

Research Article

Metamodern Subject: Towards Metaxy and Fragmentation

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Abstract

The very last quarter of the century is characterised by a large-scale and deep-seated changes which distinguish it from the postmodern epoch. This is in part due to globalisation that has remolded the economic, social and cultural space. Those unprecedented alterations manifest themselves in all areas of human life as the key features of the contemporary cultural landscape. One of its mains, which must not be treated with eyes wide shut, is the reemerged subject that should be taken neither as the old modern nor the postmodern one as it encompasses no transcendental explanations. Concepts like identity, selfhood and subjectivity might continuously be dismantled and deconstructed. The fact that the theme of identity is engaged as an episteme to delineate metamodernist novelists' conceptions can seem as if snappishly chosen, yet this is not the case. The question comes as follows: why exactly the theme of identity is singled out among others, particularly in metamodernist literature? The thematic should be considered within the historical context of metamodernism, which is not by chance coincided with the twenty-first century transformations. Identity has been one of the debatable issues among scholars from different disciplines since antiquity; it has never been cartelised by a certain discipline or field. However, more than ever before, new-fangled technologies at the turn of the twenty century have made identity a pinnacle compared to other themes. The first-time changes, which have resulted from the rise of technologies, and new forms of communication, have overlapped with the new sensitivity of 'metamodernism. As long as the centrality of language in literary works and linguistics as the study of language has the authority to study literature, the paper adopted linguistic analysis, notably stylistics. By virtue of the latter, it is argued that literary writers, namely metamodernist novelists have contributed to such an exchange over identity. Through a microscopic analysis of forms, functions, and meanings of literary language in a systematic way, it is asserted that the influx, hence, of values, morals, behaviours, and the multiple, fragmented and oscillating self is unequivocally exhibited in the metamodernist novels.

Keywords

Subject, Identity, Metamodernism, Novelists, Stylistics, Multiple-Self, Mono-Self-Influx

1. Introduction

It is perhaps imperative to acknowledge that metamodernism has come to light as a joint of elements of modernism and postmodernism. Nevertheless, most of the characteristic features attributed to metamodernism reject those of postmodernism. This account seeks right from the start to offer the very ephemeral overview of the historical sketch of meta-

modernism. The overall sub-end remains disclosing the existing interplay between metamodernism and postmodernism, which cannot be understood beyond modernism as well. Subsequently, the researcher draws attention to the distinguishing features which partake in labelling such a cultural sensitivity – metamodernism – as a literary movement.

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1.1. Historical and Conceptual Background of Metamodernism

Once a movement, postmodernism, has come to its end another has emerged. This is how this account starts voyaging into a new sensitivity, which its echoes have transcended literature. To herald the coming trend, buoyantly this section may be inspiring with a name. The term in use is 'metamodernism'; how it can be defined then? The researcher is compelled enough to address multiple definitions in this introduction. On account of this consideration, this attempt is in the process of neither obliterating some terminological substratum at the expense of the targeted concepts nor digging into the genealogy of the movement. It is not even its concern to indubitably unravel how the metamodernist writers have aspired to differentiate themselves from other theorists, particularly postmodernists. The vibrant objective in the remainder of this subdivision is a general outline of metamodernism as a concept at first.

In *The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives*, Zavarzadeh has introduced the term metamodernism in 1975, which is according to him, has emerged from the field of aesthetics [1]. Equally, in their article *Metamodernism: a conceptual foundation*, 2015, notably in their introduction, Ciprian Baciú, Musata Bocos and Corina Baciú –Urzica have confirmed so [2]. In the same regard, they have asserted that metamodernism is more than a reaction to postmodernism; it does not remain only at the stage of conflict, of a continuous denial, or of question about concepts and theories. It is a trend that is in the quest of unification, harmonisation and settlement of the conflicts between modern and postmodern by the support of involvement in search of resolving problems and desirable position towards existing theories, not only combating, or questioning them. Baciú and others have attributed new significance to terms like change, transformation, and metamorphosis, adding to the sense used in informatics 'about' (Meta- = relating to change: employed with some adjectives, verbs and nouns; metamorphosis = the process of changing into something completely different; metalanguage = a form of language or set of terms used to describe or analyse another language [2]. By these accredited meanings, metamodernism can be defined as a representation of a tendency that characteristically distinguishes modern societies [2]. From a historical stance, it is a stage that has come after postmodernism, which implies the impossibility of drawing a clear spatio-temporal borderline between them. Metamodernism is a phase that declares the end of the postmodern scepticism [2]. And it alternatively paves the way to the pacification and reconciliation between modernity and post-modernism, and of postmodernism with itself [2]. In a short-term, in the metamodern era, neither criticism nor problematisation is the key. Instead, it is the stage where efforts are constructive to find means to societal issues. It rather promotes pre-emptive and hands-on thinking, 'how will it be in the future if', 'what

