of fact and fiction—fiction—reader engagement, and deconstruction (Yousef, 36). These techniques can be observed in the works of postmodernist writers such as Samuel Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut, and Salman Rushdie. Moreover, despite the similarities that exist between modern and postmodern literature like that of the use of fragmentations, irony, self-consciousness, discontinuity and a questioning of traditional values, the postmodern attitude towards these features differs from that of modernism. To illustrate, modernist works like *The Hollow Men* by TS Eliot tend to represent a fragmented view of human experience in the modern age, yet this fragmentation is represented as something tragic to be mourned as a loss (Klages). In contrast, postmodernism does not lament that rather it celebrates the fragmentation, incoherence and meaninglessness of life (ibid). The cynicism and irony promoted by postmodernism led to a significant change in various aspects of culture, philosophy, and society.

Gathering the above points, postmodernism can be described as the antithesis of modernism's thesis. The zeitgeist of postmodernism is characterised by scepticism, irony and cynicism. Accordingly, Jos de Mul juxtaposes modern enthusiasm—encompassing everything from utopism to the unconditional belief in reason—with postmodern irony—encompassing nihilism, cynicism, sarcasm, and the distrust and deconstruction of grand narratives. (qtd in Vermeulen and van den Akker 4)

1.2.1 Echoes of Postmodernism's Demise

By the end of the 20th century, many critics and scholars signalled the death of postmodernism and the rise of a new era that they called post-postmodernism. The reasons behind such claims are different and varied. Some scholars claim that material events like climate change, financial crises, terror attacks, and digital revolutions require a new vision other than that of postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van Den Akker 1). Others claimed that postmodernism's cynicism and unproductive nature brought its end.

To illustrate, the American author David Foster Wallace criticizes the use of irony— which he defines as the gap between what is said and what is meant— in American literature and TV shows. In his essay *E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction*, he argues that:

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“Irony, entertaining as it is, serves an almost exclusively negative function. It's critical and destructive... But irony's singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks” (qtd in Coenen)

In other words, he argues that irony does not produce anything meaningful to the American society; it just celebrates the chaos that it exposes. The hegemony of metafictional and self-conscious irony and cynicism in American culture ultimately led to a general feeling of emptiness, nihilism and despair. In his essay, Wallace predicts that the use of irony in American literature and TV shows will deteriorate in favour of what he calls “a return to sincerity” or a new sincerity.

In addition, Ihab Hassan states “We hardly knew what postmodernism was”. (Hassan 15 qtd in Coenen); he addressed postmodernism in the past form to indicate its end. Moreover, Hutcheon declares the end of postmodernism in the epilogue of the second edition of her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* when she says: “Let’s just say it: it is over” (qtd in Vermeulen and Van Den Akker). Furthermore, she posits the question about the successor of postmodernism; a question that she does not know the answer to and asks the readers to find it:

The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and 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—and name it for the twenty-first century. (qtd in Vermeulen and Van Den Akker)

Despite their agreement on the death of postmodernism, these commentators do not seem to agree on the essence of the successor of postmodernism. The term post-postmodernism has been used to describe the new cultural and intellectual movement that is emerging in the wake of postmodernism. However, the term is relatively new, and its definition caused disagreements and different points of view among scholars and critics. Thus, post-postmodernism is considered to be a vague term that is still being explored and defined by different scholars and critics.

I.3 Rise of Metamodernism: A Phoenix Born from Postmodern Ashes

There are several theories that have been proposed to conceptualize post-postmodernism, a term used to describe a variety of different approaches that are seen as moving beyond postmodernism. One of the suggested terms is metamodernism. It is a cultural and philosophical movement that emerged in the early 21st century as a reaction to postmodernism. The Dutch

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philosophers Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker were the first to use the term to describe the current zeitgeist or structure of feeling⁵ through their essay Notes on Metamodernism. They explicitly stated that they did not invent the term for it exists years before. Their essay has been praised for having made a significant contribution to the study of contemporary culture. Metamodernism can be understood by exploring the rationale behind the use of the prefix “meta” and its characteristics.

Vermeulen and van den Akker argues that the term metamodernism can capture the current cultural zeitgeist. Their rationale lies behind the fact that the prefix “meta” in “metamodernism” refers to notions such as "with," "between" and “beyond” according to the Greek-English lexicon (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2). To briefly summarise, modernism is characterized by an exuberant self-confidence, a fervent belief in progress and reason, and an audacious vision of a reachable utopia. This was due to several factors including the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, postmodernism positions itself as the antithesis of modernism. It is characterised by incredulity towards grand narratives. Thus, postmodernist discourse is loaded with irony, pastiche and cynicism. Rejecting the modernist pursuit of universal truth, postmodernism embraces the multiplicity of truths and celebrates the relativistic aspect of every narrative. In contrast to modernism, it challenges the status quo and offers the opportunity for marginalized voices to express themselves. However, having such an abundance of narratives, feelings of absurdism, nihilism and relativism have come to prevail in the postmodern age.

From this clash between modernism and postmodernism, metamodernism emerges as a synthesis between the two movements. The problems that face humanity today refuse to be treated by either the optimism of modernism or the irony of postmodernism. Yet, metamodernism integrates both of these virtues in an attempt to create an entirely new vision that transcends both of them. Vermeulen and van den Akker describe the metamodern structure of feeling as an oscillation “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” (6). Thus, the prefix “meta” means to integrate as well as to surpass.

Metamodernism is characterised by a “both-neither” dynamic that is at once modern and postmodern, yet neither of them. Metamodernism takes the awareness of postmodern

⁵ Structure of feeling is a term coined by the Welsh writer Raymond Williams that describes a particular quality of social experience that gives the sense of a generation or a period (Williams 131 qtd in Rudrum)

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scepticism, yet it moves beyond it striving once again for a deeper sense of meaning. As Vermeulen and van den Akker put it: “their intention is not to fulfil it, but to attempt to fulfil it in spite of its ‘unfulfillableness.’” (9). Thus, the two authors align metamodernism with Kant’s negative idealism which is characterised by as-if thinking. As a consequence, metamodernism has been described with seemingly contradictory terms such as ironic sincerity, pragmatic idealism and informed naivety.

In conclusion, according to Vermeulen and van den Akker, metamodernism comes as a synthesis between modernism and postmodernism that includes and transcends both of the movements. It has been described as a pendulum that oscillates between modern sincerity and postmodern irony, between a yearning for meaning and authenticity and an awareness of its limits, as well as a willingness to engage with both modernist and postmodernist aesthetics. The characteristics of metamodernism include “both-neither”, “as-if thinking”, ironic sincerity, pragmatic idealism and informed naivety.

II. Evolution of Literary Threads: Unraveling Timeless Themes and Craft

II.1 Delving into the Abyss: Dance with Death's Eternal Question

Death has been one of the major themes in literature throughout human history. It is a universal experience that is inevitable in every human life. For this reason, it has been explored in different ways by different writers from different backgrounds and eras, ranging from the epics of antiquity like that of Homer’s *The Odyssey*, to present-day literature. Given the fact that modernism and postmodernism are two antagonists, death is treated differently. In modernism, death is often treated as a negative experience whereas postmodernism treats it in a more playful and ironic way.

In modernism, death is often associated with feelings of alienation, and despair. Philippe Aries argues in his book *Western Attitudes Toward Death (1974)*, that the Western attitudes towards death changed in response to the rapid social changes brought by industrialisation and urbanisation. In the third chapter, he discussed about the modern period that he refers to as “Forbidden Death”. In this light, He identified two societal trends that influenced the shift of attitude towards death in the Western community. The first trend is linked to the modernisation of medical care and the rise of hospitals. In Aries’ perspective, in earlier times, death was part of family life and one would die in his bedroom surrounded by his family. In contrast, the medicalisation of sickness and death deepened feelings of solitude and alienation of the modern

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man (88). The second trend is linked to the idea that life should be, above all, happy. In his perspective, there was a growing sentiment of optimism and naivete that humans can progress and evolve in all spheres of life. This sentiment caused a denial of death in modern culture (87). In literature, modernist writers often felt a sense of alienation and loss in the modern world, and they often used the theme of death to explore these feelings. Their works often depict death as a destructive force that makes them question the meaning of life. For example, *The Wasted Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925) by T.S Eliot are two poems that represent meditations on the meaning of life and death in the aftermath of World War I.

In postmodernism, authors often deconstructed the traditional concepts of death. They took a more self-conscious and playful approach. Instead of lamenting the theme of death like in modernism, they celebrate the different interpretations of death. Some authors celebrate the absurdity and meaninglessness of life like Albert Camus's novels such as *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947). Others explore the different interpretations of death including the possibility of the afterlife. In this sense, they use metafiction that blurs the lines between reality and fiction. For example, Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) follows the life of Billy Pilgrim, an ex-American soldier who occasionally travels back and forth in time to when he participated in WWII. The novel explores Billy's different interactions with death and his thoughts on the meaning of his life and the horrors of war.

