

**Nargis Ismayilova**

**KAMAL ABDULLA  
AND  
POSTMODERNISM**



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In her monograph, Nargiz (Nargiz) Ismayilova, PhD in Philology and Associate Professor, provides a comprehensive postmodern analysis of the works of People's Writer and Academician Kamal Abdulla, recognized as a pioneer in post-independence Azerbaijani literature. The study focuses on his novels *The Incomplete Manuscript*, *The Valley of the Sorcerers*, *No One to Forget...*, and *The Adventure of Secrets*, as well as selected short stories, examining them within a postmodern literary framework.

These works, regarded as landmark examples of Azerbaijani postmodernism, are systematically analyzed for the first time in this monograph. The study is intended for researchers, doctoral and master's students, and a broader audience interested in postmodern literary studies.



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## INTRODUCTION

*“Man is the measure of all things.”*

– Protagoras

The wave of postmodernism, that originated in Europe and subsequently spread worldwide has given rise to significant and distinctive works across various fields. While this movement introduced tensions and conflicts within literature, it simultaneously forged a unique identity of its own. Having witnessed historical periods marked by the emergence, consolidation, and development of numerous intellectual movements and ideologies, the Western world may, for the purposes of periodization, be examined through three principal stages: first, the Middle Ages, or the theocratic period, in which divine revelation occupied the epistemological center; second, the modern period, shaped and articulated through transformative processes such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment; and finally, the postmodern period, which has been the subject of critical and scholarly inquiry since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Docherty, Thomas. Postmodernism. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 3.

From its inception, postmodernism has shifted the axis of literature. Characterized by multiple methods and approaches, postmodernism develops within a framework of shared principles while simultaneously incorporating diverse directions. Retrospectively examining the art world, scholars commonly note that there exists “a mannerist postmodernism (Michel Graves), a Baroque postmodernism (represented by the Japanese), a Rococo postmodernism (Charles Moore), a neoclassical postmodernism (represented by the French, particularly Christian de Portzamparc), and possibly a ‘high modernist’ postmodernism in which modernism itself becomes the object of postmodernist pastiche,” underscoring that the origins and evolution of this wave are European.

Postmodernism has never been analyzable along a linear, unambiguous trajectory or as a straightforward product of collective thought. For example, while Jürgen Habermas emphasized that postmodernism exists outside the realm of art, Fredric Jameson attempted to encompass the movement in all its complexity.

Although thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Virilio are often the first names associated with postmodernism, none truly identified themselves as postmodernists. This, we contend, reflects both the complexity of the movement’s theoretical principles and the profound debates among scholars.

Contrary to claims that postmodernism has a short lifespan, postmodern works continue to be produced worldwide.

In the second half of the 19th century, the classical novel, which reached its peak with authors such as Balzac and Tolstoy, relied on assumptions of rational thought, holding that the world is knowable, perceivable, and representable, and that language is the most accurate medium to convey this world.

These assumptions about realism were first questioned in the early 20th century by authors such as Marcel Proust, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, and were further developed by James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and others, who produced seminal works in the 1920s. This heralded a transformative literary period. In the era now called postmodernism, beginning in the 1960s, the concept of reality was fundamentally challenged once again. Postmodern writers approached truth with profound skepticism, making doubt a central principle of the movement.

If so, what is postmodernism? Many scholars argue that the best answer is “to question and to doubt” (skepticism), extending from the accepted truths and moral norms of ancient Greece to classical Greek philosophy<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> İsmaylova, N. (2019, July 27). Kamal Abdulla: From postmodernism to national distinctiveness, Part I. *Ədəbiyyat Newspaper*, 22–23.



Postmodernism, which treats doubt as a legitimate foundation for understanding the world, spread rapidly as a movement characterized by flexibility rather than certainty. Brian McHale, noting that “the term postmodern is problematic in its entirety, and previous analyses have been incomplete<sup>1</sup>,” emphasizes that postmodernism concerns existence, whereas modernism concerned reason. Formed on the basis of criticism of modernism, postmodernism opposed the rationalism, materialism, indoctrination, submission, and technologies and sciences that sought to subjugate humans and mechanize their existence.

It is clear, therefore, that postmodernism cannot be discussed without reference to modernism. Modernism, which gained influence in Europe in the 19th century and emphasized the sovereignty of reason and science, represented a departure from tradition. It aimed to move away from the aesthetic principles of classical art, reacted against the dogmatic and scholastic thought system of the Church, and centered on the principle of human elevation.

“Modernism, emerging alongside the Enlightenment, was a system of thought founded on humanism and democracy. The origin of the term “modern” is traced to the Latin *modo* (recently, just now), giving rise to *modernus*, first used<sup>2</sup> in the 5th

<sup>1</sup> Özseveç, Yıldırım. “On Postmodernism.” *International Journal of Social Research*, Vol. 10, No. 54, 2017. ON POSTMODERNISM <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.20175434580>

<sup>2</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. “Modernity: An Unfinished Project.” In *Post-*

century AD to distinguish Christianity from pagan culture.” Modernity is generally acknowledged to have emerged during the Renaissance and reached its zenith in the 19th century<sup>1</sup>. Its motto was “liberty, equality, and fraternity<sup>2</sup>.”

However, due to various factors, from the first half of the 20th century, modernism became theoretically vulnerable. Its narrow framing of freedom and equality as exclusively European, political misapplications, and reliance on uncertain scientific data left modernism exposed to critique—a task later undertaken by postmodern philosophers.

Postmodernism (sometimes abbreviated as Po-Mo<sup>3</sup>-N. İ) refers to the new artistic and intellectual paradigm formed in opposition to all modern structures and concepts established during the Enlightenment. Emerging primarily in philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and culture, postmodernism seeks to disrupt universal rules.

Ihab Hassan differentiates postmodernism from modernism, noting that in postmodernism,

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modernism – Jameson, Lyotard, Habermas, edited by Necmi Zeka, 31–44. Istanbul: Kıyı Yayınları, 1994.

<sup>1</sup> Paz, Octavio. Poetry and Modernity. Translated by Nilgün Tütal-Küçük. In *Modernity Versus Postmodernity*, edited by Mehmet Küçük, 88–103. Istanbul: Vadi/Toplum Yayınları, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Zygmunt Bauman: Tüzer, “Postmodernism and the Death of God,” p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Seymour, Richard. “Postmodernism: The Scapegoat of Our Age.” *Gazete Duvar*. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/postmodernizm-cagimizin-gunah-kecisi-haber-1528834>