can be done to' positive, meditative, reflective, logical, active and proactive thinking [2].

Following the same line of thought, in their article *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010), Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker have referred to the same field [3]. The term metamodernism, as it has been interpreted by Vermeulen and Akker, entails a prefix 'meta' that keeps the ancient Greek meaning of 'with', 'between', and 'beyond' [3]. Epistemologically, according to Vermeulen and Akker, unlike modernism and postmodernism which are both linked to Hegel's 'positive' idealism, metamodernism aligns itself with Kant's 'negative' idealism [3]. 'As if' is the appropriate phrase that can be used to sum up Kantian's philosophy of history [3]. In the same article, Vermeulen and Akker have admitted the conception of Curtis Peters:

We may view human history as if mankind had a life narrative which describes its Self-movement toward its full rational/social potential... to view history as if it were the story of mankind's development. Kant as well adopts the same term when he writes "[e]ach... people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal" [3].

Inferred from the above quote, humankind does not lead the way towards a natural and anonymous goal, but they pretend they do so that they progress morally as well as politically [3]. This is the case for metamodernism; it moves for the sake of moving, and it is an essay regardless of its unavoidable failure; Vermeulen and Akker have construed metamodernism as the pursuit forever for a truth that it never expects to find, Vermeulen and Akker have metaphorically put:

The metamodern thus wilfully adopts a kind of donkey-and-carrot double-bind. Like a donkey, it chases a carrot that it never manages to eat because the carrot is always just beyond its reach. But precisely because it never manages to eat the carrot, it never ends its chase, setting foot in moral realms the modern donkey (having eaten its carrot elsewhere) will encounter, entering political domains the postmodern donkey (having abandoned the chase) will never come across [3].

Ontologically, metamodernism is construed as an oscillation between the modern and the postmodern [3]. For Vermeulen and Akker, it vacillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, hope and melancholy, naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, along with purity and ambiguity [3]. In the same vein, Vermeulen and Akker have considered such a fluctuation (to vs. fro, and back vs. back) as a form of metamodernist negotiation between the modern and postmodern [3]. To put it briefly, the epistemological 'as if' and ontological 'between' are to be conceived as both –neither dynamic. On the one hand, they are each at once modern and postmodern, and neither of them on the other hand.

1.2. The Literary Dimension of Metamodernism

While the previous paragraphs underlined the key insights into the concept of metamodernism, this account explores the relation between literature and metamodernism. In the light of occurrences of the term and its proposed meanings as laid out by Vermeulen and Akker along with others, the attention is shifted towards its insinuations in literature. This account neither provides a rubric for reading literary genres belonging to postmodernism, nor also generates a retrospective understanding of metamodernism in other disciplines (where the term positions itself such as literary theory, art criticism, social theory, and political science). The legacy inscribed in these lines highlights the fundamental characterisations of metamodernist literary fiction. The main focus of this section lies in literature. That is, how is the literary field (and the corresponding literary theory) developing towards the metaxis of modernist and postmodernist ideals, and which features are – in line with the idea of metataxis – characterising the metamodern aspects of literature? So that the evolution towards metamodernism in literature can be flawless, the two questions are in due course

The apposite starting point to gain enough understanding is to be involved, though briefly, in the debate about metamodernism that has been headed by the readings posed by David James and Urmila Seshagiri in the article *Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution* (2014). They have stated that:

A growing number of contemporary novelists [...] place a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions, styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing. [4].