In conclusion, the use of the theme of death in literature reflects the cultural and philosophical values of the period in which it was written. Modernist writers often lament the idea of death while postmodernist writers celebrate the different possible interpretations of death using self-conscious and metafictional approaches.

II.2 History's Whispers: Echoes of Ages Past in the Present

History has been one of the most explored themes in literature. It has been explored in many different ways by authors. The way history is tackled reflects the cultural and philosophical background of the author. The way history was explored in modernism differs from that of postmodernism. In this light, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker align the modern and the postmodern philosophical approach to history with Friedrich Hegel's positive idealism that declared the 'end of history' (5). However, modern perception of Hegel's 'end of history' differs from that of postmodernism.

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According to Vermeulen and van den Akker, Modernism's attitude towards history is often seen in a positive light. This is due to the belief that a better future is inevitable, and humans can progress through science and social development (5). Some argued that, with the universalisation of Western Liberal democracy, the Telos⁶ of history can be achieved, eventually, leading to the long-awaited utopia. (Fukuyama qtd in Rudrum et al. 43). In addition, in literature, many modernists sought to break away from the past. They explore history with a focus on the present and the future in a more experimental and subjective manner. By using techniques such as stream of consciousness and fragmentation, modernists explore the inner life of their characters in a way that defies the traditional linear plot. In this sense, they explore the problems and the complexities of the modern era through multiple individual perspectives. They, nevertheless, believed in art's ability to provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which has been lost in most of modern life (Klages).

In contrast, postmodernism perceives Hegel's 'end of history' in a negative manner. It acknowledges that the telos of history cannot be fulfilled and thus it abandoned the pursuit of the ultimate goal of history. (Vermeulen and van den Akker 5). In this light, postmodern thinkers reject the idea that there is a single, linear path of progress leading to a utopian endpoint as well as any attempt to have a single totalising narrative of history. Instead, they focus on the present moment, the local and the particular. They argue that history, like any other grand narrative, is constructed, and the experiences of individuals and groups are more important than totalising abstract ideas or theories. As a result, one of the major subcategories of postmodern literature is the historical novel. In fact, Linda Hutcheon considers what she called "historiographic metafiction" as one of the dominant forms of postmodern literature (Wesseling). In this sense, there was an abundance of mini-narratives that aimed to deconstruct any attempt to have a totalising narrative and gave a voice to the subaltern, the oppressed and the marginalized people.

In conclusion, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker connect both modernism and postmodernism to Hegel's positive idealism that declared the 'end of history'. However, on one hand, modernism's perception of Hegel's end of history embraces the idea of continuous human progress that can ultimately to the realization of a utopian society. On the other hand, postmodernism takes a more sceptical approach as it acknowledges that the ultimate telos of history is unattainable and, as a result, abandons the pursuit of this ideal. Moreover, postmodernism rejects any attempt to have a totalising history. It witnessed the rise of the

⁶Telos is a term used by the Greek philosopher Aristotle to refer to an ultimate end (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

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historical novel, or what Hutcheon terms “historiographic metafiction”, that deconstructs the grand narratives and focuses on the experiences of marginalized groups, such as the blacks, the colonized people and women.

II.3 Navigating the Moral Compass: Where Righteousness Meets Ambiguity

One of the most common literary themes in literature is that of morality. It explores the concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, and the nature of human behaviour. The concept of moral centre in literature refers to the character or group of characters who represent the author's sense of right and wrong. The author builds his work around their ideas and actions, and they often serve as a guide for the reader. The concept of a moral centre in literature is different in modernism and postmodernism.

On one hand, in many modernist works, authors tend to uphold the concept of the moral centre. It is often represented by the protagonist who is struggling to make sense of the modern world. Mary Klages notes that many modernist writers believe that art can unity, coherence, and meaning that has been lost in the modern world. In addition, they do break away from the traditional forms of literature in the sense that they experiment with new methods that focus on subjectivity and embrace the multiplicity of points of view. Yet they highlight the protagonist’s perspective. For example, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1920) follows the life of the protagonist Leopold Bloom who is an ordinary and flawed man trying to make sense of the world. James Joyce is known for his use of “epiphany” which refers to the sudden realisation that the protagonist experiences and finds a possible solution to his dilemma.

On the other hand, postmodernism rejects the concept of a moral centre in the text. Postmodernist writers often make the moral centre fragmented and ambiguous. This is related to Roland Barthes [1]’s declaration of the death of the author. The latter refers to a key feature in postmodernism that upholds the possible interpretations of the text by the readers instead of prying into the author’s background, intention and philosophy (Oxford Reference). By the same token, postmodern literature favours a more relativistic view of morality, in which there is no right or wrong, but only different perspectives without a central one. Moreover, Fredric Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, offers an analysis and a critique of postmodernist culture. He contends that one of the features of postmodernism is what he terms as “the waning of affect”. He argues that the deconstruction,

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irony and relativism of postmodern literature have resulted in depthless narratives that do not convey meaning or solution, and instead embrace nihilism and absurdism. This lack of a clear meaning has resulted in a waning of affect or a crisis of emotion in the sense that the readers find it difficult to engage with a postmodern text and feel alienated and ironic towards it. To illustrate, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) follows the life of a black American girl named Pecola. She is deeply traumatized by racism and desperately tries different ways to have blue eyes which she sees as a simple of acceptance and beauty. Her actions caused controversy among the readers. Some view her actions as a sign of weakness and despair while others view her actions as a desperate act to survive.

In conclusion, the way morality is portrayed in literature reflects the values and beliefs of the period in which it was written. Modernism was in favour of the concept of a moral centre while postmodernism rejected that opting for a more relativistic view of morality.

III. Craftsmanship of Expression: Techniques Woven Through Ages

III.1 Sincerity's Tender Embrace or Irony's Sardonic Grin?

Irony is a literary device that is used in a situation that reveals the opposite or a hidden meaning of what it is said. In David Foster Wallace words, "For irony — exploiting gaps between what's said and what's meant. Between how things try to appear and how they really are— is the time honored way artists seek to illuminate and explode hypocrisy" (182. qtd in Bunnell 2). It is often used to have a humorous effect, to emphasize a point or to add complexity and depth to a text. The use of irony in modernism differs from that of postmodernism specifically in the intention behind the use of irony.

In modernism, irony was often used to express the sense of alienation and fragmentation that was dominant in the modern era. Modernists saw that the traditional forms of literature were inadequate to represent or explore the complexities of the modern era. Therefore, they opted for new experimental ways of writing that involve the use of irony. However, it was used to mourn the complexity of modern life. In fact, many modernist writers believed in the idea that art can create meaning and convey a truthful message. For this reason, modernism is associated with concepts such as sincerity, enthusiasm and naiveite for it attempts to make sense of the complexity of the modern world (Vermeulen and van den Akker 6).

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In contrast, the use of irony in postmodernism is characterized by incredulity towards modernity's grand narratives and a playful attitude towards meaning. Postmodern irony is used to expose the flaws in the modernist narratives and the sufferance of the subaltern, the minorities. However, while it succeeded in exposing those problems, it does not appear to offer solutions for the question it was posing. In this light, Wallace comments that: "Irony as entertaining it, serves an exclusively negative function. It's critical and destructive, a ground-clearing. Surely this is the way our postmodern fathers saw it. But irony's singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks" (183 qtd in Bunnell 2). Thus, postmodernism failed to produce solutions for the problems that it exposed. Therefore, Wallace predicted a literary rebellion against postmodern irony in favour of sincerity. His predictions proved to be correct due to the emergence of new concepts such as 'new sincerity' and 'post-irony' in contemporary literary theory (Bunnell 2).

In conclusion, modernism tends to use irony as a device to lament or mourn the fragmented complex modern life. In contrast, the postmodern use of irony is used to expose the local problems, yet it fails to offer solutions for those problems leading to an atmosphere of absurdity and cynicism in the postmodern era.

III.2 Narrators as Kaleidoscopes: Shifting Perspectives and Truths

Narrative style refers to the way and the methods used to tell a story. Modern and postmodern literature share many similarities when it comes to the narrative style. Many critics argue that postmodernism is an extension of modernism (Yousef 36) However, the two movements differ in some aspects as they represent different approaches to storytelling and the role of the author.

Modernism and postmodernism have many similarities when it comes to narration. They both rejected the old traditional conventional forms of literature, such as linear plots and reliable narrators and opted for new experimental ways of individualistic writing. In this sense, techniques such as stream of consciousness, fragmentation, multiple narrators and non-linear plots are found in both modern and postmodern literature.

However, the main difference between modern and postmodern narrative style is related to the notion of self-reflexivity. Postmodern authors tend to be more self-conscious and playful. Thus, they challenge the reader's expectations and question the conventions of storytelling. For example, the technique of metafiction draws attention to the fictional nature of the text often through narrators who are aware they exist within a story. In addition, pastiche is a technique

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that is used in many postmodern works. This technique combines elements from different genres or styles. This can be used to create a sense of irony, imitation or to undermine traditional genres. Another example is the use of intertextuality. This technique is used to refer to other texts or works of art. This can be done through the use of allusions, quotations, or other forms of reference.

In conclusion, Modernist narrative styles are often characterized by their search for new ways to express the complexity of the modern era while postmodernist narrative styles are often characterized by their playful, self-reflexive, and ironic engagement with the conventions of storytelling.

III.3 Stream of Consciousness: Torrents of Thought Meandering Onward

Stream of consciousness is a literary technique that can be found in both modern and postmodern literature. Stream of Consciousness is a term coined by the psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). It is a narrative style that depicts a character's ongoing inner thoughts. Modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce used stream of consciousness to explore the inner lives of their characters in a way that had never been done before. Thus, they pioneered a new kind of realism that is known as psychological realism. Postmodernist authors also used a stream of consciousness, but they used it differently. Postmodernists were more self-conscious about the use of stream of consciousness, and they sometimes used it to create a sense of irony or absurdity.

IV. A Metamodern Glance: Synthesizing Between Modern and Postmodern Themes and Techniques

IV.1 Resurgence of Authenticity: Retrieving the Lost Fragments of Truth

In her article, *To Engage in Literature*, Nadine Feßler states that contemporary literature can no longer be understood as postmodern. She argues that contemporary literature moved away from postmodern traditions due to the fact that postmodernism has exhausted itself and failed to construct something useful for humanity (Amian 1 qtd. in Feßler). Furthermore, she discussed the return of some outdated literary concepts in contemporary literature that were neglected in postmodernism. These concepts that were popular in the modern era include authenticity, ethics, engagement and aesthetics. In a general sense, authenticity refers to the

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quality of being truthful and genuine (Oxford Reference). When linked to literature, authenticity refers to the extent to which a work of literature is true to life, whether in terms of its characters, settings, and plot. Accordingly, Ulla Haselstein and others –in their book *In the Pathos of Authenticity*– 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. (19 qtd. in Feßler)

In other words, the contemporary literature experiences a comeback of authenticity, yet without the demise of postmodern scepticism. Thus, it is a ‘new authenticity’ different from its predecessors.

Other literary critics also signalled this change in contemporary literature. For example, the English novelist Tom McCarthy declared in 2010 that “the task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of modernism” (38 qtd. in James and Seshagiri). In addition, David James and Urmila Seshagiri noticed that several contemporary writers– they mentioned Zadie Smith, J.M Coetzee and Julian Barnes– demonstrated a revived interest in modernism in their writings. Accordingly, this revived interest has triggered the return of some conventional literary forms like the historical novel, the realist novel and the family saga (Youssef 40). The new authenticity comes with a renewed interest in engaging the reader and making art for art’ sake. In this light, Jeffrey Eugenides states that: “I don’t see myself as a high postmodernist...Middlesex is a postmodern book in many ways, but it is also very old-fashioned. Reusing classical motifs is a fundamental of postmodern practice, of course, but telling a story isn’t always. I like narrative. I read for it and write for it” (qtd in Feßler). Thus, what Eugenides said captures the change in contemporary literature in which writers are going beyond the borders of postmodern cynicism. To sum up, many literary critics have signalled a change in contemporary literature that is characterised by the return of outdated concepts such as authenticity but without the total dismissal of postmodern ideas.

IV.2 Beyond the Curtain of Irony: Embracing Sincerity Anew

Post-irony, synonymous with the concept of New Sincerity, is a literary and cultural phenomenon that emerged in the late 20th century. It is characterized by a blurring of the lines between sincerity and irony as it uses irony as a device to convey a sincere message. Post-irony

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is regarded as a reaction to the excesses of postmodern irony, which had become increasingly cynical and nihilistic. The term "post-irony" was first coined by the literary critic David Foster Wallace in his essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction". Wallace criticized the cynical and unproductive nature of irony and called for a new use of irony that writes in the service of sincerity (Coennen 2). The concept of post-irony goes hand in hand with metamodern theory as both of them attempt to synthesize between modern sincerity and postmodern irony. In this light, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker state that:

Indeed, both metamodernism and the postmodern turn to pluralism, irony and deconstruction in order to counter a modernist fanaticism. However, in metamodernism this pluralism and irony are utilized to counter the modern aspiration, while in postmodernism they are employed to cancel it out. That is to say, metamodern irony is intrinsically bound to desire, whereas postmodern irony is inherently tied to apathy. (10)

In other words, it can be argued that post-irony or metamodern irony includes and surpasses postmodern irony as it attempts to express genuine emotions and beliefs. Some authors that are regarded as metamodernist writers, as well as post-ironists, include Dave Eggers, Jonathan Franzen, Haruki Murakami, Zadie Smith, and David Foster Wallace (Bunnell 3).

IV.3 Dancing with Shadows: The Intrigue of "As if Thinking"

Another key feature in metamodern philosophy is its adaptation of the "as if thinking" approach. In their article Notes on Metamodernism, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker align modernism and postmodernism with Hegel's positive idealism that declares the "end of history". In contrast, they associate metamodernism with Kant's negative idealism (5). They argued that metamodernism adopts Kant's philosophy that can be described as "as if thinking". In their words: "The current, metamodern discourse also acknowledges that history's purpose will never be fulfilled because it does not exist. Critically, however, it nevertheless takes toward it as if it does exist. Inspired by a modern naiveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism." (ibid) Thus, metamodernism is a movement that is constantly moving, always seeking new ways to understand the world. It is a movement that is aware of its limitations, yet instead of being stuck by postmodern incredulity, it nevertheless moves forward as if it can achieve its goals. It commits itself to an impossible possibility. Therefore, metamodernism includes and surpasses both modern and postmodern philosophies. By the same token, when applied to literature, metamodern writers are conscious of their limits, just like postmodernists,

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yet they still try to find new ways to engage with the reader and to create a sense of hope that was lost in the postmodern era.

V. Contextualising *The Promise* by Damon Galgut

Damon Galgut is one of the revered South African writers. Born in 1963 Pretoria in South Africa, Galgut witnessed the apartheid era as well as its demise. This profound experience serves as a driving force behind his literary works. Growing up in South Africa as an Afrikaner during a time of institutionalized racial segregation and oppression, Galgut witnessed the injustices and complexities of apartheid. These experiences have undoubtedly shaped his worldview and have provided him with a unique perspective on the apartheid experience. Throughout his career as a writer, he was shortlisted twice for the Booker Man prize, in 2003 for his novel *The Good Doctor* and in 2010 for his novel *In a Strange Room* before he eventually won the prize for his latest work *The Promise* in 2021. In his writing, he often explores themes of identity, power dynamics, and the struggle for justice in a society marked by racism and inequality. By drawing from his personal encounters with apartheid, Galgut brings an authentic and emotional depth to his storytelling, allowing readers to engage with the complexities of South Africa's history and its impact on individuals. Galgut's literature is not limited to capturing the injustices of the apartheid era. He also explores the aftermaths of the apartheid system and challenges of reconciliation and the ongoing struggles faced by the country as it attempts to heal and move forward. His work offers nuanced portrayals of the human experience in post-apartheid South Africa using interesting plots and characters.

His latest work *The Promise* is a family saga that follows the life of Swarts. This family consists of Manie, his wife Rachel, and their children Anton, Astrid, and Amor. The plot is about the death curse that every decade hits one member of the Swart family for his/her refusal to fulfil the dying wish of their mother Rachel who wanted to bequeath a house on the family's farm to their black maid Salome. Each of *The Promise*'s four chapters centres around the death of a different Swart. Each death is paralleled with a defining moment in South African history. The plot starts with the death of Rachel, the mother, during the State of Emergency. Then, the second chapter revolves around the death of the father in 1995 which coincided with the World Cup Rugby 1995, Mandela's presidency and the end of the apartheid regime. The third chapter follows the death of Astrid around the time of Mbeki's inauguration in 2004. Finally, the story ends with the death of Anton in 2018 which coincided with Jacob Zuma's eventual resignation leaving the youngest daughter Amor alone with the task of fulfilling the promise. The promise

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ignored by the members of the family over the years becomes an allegory for the broken promises made to black South Africans at the dawn of the country's non-racial democracy in 1994.

conclusion

Metamodernism can be seen as an artistic and cultural movement that seeks to synthesize the key elements of both modernism and postmodernism. While modernism emphasized progress, totality, and sincerity, and postmodernism embraced scepticism, plurality, and irony, metamodernism synthesised the two movements by adopting some concepts such as post-irony, new authenticity and as-if thinking. It is self-conscious of its limitations but unlike postmodernism; it nevertheless pushes forward in the hopes of finding meaning. On the other hand, Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021) is a family saga that explores apartheid as well as post-apartheid South Africa. Spanning four decades, each chapter revolves around the death of one member of the Swarts family and each death is paralleled with an important event in South African history.