Based on this quote, modernism has been employed as the basal background by some contemporary writers in their works as a source of inspiration in a new context [4]. However, James and Seshagiri have referred to modernism to argue that it has gained new relevance in contemporary literature [4]. Their article, James and Seshagiri, is an essay to return to “the logic of periodisation [which offers] a retrospective understanding of modernism as a moment as well as a movement” [4]. Nonetheless, the effort to periodise modernism raised a problem as it implies that everything outside of its historical place in time can never be regarded as modernist [4].

Vermeulen and Akker along with James and Seshagiri are intersected in their use of the term metamodernism [3, 4]. The latter has been used by James and Seshagiri who have described it as a development which “regards modernism as an era, an aesthetic, and an archive that originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” [4]. Yet, Vermeulen and Akker in their article *Notes on Metamodernism* have argued that metamodernism refers to a swinging between modernism and postmodernism as wordily stated “[...] we will argue that this modernism is characterised by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a mark-

edly postmodern detachment, we will call this structure of feeling metamodernism” [3]. Despite James and Seshagiri having opted for periodisation, they have tackled modernism as an archive from which writers can take elements and then ‘make it new’ by updating it to a contemporary context [4]. In a nutshell, James and Seshagiri have contended that the “metamodernist practice redistributes the innovative energies of its predecessors. It pays tribute to modernist style [...]; it inhabits the consciousness of individual modernist writers [...]; and it details modernism’s socio-political, historical, and philosophical contexts” [4].

The discussion above implies that James and Seshagiri have aligned metamodernism with modernism [4]. In contrast to Vermeulen and Akker’s argument that closely relate metamodernism to postmodernism [3], James and Seshagiri have maintained that metamodernism distinguishes itself from postmodernism “through self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarisation as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century” [4], and thus displaying its relation to modernism instead of postmodernism [4]. This is the key difference between these two sides of the metamodernist debate; If James and Seshagiri’s article has discussed metamodernism in relation to literature [4], Vermeulen and Akker have not related it to literature, yet art, architecture and film [3].

Also, Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson are amongst scholars who have explicitly admitted the end(s) of postmodernism. In the introduction to *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (2015), they have conceded that postmodernism has been bushed, yet that “many writers in the first decade of the twenty-first century have continued to engage with narrative techniques, styles and approaches that speak in varying ways with (and against) postmodernism” [5]. In their introductory account, they have mentioned multiple terms that have been used in the literary field to label this phenomenon, metamodernism [5]. They have equally claimed that there is a “broad desire in literary and cultural criticism to move beyond the postmodern while recognising its continuing importance as a critical shadow cast over the first decade of the twenty-first century” [5]. Bentley, along with co-writers and others have failed to offer their definition for metamodernism, but they have contended that the legacies of postmodernism that can be found in the works of multiple novelists of the 2000s may be categorised in three different strands, as listed below:

Those novelists who continue to use narrative techniques associated with postmodernism but who have reintroduced a set of grounded ethical positions; those who have attempted to return (or continue) to work in a broadly realist mode as an implicit rejection of postmodernism; and those who have self-consciously returned to modernist techniques as a way of return to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics [5].

According to this categorisation, it is possible to note that there is no single work that can fit into just one of these categories. However Bentley and others have indeed tried to clas-

sify the trend after postmodernism, a clear distinction has not been in sight [5]. Hitherto, the two categories do seem to fit within the previously outlined ideas. Bentley and others have acknowledged that some of the British novelists of the 20th century have continued to use postmodern techniques, echoing the ideas of Vermeulen and Akker on the one hand [5, 3]. The third strand, on the other hand, lies in the fact that a huge number of writers have consciously used modernist techniques in their works, which resonates with the definition of metamodernism given by James and Seshagiri [4]. Bentley and others who have conferred both postmodernism and modernism in their description of what came after postmodernism might argue for either side of the metamodernist debate [5]. It is therefore significant to state that while Vermeulen and Akker have not correlated metamodernism with literature, but with art architecture and film instead [3], James and Seshagiri have dealt with the term in relation only to literature [4]. The thesis thus adopts the view of James and Seshagiri.

With the above short-lived overview of the literary dimension of a new sensitivity (metamodernism), the thesis switches to the analytic account based on cultural perspective of the two novels: *Sisters* by Booker Prize finalist Daisy Johnson (2020) and *The Sympathize* by Vietnamese Viet Thanh Nguyen (2015). The very point of engagement between the sections of this paper divulges the theme of Identity as the landmark of intersection. That is, the researcher aims to exhume the diverse ways in which identity is conceptualised by metamodernist novelists as long as the earlier beginning of metamodernism coincided with high modernity; an epoch in which identity is vital and problematic.

1.3. Literature Review

Not only in social sciences and cultural studies, the issue of identity and character continues to be located at the centre of debate among literary theorists and novelists. This section seeks to explore the very fundamental studies devoted to the question of identity in metamodernist literature. However, as metamodernist, the two novels targeted in this work have not yet received sufficient literature in its thematic facet, chiefly identity. This results in shifting the attention towards the theme of identity in postmodern age. In two-fold reasoning, this account pledges this outcome. First, from the very outset of such a paper, it was mentioned that metamodernism as a new cultural and literary sensitivity emerged out of the modern and postmodern after-effects theoretically speaking. Second, both modernist and postmodernist literary writers have explored and been engaged in the quest for identity. To such an end, what follows in this account focuses on how the states of affairs appertaining to identity are presented in variety types of postmodern backdrops.

Like the previous schools of thought, postmodern writers have dedicated a lion's share to the issue of identity. This account aims to reconnoitre the limited reach of postmodern conceptions of the notion of identity, which in a brief can be

pigeon-holed as a genealogical picture of the term. The start takes place with sketching the framework of identity in its classical notion. Erik Erikson (1959) has defined identity as a perception of one's own continuousness and consistency in time [6]. The author has proposed the metaphor of a wall bar that encompasses the entire array of issues which have to be delineated and worked out throughout the stage of human development [6]. His objective is to substitute the common models of an individual's development as a linear ladder that should be followed [6]. While the psychological approaches bring into focus the early childhood of individuals as a fundamental stage in human development, Erikson has emphasised the decisiveness of adolescence [6]. His conception of identity is very confined to the individual's achievement which has to be preserved - as a uniform, ahistorical, and stage-driven process [7].

As stated elsewhere, the underline objective of this introductory review is formed with some insights into postmodern conceptions of identity, which might introduce readers to an in-depth discussion on post-postmodern –metamodernism, conception of identity. Such a changing postmodern atmosphere is of a variety of characteristics which drastically imposes a wide gap between scholars in terms of how identity has been conceptualised. This Widest gulf, theoretically speaking, insinuates an umbrella question; how the individuals form their identity in postmodern fractured, multi-narrative society? The very first glance at the question suggests a sociological perspective for the conditions lying behind the formation of identity have altered in the post-modern age. The construction of identity takes the individuals in relation to not only others but also themselves. The actualisation takes place through the process of the development of uniqueness, reinforced through continuousness and attachment. It leads the notion of personal identity to a distinct place, where identity is formed through the practice of individualism. In the light of Berzonsky's conception "the quest to achieve a sense of identity is important because we live in a relativistic, postmodern age of continual social, political, economic and technological change, which requires continually shifting expression of one's self" [8].

According to postmodern critics, identity is theorised as fluid concept, an open question, a construct that is erected as one move along, according to one's environment and interest. Tout-court, postmodern' understanding implies self-shift, molten, dynamic, multiplicity, relativistic, context-specific and fragmented [8]. Additionally, a wide range of critics have been consented to the claim that identity formation in postmodern world is built and developed out of consumerism [8]. It can be stated that self –identification has become very challenging in this postmodern era, in this regard Mark Poster has stated that "...a post-modern society is emerging which nurtures forms of identity different from, or even opposite to, those of modernity" [9]. In the same respect, Kellner has argued "...one is a mother, a son, a Texan, a Scot, a professor, a socialist, a Catholic, a lesbian - or rather a combination of these social roles and pos-

sibilities. Identities are thus still relatively fixed and limited, though the boundaries of possible identities, of new identities, are continually expanding” [10]. As an example, Kellner among others have argued that in the post-modern world identity is closely identified with the active consumption of products that are offered to individuals by the media and leisure industries [10]. This paper adopts another line of thought, which focuses on the role of socio-cultural factors and forces in constructing identity.