Chapter Two:

*Exploring Prominent Metamodernist Themes with
Relevance to the Novel*

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Introduction

Metamodernism seeks to restore the very concepts that were praised in modernism and neglected in postmodernism. These concepts include authenticity, engagement and sincerity. However, that does not indicate the total demise of postmodern traditions like that of scepticism and irony. In this regard, this chapter aims to explore the themes of Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021) through a metamodern lens. It analyses how the themes of death, history and morality suggest the return of authenticity and engagement in a way that goes beyond the postmodern frame, and thus signals a change in contemporary literature that can be aligned with metamodernism.

Chapter Two: Exploring Prominent Metamodernist Themes with Relevance to the Novel

I. Exploring Metamodernist Touch on the Theme of History

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, Ulla Haselstein and others observed the return of authenticity and engagement through the renewed interest in what she called ‘real things’ (Feßler). In his novel, *The Promise* (2021), Damon Galgut employs death as the central theme of his novel. Under the metamodern perspective, it can be interpreted as an attempt to restore the authenticity and engagement of modernism along with the dark humour and irony of postmodernism. In order to support this claim, we will explore the significance of death in philosophy and literature; then, we explore the theme of death in Galgut’s novel through a metamodern perspective.

Death has been one of the major concerns of philosophy since the beginning of history. It is a universal experience that every human being inevitably and eventually goes through. One of the prominent philosophers who devoted all of his efforts to the fundamental question of death is Martin Heidegger. This German philosopher considers death to be a fundamental aspect of human existence. He believed that living an authentic life requires a confrontation with one's finitude and mortality. As he puts it: “The end of the world is death. The ‘end’ that belongs to existence limits and defines the whole of Existence... death is just a fellow Existence.” (qtd. in Shariatinia 2). In other words, he argues that authentic existence requires a confrontation with the limits and finitude of human existence and that this confrontation is necessary for a true understanding of what it means to be human. By the same token, He believes that inauthentic existence involves a refusal to confront these limits and a reliance on preconceived notions and frameworks for understanding the world. This inauthentic mode of existence is characterised by a lack of true freedom and a failure to take responsibility for one's own life.

Accordingly, death has been one of the major themes in literature. Throughout history, many authors used the themes of death as a tool to explore the human condition and a wide range of emotions and experiences. In the novel, *The Promise* (2021), the author’s main theme is centred around death. Each chapter revolves around the death of one member of the Swarts family and the funeral that follows it. In his interview with Ella Fox-Martins, Galgut states that the reason behind this comes from a conversation with his friend who told him about the loss of his family members in a car accident (Fox-Martins). Despite the depressing nature of the topic of death, Galgut’s friend told the story in a seemingly sarcastic yet interesting way. This conversation inspired Galgut to write a family saga about an Afrikaner family that gathers each decade for the funeral of a family member. Each funeral offers an unusually structured look at the

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development of the family over time. In addition, each funeral is set in a different decade of South African history. Thus, it offers the opportunity to shed light on important historical events of South Africa ranging from the last years of Apartheid to the presidencies of Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma.

Moreover, in another interview, he states that the novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930) by William Faulkner also gave him inspirations to write his novel (Damon Galgut, 00:26:46-00:26:55). Galgut acknowledges that Faulkner's ability to delve into the psychological depths of his characters greatly inspired his narrative approach in his novel. Faulkner's emphasis on exploring the internal conflicts, desires, and flaws of his characters resonated with Galgut's storytelling aspirations. By drawing inspiration from Faulkner, Galgut aimed to write a family saga that follows the multiple deaths of members of the Swarts family. By doing so, he induced his readers to intimately connect with the character's struggles and dilemmas. In fact, Faulkner's novel, just like Galgut's, revolves around one family, the Bundren. It follows the Bundren family's journey to bury their mother, and it explores the complexities of grief, family bonds, and the human condition. Having multiple narrators in the novel highlights the different reactions and perspectives that each family member has towards death and their shared experience. Both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Promise* delve into family's experience and the impact of death, but they differ in their settings, and thematic exploration. Faulkner's novel emphasizes the fragmented perspectives of a single journey, while Galgut's work spans for four decades, from 1986 to 2018. Each decade features the death of one member of the Swarts family, and each death offers an opportunity to look at the development of the family as well as the development of the country.

The first chapter, entitled 'MA' begins in 1986 with the death of Rachel, the matriarch of the family. On her deathbed, she promised her husband Manie to give their house to her black maid, Salome and their 13-year-old daughter, Amor, coincidentally overhears the conversation. The promise triggers a chain of events that reflects racism and hypocrisy in the last years of apartheid South Africa. There were different reactions to the mother's death. Amor could not accept the death of her mother; "No, no. It can't be true what her aunt has just told her. Nobody is dead. It is just a word" she ponders (Galgut 1). Manie, the father, falls into depression following the tragic loss of his wife. he sorrows in anger: "Her absence is like a steely coldness deep inside. She knew how to get to the innermost part of me, sticking her little knives in there. Couldn't tell the difference between hate and love" (Galgut 9). However, he denies the promise he made to his wife when his daughter confronted him about it. Anton, their son, believes that

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he caused his mother's death because he shot and killed a black woman while he was in the military. Astrid, their other daughter, showed no emotions. Aunt Marina, Rachel's sister-in-law, is a racist who disapproves of Rachel's marriage to Manie because she is Jewish whereas the Swarts are Dutch protestants. She is even more upset when she learns that Rachel has asked Manie to give Salome the house. Marina believes that this is a betrayal of the family and that it will only encourage other black people to make similar demands. The first chapter explores the impact of death on the Swarts family which is portrayed as a microcosm of South African society. It is also a reminder that death is a universal experience and that it can touch everyone, regardless of their race, class, or social status. Thus, it forces the family to confront their own mortality and the fragility of their way of life. It also exposes their different attitudes towards apartheid.

The second chapter, entitled "Pa", is set during the first years of the post-apartheid South Africa. It is centred around the death of Manie Swart, the patriarch of the family. Manie is poisoned by a snake while working at his reptile park. The family once again gather for the funeral, and the issue of the promise is once again addressed. Amor is keen to fulfil the promise arguing that "the laws have changed" (Galgut 98). She is the only one who supports the promise. She believes that it is the right thing to do and that it would be a way to honour their father's legacy. However, her older brother, Anton refuses to do so. Astrid, the middle child, and Marina, their aunt, agree with him. they do not believe that the promise should be fulfilled because it would be a betrayal of their father's memory who showed no intentions to fulfil it. The issue of the promise is unresolved at the end of the chapter. The father who made the promise died and so it would seem that the promise died with him.

The third chapter, entitled Astrid, is set ten years after the death of Manie in 2005. It is centred around the death of Astrid Swart, the middle child of the family. Before her death, she was married to a rich politician and had an affair with a black politician although she previously expressed her racism towards the blacks. Then, one day while driving home from work, Astrid is hijacked and killed. This hijack highlights the violence and crime that still plague South Africa, even after the abolition of apartheid. The chapter ends with the Swart family gathered at Astrid's funeral. Anton and Amor meet once again, and Amor raises the question about the promise to her brother. Anton is now in a loveless marriage and huge debts. He has also decided to give up his job and become a writer. struggling to make ends meet, and he is not sure what the future holds for him. Amor still holds that the promise is important, and she wants Anton to

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fulfil it. She argues that it is the right thing to do and that they must fulfil their mother's dying wish. Anton is initially reluctant, but he eventually agrees to think about it.

The fourth and the last chapter, entitled Anton, is set in 2018. This year experienced the national celebration of Zouma's long-awaited resignation after a disappointing presidency. Anton who suffers from alcohol addiction, a failed marriage and a failed career as a writer eventually commits suicide leaving his youngest sister alone on the farm. Anton's death is a reminder of the pain and suffering that still exists in South Africa, and that the country still struggles to overcome the legacy of the apartheid. Amor is determined to fulfil the promise that her father made to her mother.

Gathering the above points, metamodernism values authenticity, emotional depth and the exploration of human experiences. In his novel, Galgut uses the theme of death to make his work more authentic and thus engages the reader more with the plot. Each funeral allows the reader to see the development of the family over time as well as the development of the country. To illustrate, the first funeral, for Rachel Swart, highlights the last years of the apartheid system. The second funeral, for Manie Swart, highlights the complexities of the first years of post-apartheid South Africa. The third funeral, for Astrid Swart, is set in the 2000s when South Africa experienced high rates of violence and crime. The fourth and last funeral, for Anton Swart, is set in the 2020s, it demonstrates how South Africa is still grappling with the legacy of apartheid. This revived interest in real themes, such as death, is one of the crucial strategies that metamodernist writers tend to employ to install authenticity and engage the reader more with the plot.

II. Exploring Metamodernist Touch on the Theme of History

Damon Galgut's *The Promise* is considered to be one of the latest prominent works of apartheid literature. The latter is one of the main literary canons of South Africa that continues to be studied and celebrated for its contributions and its role in documenting the challenges of apartheid as well as post-apartheid. Apartheid literature is considered to be a part of the postmodern canon because it attempts to question and deconstruct the grand narratives of apartheid South Africa and to give voice to the marginalized, mainly the blacks. As a result, like other works in apartheid literature, the theme of history stands as one of the prominent themes of *The Promise*. However, the way the theme of history is treated in the novel suggests a change in contemporary literature that differs in many ways from the typical postmodern

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deconstruction of history. In fact, it resonates with the metamodern revival of authenticity, engagement and sincerity.