Following the same line of reviewing, in their paper *The Buddha of Suburbia: Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Society*, Andersen, Hansen, Hellstrom, Hiltunen, Hobbs, Jackson and Munch have delineated the issues related with the formation of identity in the context of immigrant society. They have correspondingly explored and showed how the characters disclose themselves with postmodern traits of fragmentation and rootlessness which are demarcated through the lens of the theatrical study of multiculturalism, identity, alienation, belonging and the immigrant experience [11]. Their study in short has revealed that the problem of belonging remains a universal issue with immigrants [11]. The very domineering question that might contribute to the development of such a review is: to what extent the condition of immigrant society can play a dynamic role in the formation of postmodern identity? Alastair Crook’s volume *Identity Formation in the Postmodern World* is the very substantial reference in which the idea of identity formation in the post-modern world is well-dyed. The book’s insights bring Giddens’ sense of the ‘reflexive self’ and Hall’s theory of the ‘crisis of the self’ side by side to demonstrate frivolous drug use and manifold narrative representations of self based on consumption and globalisation [12].

Taken as a whole, such a frustration that emerges out of identity oriented postmodern society leads to inquire anew the issue of identity in post- postmodern age, remarkably in metamodernist literature. To this end, the paper initiated the review with the contextualisation of the conceptions of identity. In the first place, both Erikson’s approach and socio-cultural approach are at centrality of this paper, though implicitly. They can thus be taken as the two faces of the episteme of this analysis. Holding the view that those approaches can be apposite to this analysis is traceable to the following reason; the novel *Sisters* depicts reality-warping metaphors and identity-dissolving avowals to the world of adolescence, a period of eerie and distressing change [13]. The novel *Sisters* by Booker Prize finalist Daisy Johnson (2020) is the first literary work with which this thesis is concerned. It is a novel of psychological thriller which is plotted with elements of horror. Daisy Johnson uses the first and the third person points of view to uncover the story of two sisters, July and September, who are inseparable since the first breath. In terms of identities, they became gradually entwined as they grew up. After the death of their father, their mother Sheila found herself unable to skip over struggles so that she could understand her two daughters. The novelist has explored the psychological

effects of grief through July and Sheila’s attempts to understand September’s death from her mother’s nagging and insults by committing suicide.

In the second place, third stance focuses on identity in immigrants ‘context, which should not be taken as ashes into the mouth of the researcher. The reason goes as follows: Being born or just lived in an immigrant family as a case for the spy, among other characters, in the novel *the Sympathizer* is to be in the so-called third space, which results in failure to form an individual identity [14]. In the reminder, the focus is shifted to an ephemeral overview about the two novels. The spy novel, *the sympathizer*, is a literary work that has come inside the so-called background for some run-of-the-mill thriller written by a white American for a Western audience. It was an echo of the Vietnam War ended in 1975. Despite its end, the Cold War and the clash of ideologies have been still going on. *The Sympathizer*, the debut novel, which has been written by Vietnamese American Viet Thanh Nguyen, and published in 2015, has won its author the Pulitzer Prize in 2016 and a great many other awards. His novel is a critique of the prevailing view of Americanisation. The literary work entails additionally the problems of acculturation and identity crisis of immigrants, along with the significance of devotion and relationships. *The sympathizer* is the Capitan narrative in the form of confessions addressed to the commandant of a communist re-education camp.

2. Novels Analysis

2.1. The Literary Work *Sisters*

2.1.1. The Synopsis of the Novel

‘Shifts back and forth between the past and present’ novel is a literary work in which the author depicts the life of two sisters, July and September, who have inseparable ties since their first cry. Physically as being presented by the novelist, they are of any sort of the likeness. Yet in terms of their psychological self, they become more and more intertwined as they grow up. The death of their father Peter involves their mother Sheila in enduring struggle to understand them. Her worry about July grows more inside her as time goes on; she is afraid of being abused by her sister September due to the latter’s resemblance of her father. The more their mother steps closely towards them, the more September taverns her from their inward-looking dynamic. The mother breaths a sort of ease while she starts drawing the girls into her fantastical children’s books that she feels adept at holding onto them. The organic relationship the two sisters have distance them from being friended outside, as if one breaths life through the eyes of the other, so to speak. Their world of games and inventions suffice them to picture their reality beyond any other being. This breeds a dense worry inside the psyche of their mother; she is always aghast of how they can be treated by their classmates at school. The turning point in their life starts at the

age between 10 and 11, particularly when July's crush on a little boy named Ryan instigates Jealousy in Lily to text her play-acting to be Ryan. Girls follow up on their whims and antics. July's sexual act with her friend Ryan and September's friend on the one hand, and September's sex with John on the other hand condense Sheela's distress, which results in the paucity of conversational tie with them. Another turning event is the death of September which is not an easy incident to bear. That is why July maintains being pretentious towards her sister's life so that she can cope with her grief. With their mother's help July becomes able to pursue 'her wobbly life' outside the confines sisterhood.

2.1.2. The Fragmented Self

It is plain that the novelist 'inclusive aim is to expose the issue of identity in the twenty first century. Throughout the novel, which is in the form of a series of jerry-rigged sections and chapters, readers might notice that the author shifts back and forth between past and present. In its literary sense, the author's intent does not go elsewhere yet enacting the characters' work to remember what sort of strange things have preceded their stay at the family's beach house. However, the switch in time goes beyond the literary lens. If construed psychologically, the swing from past to present is of an identificatory dimension. It implies a kind of instability in the psyche of the characters who are partially influenced by those offbeat states of affairs. In the forthcoming accounts, such an endeavor travels around some aspects of the characters 'fragmented identity'.

Another aspect pertaining to the theme of identity in the novel is memory. From the very onset, the two sisters are introduced as two faces of the same coin; despite their physical unlikeness, their organic relationship never allows them to give the cold shoulder. Their identities are entangled as they grow up. A wind of change seen light in the death of their father alters the course of the events and hence their state of being including their mother. Dread crept over her about July results from Sheela's belief that September's resemblance of Peter – the fiercer of the two- might hit below the belt. That fear is an outcome of what has lasted in her memory, which is itself a critical component of creating and upholding her identity. Let's have a look at this quote of Van Dyke, R. M and S. E Alcock (2003):

Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions. People remember or forget the past according to the needs of the present, and social memory is an active and ongoing process [15].

On such basis, the death of her spouse leads her to remember that resemblance between her daughter September and Peter; the latter makes Sheela feels and expresses helplessness and misplaced jealousy when reflecting on how to parent her children, apparently giving up on the strange duo and their perceptibly abusive relationship, as Sheela's words confirm "considered again and again moving them to different schools, enforcing some sort of system of rules, finding

a therapist who could see them separately, but she could never quite do it"[13]. Subsequently, a thorough inspection of their lethal relationship makes Sheela envious of their closeness, and she lets the girls 'poison go unchecked'. Sheela feels excluded by their relationship. Something is wrong with Sheela, she is perhaps depressed and the novel alludes to a deep trauma within the whole family members. Sheela's husband is drowned when the girls are little. Hinted at and circled is the suggestion of domestic violence.

The negative impacts of her husband's behaviours towards her intensifies her fear. Sheela's life has therefore been marked by abuse and mental illness. Her sadness, which often confines her to bed, is evocatively described as a "smaller, weightier child." September's father who died shortly after the girls' birth, was cruel to Sheela and his daughter July. Sheela sees a lot of him in September, but she avoids delving into what it entails. Sheela still fails at her parental duty to protect July from her sister. She notes that "September could make her sister do anything; she always could. September's relationship with July reminded her of Peter's: his withholding of affection for tactical gain, the control hidden under smooth folds of compassion" [13]

Because of that, fear is already there, yet restored no more. The need for the present –how to deal with her daughters – generates fright over. By this line of thinking mother is involved in reconstructing a new identity of herself and that of her daughters.

There might be a sort of curiosity amongst readers about how memory sometimes shapes identities. To further develop such argument, the thesis refutes – in such case – the predominant approach that assumes that people have different social identities which need permanent negation and organise self relationships with others- both individuals and groups. It is of a paradoxical lens, human himself adding to his or her individual and subjective character is often forgotten. Despite some aspects of identity being given from early birth – like sex, ethnicity, or class –they do not strictly determine individuals as people and who they can become in the future! It is thus necessary to be aware of individual and life experiences which form and reconstruct new dimensions of identity. Mother's experiences with her spouse along with her two daughters are good example. The individual level is more sudden, immediate and contingent, and acts with greater frequency; this does not mean neglecting the social level that changes follow more slowly because mother's experiences are to be considered nothing beyond the social background, and family framework in which she lives.