The Promise is centred around the Swarts family which is a white Afrikaner family. This family owns a farm outside the city of Pretoria and has some black servants. The story is, thus, narrated from the oppressor's side which is different from most of the typical postmodern works that tend to explore the story from the eyes of the oppressed. The black characters, mainly Salome and her son Lukas, still play a role in the plot but they are no longer the primary focus, and they are treated as no more than secondary characters. In his review of the novel entitled *A Family at Odds Reveals a Nation in the Throes*, James Wood finds that silencing the black characters in Galgut's novel is both saddening and eloquent because it reveals the idea that the blacks were indeed silenced in reality. Similarly, in her article, *To Engage Literature*, Nadine Feßler reports that some contemporary writers, such as Jonathan Safran Foer and Bernhard Schlink, experiment with new ways to engage the reader. In their writings about the Holocaust, these two writers tend to establish a new form of communication between the oppressors and the oppressed which was "unthinkable in a postmodern world" where the story is told mainly from the victims' perspectives. Thus, there is a noticeable change in contemporary literature that tends to surpass and move beyond the traditions of postmodernism. In this light, Galgut tends to shed light on the complexities of the experiences of the whites, as well as the blacks, in South Africa, and how the past continues to shape the present for all South Africans, regardless of race. Therefore, he triggers a unique reading experience that forces the reader to engage with the story and prevents him from feeling detached from it.

In addition, Galgut's background and perspectives, albeit implicitly, play a significant role in shaping the story as well as the theme of history. In fact, the Swarts family, the central family of the novel, reflects many aspects of Galgut's personal life. To illustrate, he and the Swarts are Afrikaners from Pretoria, and they both lived through the apartheid era as well as the post-apartheid era. In addition, Galgut portrays his experience as a Jewish Afrikaner living among the Dutch Protestant Afrikaner majority through the character of Rachel. Born as a Jewish Afrikaner, she converted to Dutch Protestantism when she married Manie, whose family are Dutch Protestant, but she reverted to Judaism before her death. Galgut explores the tensions between Jewish and Dutch Protestant Afrikaners in Rachel's relationship with her sister-in-law Tannie Marrina, who despises the Jews. Although Galgut does not write explicitly about his own life in the novel, his personal background and experiences are noticeable in the novel. This adds to the authenticity of his novel, and it incites the reader to engage more with the story. As

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a consequence, the novel challenges Ronald Barthes' declaration of the "death of the author". The latter refers to the title of Barthes' 1967 essay in which he argues that the meaning of a text is not determined by the author's intention, but rather by the reader's own interpretation (Barthes). However, in the case of *The Promise*, Galgut's background and perspectives play a significant role in shaping the meaning of the story in a way that is not negligible. The readers can still create their own interpretation of *The Promise*, yet Galgut's personal background and experiences can provide important context for understanding the meaning of the novel. Thus, the novel moves beyond the borders of postmodernism as it suggests the return of the author rather than its demise.

Moreover, Galgut's writing acknowledges the progress of the South African community over the years as well as its setbacks due to the legacy of apartheid. In this light, it can be aligned with the metamodern quest that displays incredulity towards any possible solution or restitution, yet, instead of being crippled by it like postmodernists, it chooses to move forward hoping for a better future. Vermeulen and van den Akker align this quest with Kant's negative idealism which is characterised by "as-if thinking" (5).

To illustrate, the plot is divided into four sections. Each section revolves around the death of one member of the Swarts. The plot spans for four decades in a linear and chronological order. Each chapter highlights how the history of apartheid affects the South African community even after its demise.

The first chapter starts with the death of Rachel the mother who died in 1986 during the last years of the apartheid system. Before her death, she made her husband promise to bequeath the house to their black maid, Salome, which he accepts albeit he does not intend to do so. Amor, the youngest daughter, who coincidentally overheard the promise, could not understand why the promise could not be fulfilled. But "History has not yet trod on her. She has no idea what country she is living in." (Galgut 54). This suggests that history inevitably plays a major role in shaping one's personality and worldview. Amor's lack of knowledge about her country's history supports the idea that people's perspectives and attitudes are often shaped by the historical context in which they live in. This chapter also highlights the difficulties that the blacks had under the apartheid system, and it demonstrates how they were treated as an inferior race that served the white Afrikaners and did not have the right to own property of their own.

The second chapter is set ten years later. It highlights the death of the father, Manie as well as the early years of the post-apartheid era. This chapter highlights the progress and

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improvements that have been made in South Africa since the end of apartheid. For example, the country hosted the 1995 Rugby World Cup which was the first international event that the country had after many years of international boycott during the apartheid era. In Addition, the blacks gained many rights that they were deprived of including the right to own personal land. However, the second chapter also highlights the legacy of apartheid. the Swarts family, except the youngest daughter Amor, refuse to fulfil the promise that their father made to their mother. This refusal symbolizes how apartheid has continued to shape the lives of South Africans, even after the end of the system itself. The third chapter jumps ten years forward. It is centred around the death of Astrid, the middle child of the Swarts, who was killed in a car hijack. This chapter highlights the fact that South Africa has one of the highest crime rates in the world. Additionally, it demonstrates how the legacy of apartheid continues to shape South Africa in many ways including crime and violence.

The last chapter is set in 2018 in parallel with President Zouma's long-awaited resignation from his post. Anton committed suicide and left Amor alone on the farm. Being the rightful owner of the family farm, she goes on to Salome's house to fulfil the promise, but Lukas, Salome' son, confronts her. He accuses Amor of coming too late, and he bursts out of years of misery and suffering that his family endured over the years. He cries: "My mother was supposed to get this house a long time back. Thirty years ago! Instead, she got lies and promises. And you did nothing" (Galgut 190). Lukas' words demonstrate that Amor's quest for restitution is not achievable or satisfactory. Adding fuel to the fire, another white family appeared claiming ownership of the farm. Amor, nevertheless, proceeds with fulfilling the promise. The story ends with Amor standing on the roof and gazing into the sky while thinking about her life. She acknowledges that she is getting old like "a branch that's losing its leaves" (Galgut 195). She, nonetheless, also recognizes that "other branches will fill the space" (ibid). In other words, she finds hope in the fact that a new life will grow from the ashes of the old, and the past must be laid to rest to survive whatever happens next.

To sum up, Galgut arguably treats the theme of history in a way that does not fit within the postmodern frame. first, the story is narrated from the oppressors' side, in this case, the white Afrikaner family of the Swart, as an attempt to establish a new form of communication between the oppressors and the oppressed which was uncommon in postmodern literature. Secondly, Galgut's own personal background and experiences as a white Jewish Afrikaner play a significant role in shaping the story albeit implicitly. This makes the work more authentic and engaging and challenges the proclaimed death of the author of postmodernism. Lastly, Galgut's

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novel displays incredulity towards any possible solution or restitution for the legacy of apartheid, yet, instead of being crippled by it like postmodernists, it chooses to move forward “as if” a better future can be reached.

III. Exploring Metamodernist Touch on the Theme of History

As previously discussed, one of the major characteristics of postmodernism is the death of the centre. This is illustrated in Ronald Barthes’ literary “theory of the death of the author”. In this theory, he criticised the traditional ways of analysing literary texts in which literary critics emphasize the author’s background and intentions. Instead, he argues that the text should be interpreted independently from its author. In addition, postmodernists reject the idea of a centred morality or vision; they embrace the abundance of relativistic perspectives and highlight the fact that they are often constructed and subjective. This resulted in what Frederic Jameson described as the waning of affect. In short, he argues that postmodernism’s rejection of the centre has resulted in a decline in the emotional or moral impact of a work of literature. In contrast, Metamodernism emerges as a reaction to the fragmentation and nihilism of postmodernism. It seeks to restore a sense of meaning and purpose but without the totalizing and dogmatic claims of modernism.

In her article, *To Engage in Literature*, Nadine Feßler reports her observations about contemporary literature in relation to metamodern theory. She observed the renewed interest in ethics and morality. She argues that contemporary writers do not entirely dismiss postmodern ideas, but rather incorporates them in order to achieve different outcomes. In this light, David Foster Wallace criticised the depthlessness and the superficiality of postmodernism, and he suggested a way out, as he puts it:

we fiction writers... won’t (can’t) dare try to use serious art to advance ideologies... People would either laugh or be embarrassed for us. Given this (and it is a given), who is to blame for the unseriousness of our serious fiction? The culture, the laughers? But they wouldn’t (could not) laugh if a piece of morally passionate, passionately moral fiction was also ingenious and radiantly human fiction. (qtd in Feßler).

In other words, what Wallace attempted to say is that if writers wanted their readers to engage with their texts, they should write in a way that makes them inevitably care about the characters and the story. He believed that fiction could be a useful tool for entertainment as well as moral

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education and social change. He argued that by creating characters and stories that are passionate and thought-provoking, writers can help their readers to see the world in new ways and to understand the experiences of others. He also believed that fiction can help readers to reflect on their own values and to make better choices in their lives.