These two levels work in a recursive way, where individuals play a significant role in the mechanism of change. Julian Thomas (1996) has defined identity as "selfhood, which he has explained as a pathway, which establishes links between sequence of experiences [16]. In such a way, to draw together a comprehensible account of a person "Selfhood" of Sheela is composed of her experiences with her husband along with her daughters, each of which contributes to another to deepen

that sense of afraid- self. In such a light, the analysis hence considers mother's identity unstable. Mother's narrative of identity is created via the interconnectedness between her and the objects around her – in such case all that mother experiences – as the latter is of a very prominent role in setting up the world – unstable and unsatisfactory life with her husband – in which Sheela lives – these objects move past into her mind and 'I' use which creates that future idea – fear.

Based on such a claim, it can be articulated that mother's identity is created through her engaging with objects and her family members – husband and daughters –; this simply justifies that identity is not already given individuality, but a particular way of engaging with the world. This is what has been claimed by Thomas. Identity must be taken up, and does not have to be crafted. This is a way of perceiving human identity based on the temporal character of human life. Things which reflect people are their having – been, they're being alongside the others and their continuous projecting - forward of themselves through their projects.

Another aspect of how a memory can change one's identity is the death of September. In a certain day, July is overwhelmed with recollections. She finds it difficult to avoid thinking about the tennis courts. Eventually, she recalls what occurred. On the day of the battle, she and September flees to the courts in a fierce storm. July too terrified to follow, watches her sister run around the courts in the rain. Suddenly, a tree falls, knocking out the floodlights and electrocuting September. July then discovers that September has been deceased for some months. To deal with her sadness, she has been imagining that September is still alive. She tells Sheela that she now knows her sister is dead. With her mother's help, July discovers who she is without September. She pursues a degree and a life outside her sisterhood and thinks of her sister often.

Both, the psychological impact along with the grief through July and Sheela's tries to understand the death of September are explored by the author. Their inability to wordily admit September's passing and absence elucidates their deep sorrow. On the one hand, Sheela finds herself retreated into an ascetic isolation while they, Sheela and July, leave Oxford for the Settle House to the extent that she is unable to have a conversation with July. The latter on the other hand is herself unable to even recognise that her sister is gone. However she is "alone for months and months and months," July begins "speaking in [September's] voice," wearing her clothes, playing games by herself she is convinced she is playing with September.

2.2. The Literary Work *The Sympathizer*

2.2.1. The Synopsis of the Novel

The novel evolves out of the journey of the unwarranted life that an unnamed spy leads in the South. The Vietnamese works as a secret police for Vietnamese communists. The novelist skilfully portrays the ambivalent personality of the

anonymous protagonist-narrator, which is manifested in Americanising Vietnamese as a shattered man; the one is divided between heart and mind. The go-between of the protagonist is literarily justified on the account of being a half-caste; illegitimately he is the son of a teenage Vietnamese mother to whom he owes much of his love, which by contrast turns out to hatred to his French Catholic priest. His dual nature appears to be poor in his English accent at English however is educated in the United States. If it does imply something it is not else all but another sound love-hate relationship, which itself deepens the split in his nature. The existing duality and his acrobatic ability to deal in a balanced manner with the two worlds is a sound implication of his strengths and weaknesses. Such a remarkable novel's soundness lies in its ability to voice the voiceless by its compelling readers to step back in time to the events of frothy years ago, yet in a new light. The tragicomic tone of the novel transcends the historical confines with the illumination of universal themes including the undying fallacies and misinterpretations between East and West. It is of the weighty concern the theme of the moral dilemma confronted by people forced to decide on the right and right, instead of right and wrong.

2.2.2. Towards Oscillating Identity

The very beginning of the novel *The Sympathizer* comes as follows:

I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces. Perhaps not surprisingly, I am also a man of two minds. I am not some misunderstood mutant from a comic book or a horror movie, although some have treated me as such. I am simply able to see any issue from both sides. Sometimes I flatter myself that this is a talent, and although it is admittedly one of a minor nature, it is perhaps also the sole talent I possess. At other times when I reflect on how I cannot help but observe the world in such a fashion, I wonder if what I have should even be called a talent. After all, a talent is something you use, not something that uses you. The talent you cannot use, the talent that possesses you — is a hazard, I must confess. But in the months when this confession began, my way of seeing the world still seemed more of a virtue than a danger, which is how some dangers first appear [14].