Moreover, Nicole Krauss, an American novelist, praises the postmodern writer, Don DeLillo whom she learnt from and got inspired to write, yet she also points to his limitations that she attempts to avoid in her writing, in her words:

DeLillo is very good – one of the best really – But there are things DeLillo doesn't seem to care about that I do. Heat, for example. I mean emotional heat: passion, jealousy, love, grief. The whole messy scope of human emotion. He seems to court detachment. He's not so interested in his characters' psychology. He's not even, I don't think, interested in rousing any compassion for them. To me that's a very limited way of writing. So while I have learned from him, and I take my hat off to him, I don't really want to be like him.[5]

Thus, contemporary writers like Wallace and Krauss acknowledge the influence of postmodernism on their writings and perspectives. However, they also acknowledge its limitations and express their intentions to move beyond it by focusing on morality, ethics and other notions that were neglected in the deconstructionist era of postmodernism.

In this light, one of the central themes of Damon Galgut's *The Promise* is that of morality. Galgut places the character of Amor as the moral centre of the story. When she was a kid, she got struck by a lightning and she would have died had her father not taken care of her. This incident made her clairvoyant. Her clairvoyance gives her a unique perspective on the world, seeing things that other people cannot see. Before her mother's death, she coincidentally overheard her dying wish which she conveyed to her father asking him to give the house to their black maid. However, when she confronted her family about the promise, they ignored her and refused to listen to her. For them, she is being naïve and does not understand the country she lives in. As the story progresses over the years, she disappears from the farm as well as the narrative, but she occasionally returns to attend the funerals of her family members. She devotes her life to work as a nurse out of a misguided sense of restitution. Amor's commitment to honour her mother's dying wish represents a powerful symbol of morality. Thus, as the story is filled with self-centred characters that include her father, siblings and aunt, she acts like the moral

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compass, a true north, for the reader. Amor's thoughts, emotions and actions guide the reader throughout the story in a way that does fit the traditions of postmodernism.

Therefore, this suggests that Galgut and other contemporary writers are coming back to the traditions of modernism that embrace the centre and commit themselves to writing stories that explore complex moral and social issues in a way that is clear, sincere and insightful.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to analyse the themes of Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise* through a metamodern lens. It concludes that the themes of death, history and morality, exhibit some metamodern features. To illustrate, Galgut uses death as the central theme of his novel to make his work more authentic and thus engages the reader more with the plot. Each of the four chapters revolves around the funeral of one member of the Swart family. Each funeral is juxtaposed with an important landmark in the history of South Africa which adds to the emotional depth of the story. In addition, the theme of history is explored from the oppressors' side which differs from the traditions of postmodernism where the story is narrated from the side of the oppressed. Moreover, while the novel expresses incredulity towards any possible solution or restitution for the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, it chooses to move forward hoping for a better future. Lastly, the novel challenges the claim of postmodernism of the death of the author in the sense that Galgut's background and experiences play a significant role in shaping the story albeit implicitly. Besides, the novel upholds the notion of a moral centre through the character of Amor, the protagonist, which makes the work more authentic, engaging and sincere.

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Introduction

Metamodernism seeks to restore the very concepts that were praised in modernism and neglected in postmodernism. These concepts include authenticity, engagement and sincerity. However, that does not indicate the total demise of postmodern traditions like that of scepticism and irony. In this regard, this chapter aims to explore the stylistic techniques used in *The Promise* by Damon Galgut. It suggests that post-irony, narrative style, and intertextuality might have contributed to the novel's metamodernist sensibility.

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I. Post-irony: A Metamodern Touch

One of the major traits of the postmodern zeitgeist is irony. In fact, Linda Hutcheon considers irony, along with scepticism, parody and intertextuality, as what defines the era of postmodernism (Ooteghem 32). As a reaction to the ideals of modernism, postmodernist writers used irony in their writing to uncover the contradictions and the flaws in the grand narratives that include politics, social norms and culture. Postmodernism rejects the notion of a universal truth and embraces the multiplicity of perspectives and possible interpretations of the world. In addition, postmodernists, through the use of irony, question the nature of reality and representation. They argue that a fixed interpretation of a text is unattainable due to the undecidability of language. In this light, irony is used to reveal the gap between reality and representation and to show how language can be used to manipulate and deceive. However, while it succeeded in exposing those problems, it does not appear to offer solutions for the question it was posing. The readers are left with a sense of alienation, cynicism, absurdism and even nihilism. To counteract this unproductive nature of postmodern irony, post-irony emerges as a possible solution in contemporary literature. It blurs the lines between sincerity and irony as it uses irony as a device to convey a sincere message. By going further, it is not a juxtaposition or a clash between cynicism and hope but rather the culmination of the two. Thus, it can be argued that it comes as a response to postmodernism rather than a mere revival of modern enthusiasm. It seeks to find a balance between irony and sincerity. Metamodernists use irony to highlight the contradictions and absurdities of the world, but they also use it to convey a sincere message. Post-ironic writers are not afraid to be earnest and passionate, even if they are also aware of the dangers of naivety.

In the context of *The Promise* by Damon Galgut, post-irony is used to navigate the legacy of apartheid exposing the hypocrisy and false promises of restitution and reconciliation of the post-apartheid governments. Nonetheless, it is also used to convey a sincere message about the importance of hope and reconciliation. To illustrate, the story revolves around the Swart family, a white Afrikaner family that lives in South Africa. Ironically, the word Swart means black in the Afrikaner language. This can be interpreted as a demonstration of the complex and ambivalent relationship that white South Africans have with race. It can also demonstrate the idea that the white Afrikaners, though not like the blacks, suffer from the legacy of apartheid; they are both complicit and victims of this discriminatory system.

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Moreover, Post-irony can be seen in the way the black characters are treated in the novel. Salmon and her son Lukas, although having the rightful inheritance of the house, are neglected in most parts of the novel. Salome “is apparently invisible. And whatever Salome feels is invisible too” (Galgut 10). As previously mentioned, this shift from telling the story from the perspectives of the oppressed to the oppressor’s is part of the newfound engagement that some contemporary writers tend to exercise in their writing (Feßler). Swart family acts like a microsome of the whole Afrikaner community. In his novel, Galgut writes about the Swarts that:

There is nothing unusual or remarkable about the Swart family, oh no, they resemble the family from the next farm and the one beyond that, just an ordinary bunch of white South Africans, and if you don’t believe it then listen to us speak. We sound no different from the other voices, we sound the same and we tell the same stories, in an accent squashed underfoot, all the consonants decapitated and the vowels stove in. (145)

The focus on the Swarts and the ironic silence of the black characters in Galgut's *The Promise* serves to highlight the ongoing marginalisation of black South Africans even after the abolition of apartheid. They also expose the hypocrisy of the post-apartheid's unfulfilled promises of restitution and reconciliation.

In addition, the use of post-irony is practised through the use of a free-floating unreliable narrator. Galgut uses this narrator playfully as he, often without warning, interferes in scenes talking directly to the reader and throwing satirical comments. For example, when Salome’s hometown is mentioned, the narrator addresses the reader: “and if Salome home hasn’t been mentioned before it’s because you haven’t asked, you didn’t seem to act”. (Galgut 190). Here, the narrator playfully invites the reader to engage more with the story. The free-floating narrator also allows Galgut to explore the complex and ambivalent relationship that white South Africans have with race. For example, in one scene, the narrator interrupts the story to comment on Anton’s relationship with Salome; he states that: “When he was a little, he used to call her Mama..., a common South African confusion.” (Galgut 32) This comment adds a layer of satire and highlights how even innocent children can be influenced by racism inherited in the society. Thereby, it sheds light on the ambivalence of white South Africans toward race.

Another example of post-irony is exemplified in the character of Amor. She is the protagonist and the moral centre of the story. She was hit by a lightning strike when she was little which made her clairvoyant, kind and sympathetic. She overheard her father’s promise to her dying

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mother that he would give the house to their black maid. However, unlike her father, her aunt and her siblings, she was the only one who was willing to fulfil the promise, but she could not persuade her family. Thus, she left the farm to pursue her studies and her career as a nurse driven by a misguided desire to make amends. Only after 30 years since the promise was made, she was the only surviving member of the Swart family. When she went to fulfil the promise, Lukas scolded her for her absence and delay. Despite all of this, Amor's kindness, selflessness to the point of self-abnegation, and commitment represent a potential, albeit imperfect, hope towards the future.

In summary, post-irony is a technique that uses irony as a device to convey a sincere message. In the context of Galgut's novel, post-irony can be exemplified in various ways, like in the family name Swart, the silence of the black characters in the novel, the satirical comments of the narrator and Amor's flawed yet persistent commitment to fulfil the promise.

II. A Metamodern Touch on Narrative Style

As previously discussed, Metamodernism emerged as a reaction to the irony and cynicism of postmodernism. Metamodernists seek to restore the same concepts that postmodernism declared dead or outdated. These concepts include authenticity, engagement and sincerity. This revived interest triggered a comeback of conventional literary forms like the historical novel, the realist novel and the family saga (Feßler). This renewed focus breathes new life into traditional literary forms and allows authors to explore the complexities of the contemporary world while preserving a sense of earnestness and genuine expression in their works.

In the context of Galgut's *The Promise*, the latter is a family saga that revolves around the Swart family. The novel follows the Swart family over the course of several decades, as they navigate the social and political changes of South Africa during the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The family saga is one of the well-suited genres for metamodernist exploration. Family sagas often trace the lives of multiple generations of characters and allow readers to see how individuals and families are shaped by the society, politics, and culture of their time. Moreover, Galgut's use of the family saga is unique and experimental because each chapter revolves around the death of one family member of the Swarts, and each death is interwoven with an insight into the country's development. This contributed to the overall success of the novel and granted it the Booker Prize in 2021.

Another unique element is the multiplicity of narrators. Galgut fractures the narrative into multiple points of view of the characters along with the presence of a free-floating narrator. The

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narrator occupies an ambiguous space as he swings between the first and third person, drifting from a tight focus on a single character to a more piercing, detached view, often within a single paragraph (Day). This narrative fluidity has been compared to the works of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner (Alter). Through the use of stream of consciousness and unreliable narrator, the author seeks to connect with readers on an emotional and intellectual level by allowing them to live the story from different angles. Thus, in this aspect, the story demonstrates some modernist features. However, in other parts of the story, it is more self-aware and ironic. To illustrate, the narrator, sometimes, seems to lose control of the narrative. At one point it begins to follow a homeless man named Bob, then after two pages it wonders why this “unwashed raggedy man” is “obscuring our view”. “Why did he waste our time with his stories?” (Galgut,135) the narrator asks, calling him a self-centred egoist and telling the reader to pay him no mind. But in this way, the beggar arrives at the reader’s window, “insistent on being noticed”, somehow hijacking the narrative and forcing the narrator into telling his story – a story on which the narrator does not seem to have a firm grip. This adds to the metafictional aspect of the novel. Metafiction is a form of narrative that continually reminds its audience that it is a fictional work (Klinkowitz). This playfulness exhibits the metamodern oscillation between the irony of postmodernism and the sincerity of modernism.

In addition, there is also an interlocutor, a second-person ‘you’ that the narrator is addressing. The narrator often challenges readers and adds satirical comments on the events of the plot. For example, in one scene, just one day after the mother’s death, the family had a funeral repast in which people gather for a meal shared by family and friends of the deceased person after the funeral. He comments that: “A curious scene, this low-key festivity just a day after Ma has died, but one the other hand people have to eat, life goes on. They’ll be drinking and making bawdy jokes soon after you go too.” (Galgut 35). This kind of satirical comments teases readers, and reminds them that death is a natural part of life, and that even in the midst of grief, people will find ways to cope and move on. It also serves to make readers laugh even in the midst of a serious event. Thus, the reader’s experience can be both entertaining and thought-provoking.

Gathering the above points, it can be argued that Galgut’s unique narrative style in *The Promise* features some metamodernist elements. To illustrate, it seeks to restore conventional forms of writing, as in this case family saga. It also seeks to restore some modern traditions as it experiments with multiple points of view, and a free-floating narrator, but without the demise of postmodern metafiction and satire as an attempt to engage the reader more with the story.

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III. A Metamodern Touch on Intertextuality

One of the goals of metamodernism is to restore some modernist traditions. To achieve this, one of the techniques that they use in their writings is intertextuality. The latter covers the range of ways in which one 'text' may respond to, allude to, derive from, mimic, or adapt to another (Oxford reference). Metamodernists often mimic or allude to the literary themes or techniques of the major modernist writers. In the context of *The Promise* by Damon Galgut, many literary critics have linked the novel's experimental prose to modernist masters like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner (Alter).

To illustrate, James Wood, in his article entitled *A Family at Odds Reveals a Nation in the Throes*, comments that:

In scope, seriousness, and experimental ambition, modernist writing like Woolf's sometimes appears to have expired along with its serious and experimental epoch, a moment when political and moral disenchantment was met by a belief in literature's regenerative power. Yet Damon Galgut's remarkable new novel, "The Promise" (Europa), suggests that the demands of history and the answering cry of the novel can still powerfully converge.

In other words, Galgut's novel demonstrated a reappraisal of modernist techniques and emphases that were neglected in the postmodern era. This reappraisal is manifested in the use of an unreliable narrator along with multiple perspectives of the family members of the Swarts.

In addition, Galgut alludes to some prominent modernist works. For example, in the first chapter, when Amor could not understand why her father did not want to keep his promise to her mother, her brother explained that she did not know her country and that "History has not yet trod on her" (Galgut 54). Jon Day argues that that is an allusion to Joyce's Stephen Dedalus who declared that history was a "nightmare from which I am trying to awake" in *Ulysses*. This allusion highlights how both of Galgut and Joyce's works explore how history inevitably shapes and influences their characters' thoughts and behaviours.

Moreover, at the end of the novel, there is a scene which narrates that "The rain has no prejudice. It falls without judgement on both the living and the death" (Galgut 193). This is a direct allusion to the final scene in Joyce's short story *The Dead* which narrates that, instead of the rain, the snow fell "upon all the living and the dead" (Joyce 52). Both of the two scenes are significant symbols of the universality and the inevitability of death.

Chapter Three: Exploring Prominent Metamodernist Stylistic techniques with Relevance to the Novel

To sum up, Galgut's novel demonstrates the metamodern reappreciation of major modernist works that were neglected in the postmodern era. One of the ways in which Galgut restores modernist traditions is through the use of intertextuality. He often mimics or alludes to the literary themes or techniques of the major modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. By alluding to modernist works, he is creating a dialogue between his own work and the modernist tradition. This helps to place his novel in a broader literary context and to enrich the reader's experience.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to analyse the stylistic techniques used in Galgut's novel. It concludes that this novel's stylistic techniques can be aligned with the metamodernist quest that seeks to restore some outdated modern traditions, however, without the complete demise of postmodern traditions. To illustrate, the use of post-irony, which is one of the features of metamodernism, can be exemplified in various ways, like in the family name Swart, the silence of the black characters in the novel, the satirical comments of the narrator and Amor's flawed yet persistent commitment to fulfil the promise. In addition, the narrative style seeks to restore conventional forms of writing, as in this case family saga. It also seeks to restore some modern traditions as it experiments with multiple points of view, and a free-floating narrator, but without the demise of postmodern metafiction and satire as an attempt to engage the reader more with the story. Lastly, Galgut's novel demonstrates the metamodern reappreciation of major modernist works that were neglected in the postmodern era. One of how Galgut restores modernist traditions is through the use of intertextuality. In his novel, he alludes to the literary themes or techniques of the major modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. By alluding to modernist works, he is creating a dialogue between his own work and the modernist traditions. This helps to place his novel in a broader literary context and to enrich the reader's experience

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Throughout history, different philosophical movements emerged to guide mankind. These movements usually come successively and each one of them comes as a reaction to the one that precedes it. Each one typically challenges the prevailing assumptions, theories, or methods of its predecessors and proposes alternative explanations or approaches. Metamodernism is not different. Metamodernism is a cultural and philosophical movement that emerged in the 21st century as a reaction to the era of deconstruction and irony of postmodernism which in turn came as a reaction to the ideals of modernism.

To briefly summarise, modernism was characterised by a break from the past and an exuberant belief in progress, science and a reachable utopia. It generated grand narratives in almost every domain from sociology and politics to philosophy and literature. However, by the mid-20th century, it became clear that modernity and the Enlightenment project had failed to deliver their promises of progress towards utopia. In this regard, postmodernism emerged as the antithesis of modernism. It displayed incredulity towards the grand narratives and ideals of modernism. Its tone was characterised by irony, cynicism and relativism. Rather than seeking one totalising objective truth, postmodernism upheld the possibility of having multiple truths. It acknowledges the subjective and relativistic nature of knowledge and suggests that multiple truths can exist simultaneously. As a result, during the postmodern era, the world witnessed an abundance of small narratives which, consequently, led to the death of the centre. In other words, Postmodernism had no unified central vision. It had no anchor point to orient itself towards. Furthermore, while postmodernism was good at exposing the problems that modernism ignored, it failed to offer solutions, and this resulted in feelings of nihilism and absurdism. Therefore, the death of postmodernism and the rise of a new vision were inevitable. In this regard, metamodernism comes as a synthesis between modernism and postmodernism that includes and transcends both of the movements. It has been described as a pendulum that oscillates between modern sincerity and postmodern irony. Thus, it includes both modern and postmodern features and surpasses both of them.

In the context of Damon Galgut's *The Promise*, this dissertation concludes that the themes of death, history and morality as well as the stylistic techniques of post-irony, multiple narrators, intertextuality and stream of consciousness suggest the reappraisal of modernist traditions like authenticity engagement and sincerity but without the total demise of postmodern scepticism.

To illustrate, concerning the themes, the theme of death in Galgut's novel demonstrates the revived interest in real themes which is one of the crucial strategies that metamodernist writers tend to employ to install authenticity and engage the reader more with the plot. secondly, the

General Conclusion

theme of history is narrated from the perspective of the oppressors rather than the postmodern focus on the oppressed. In addition, it displays incredulity towards any possible solution or restitution for the legacy of apartheid, yet, instead of being crippled by it like postmodernists, it chooses to move forward “as-if” a better future can be reached. Lastly, as far as the theme of morality is concerned, Galgut places the protagonist Amor as the moral centre of the story which acts as a moral compass for the reader and explores complex moral and social issues in a way that is clear, sincere and insightful.

Concerning the stylistic techniques, post-irony is used to pass sincere and thought-provoking messages. This can be exemplified in various ways, like in the family name Swart, the silence of the black characters in the novel, the satirical comments of the narrator and Amor’s flawed yet persistent commitment to fulfilling the promise. In addition, it can be argued that Galgut’s unique narrative style in *The Promise* features some metamodernist elements. To illustrate, it seeks to restore conventional forms of writing, as in this case family saga. It also seeks to restore some modern traditions as it experiments with multiple points of view, and a free-floating narrator, but without the demise of postmodern metafiction and satire as an attempt to engage the reader more with the story. Lastly, Galgut's novel demonstrates the metamodern reappreciation of major modernist works that were neglected in the postmodern era. One of how Galgut restores modernist traditions is through the use of intertextuality. He mimics Woolfian stream of consciousness and alludes to some prominent modernist works such as James Joyce’ *The Dead*, and *Ulysses* and William Faulkner’s *As I Lie Dying*.

All in all, this study concludes that there is a change in contemporary literature that moves beyond postmodernism. This change is manifested in Metamodernism. The latter emerges as a possible synthesis between and postmodernism by oscillating between the two of them. In the context of apartheid literature, Galgut’s *The Promise*, albeit implicitly, can demonstrate some metamodernist features like the renewed interest in authenticity and engagement. Furthermore, this study recommends that further research should be done about metamodernism in contemporary literature in order to gain more insights and knowledge about the newly emerging movement.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Biography of Damon Galgut



Damon Galgut is a South African writer and playwright. He is known for writing many novels, plays and short stories that discuss the apartheid as well as the post-apartheid era in South Africa. Born on November 12 1963 in Pretoria, South Africa, to a Jewish Family, Galgut witnessed the peak and the fall of apartheid South Africa. He studied drama at the university of Cape Town. His experience as a white Afrikaner fuelled his literary inspirations.

He wrote his first novel *A Sinless Season* (1982) when he was 17. Then, he wrote his next book, a collection of short stories called *Small Circle of Beings* (1988). In 1992, he won The Central News Agency Literary Award for his novel *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991). His next novel, *The Quarry* (1995), was made into a feature film, with a 1998 release. A second feature film version was released in 2020. Galgut began to become better known outside South Africa for his fifth novel *The Good Doctor* (2003) which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. This novel also won also won the Commonwealth Writers

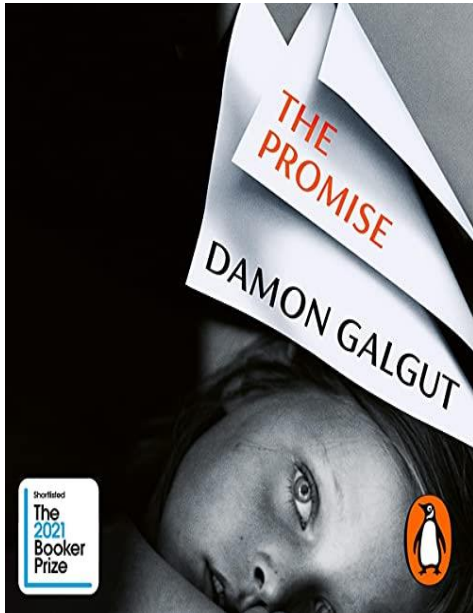
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Prize for Best Book: Africa (2003). In 2010, His novel *In A Strange Room* was shortlisted for The Booker Prize for fiction. His 2014 *Arctic Summer* was short listed for the Walter Scott Prize. In addition to his novels, Galgut has written several plays such as *Echoes of Anger*, *Party for Mother* and *Alive and Kicking*.

Galgut's efforts culminated in his latest novel *The Promise (2021)* for which he won the 2021 Booker Prize. He became the third South African writer to win the Booker, following Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee. The novel tells the story of a white South African family who make a promise to their black maid, Salome, that they will give her the house she lives in on their property. However, the family repeatedly breaks this promise, even after apartheid ends.

Appendix B

Summary of the novel:



The Promise is a 2021 novel written by the South African writer Damon Galgut, published in May 2021 by Umuzi, an imprint of Penguin Random House South Africa. It was published by Europa Editions in the US and by Chatto & Windus in the UK. This novel led Galgut to win the Booker Prize for the first time in his career after he was previously shortlisted twice for his previous works *The Good Doctor* (2003) and *In A Strange Room* (2010).

The Promise is a family saga that revolves around the Swarts family, an Afrikaner family owning a farm just outside Pretoria. The family consists of Manie, his wife Rachel, and their children Anton, Astrid, and Amor. The novel begins in 1986, when Rachel Swart dies after a long illness. Before her death, she makes her husband Manie promise to give their black maid, Salome, the house she lives in on the family's property. However, Manie does not intend to fulfil the promise. Thus, the promise to Salome became a source of tension and conflict within the family. The novel, then, follows the Swart family over the next four decades. Each decade features the death of one family member. Each chapter of the novel offers the reader an insight into how the Swarts deal with the death of a loved one, the end of apartheid, and the challenges of living in post-apartheid South Africa. *The Promise* is one of thought-provoking South African

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novels that explores themes of race, class, and family in South Africa. It is also a meditation on the legacy of apartheid and the challenges of building a more just and equitable society.

The Promise has been praised by many critics for its modernist themes and techniques. The moral failings of the Swart family have been interpreted as an allegory for post-apartheid South Africa, and the promise of White South Africans to Black South Africans.

Resumé

Beaucoup de chercheurs, tels que Linda Hutcheon, ont signalé un changement notable dans de nombreux aspects de l'art, de l'architecture et de la littérature contemporains, qui dépasse la déconstruction et l'ironie du postmodernisme. Dans cette optique, cette dissertation vise à explorer cette tendance métamoderniste dans la littérature de l'apartheid, plus particulièrement dans le roman "The Promise" (2021) de Damon Galgut en tant qu'étude de cas. Pour atteindre cet objectif, cette étude adopte une approche qualitative dans laquelle des méthodes d'analyse descriptive sont utilisées afin d'analyser les thèmes et les techniques stylistiques du roman. Cette étude conclut que les thèmes du roman, tels que la mort, l'histoire et la moralité, ainsi que les techniques stylistiques, telles que la post-ironie, les narrateurs multiples, et l'intertextualité, démontrent un retour à certaines traditions modernes, comme celle de l'authenticité, de la sincérité et de l'engagement, mais sans la disparition totale du scepticisme postmoderne. Cela résonne avec le métamodernisme, qui se caractérise par une oscillation entre l'optimisme et la sincérité du modernisme et le scepticisme et l'ironie du postmodernisme. Ainsi, ce roman présente à la fois des caractéristiques modernes et postmodernes, et les dépasse toutes les deux.

Les mot clés : modernisme, postmodernisme, metamodernisme, post-ironie, sincérité

الملخص

لقد ابلغ العديد من من الباحثين، من بينهم ليندا هنتشون، عن حدوث تغيير ملحوظ في العديد من جوانب الفن، الهندسة المعمارية والأدب المعاصر الذي يتجاوز السخرية و التفكيك الخاص بما بعد الحداثة. تم اقتراح مصطلح ميتا حداثا لتتظير ظاهرة ما بعد الحداثة. على ضوء ما سبق، تهدف هذه مذكرة لاستكشاف نزعة الميتا حداثا في ادب الأبارتيد، بشكل أدق، في رواية الوجد 2021 للكاتب دامون غالغوت. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تعتمد هذه دراسة على المنهجية النوعية، حيث تستخدم طرق تحليلية وصفية في تحليل موضوعات الرواية و تقنياتها الاسلوبية. توصلت هذه دراسة الى ان موضوعات الرواية، مثل الموت والتاريخ والأخلاق، وكذلك التقنيات الأسلوبية، مثل ما بعد السخرية، الرواة المتعددين والتناص، تُظهر العودة إلى بعض تقاليد الحداثة، مثل الاصالا و الاشارك و لكن بدون محو التام للتشكيك ما بعد الحداثي. هذا يتوافق مع الميتا حداثا التي تتميز بالتأرجح ما بين تفاؤل و اخلاص الحداثة و تشكيك و سخرية ما بعد الحداثة. و بالتالي، تتضمن هذه رواية سمات الحداثة و ما بعد الحداثة كما انها كلاً منهما.