Such an opening unveils the theme of personal identity. A spy lives in a situation which is tough and uneasy to realise his wholeness and consistency in his being - existence-; he fails to achieve the state of self in the world. He embodies a state of *In-betweenness*, "a man of two faces " and of " two minds ". The use of the adverb 'sometimes' and 'perhaps' indicates that the narrator lives a sort of uncertainty and instability within the self. Such might be helpful in reading this unsteadiness as a sort of oscillation and fluctuation from then towards now, between the past and the present; it is a sort of flux in his being; the narrator subsists such a swaying; he is in between his old and new self, his being before working as a spy and current being as a spy. These ups and downs charac-

terise multiple complex identities of the captain, his wearing of a South Vietnamese mask that veils his communist face finds its reason in the role attributed to him as a spy.

The state of –in-betweenness in which he was born plays an important role in making him fit to be a spy. His birth took place in the North yet made to escape the communists with his mother in his ninth year, settling in the South. Due to an absent European father and a Vietnamese mother, the narrator was born a biracial bastard into a culture where there was no official place for an either-or/neither-nor identity. Since he is neither Vietnamese nor European in his country, he is unable to marry. Here is a quote that exposes his refusal as well of that state of being a bastard “I was not a bastard, I was not a bastard, I was not, I was not, I was not, unless, somehow, I was” [14]. The state of volatility continues to live with the narrator. As being deprived of the possibility of respectability and family, he resorts to political and professional missions to feel his being. However still even in these territories, he is contradictory in his sense of self. He is introduced as a spy who supports the Republican South and seems friendly to Americans, but on the inside, he is a communist working for the revolution.

Such a separation is genuine more so than merely fictional. The Captain's unfathomable depth may be seen through the mask with no problem; a spy confesses "Most actors spent more time with their masks off than on, whereas in my case it was the reverse. No surprise, then, that sometimes I dreamed of trying to pull a mask off my face, only to realize that the mask was my face" [14]. This is not to say that the Captain acts sympathetically with the West, it is however his inability in the re-education camp to take the hard line against American Capitalism despite he devotes his entire life to the rebellion the insurgents find him, and his confession, distrustful. The narrator lives that duality politically - and the world is a risky place for somebody loath or impotent to choose of one the sides. However, his inability to see the world from different perspectives, the two in this case, is an assenting and indispensable part of his identity; Despite his becoming weary of the trouble it brings about, and although he slides into the reductionist perspective of the universe, it is neither an unconstrained choice: Here a spy says “while I chose to live two lives and be a man of two minds, it was hard not to, given how people have always called me a bastard. Our country itself was cursed, bastardized, partitioned into North and South” [14].

In a sense, the bastard, biracial Captain is closer to Vietnamese than other characters: similar to his much-loved home, he is fragmented, and the ideology of the South and the North fails to make him feel at home as long as he is made to choose. For all their incompatible variances, the communists and the capitalists share so: the necessity to fix any ever-changing identities. The tenacity, the evenness and the unity of the captain become intimidating because of the power that the commandant exercises over him. However, this does not differentiate the demands that he makes on both identities;

that of the commandant and the department chair. The use of the chair mirrors American's way of thinking and being in and out of the academy. This mentality is shown through the Americans' treatment to notably women and minorities, such a way of thinking suggests that one can realise the other and thus explain the latter to the new other, reading it out of the box of Americans, this is not else but arrogance and a sort of manipulation. To be more explicit, let's suppose that sometimes mentality reflects itself as a faith in science, knowledge and the like, yet it arises out of one's beliefs; be it racial, cultural, and gendered or even gendered pre-eminence.

Ironically explored, the theme of identity is much noticeable in the dialogue between the department chair and the captain. The former asks the latter about the identity of an oriental aiming to divulge his identity crisis. He treats the Captain as a patient in a cultural experiment. The captain becomes able to adjust himself to the West better than Asians; born without any help from a white parent. This is clearly what the following proves “you embody the symbiosis of Orient and Occident, the possibility that out of two can come one. ... You must assiduously cultivate those reflexes that Americans have learned innately, to counterweigh your Oriental instincts” [14]. Self-sense reduction of the Captain leads his way to the success of Americans, which is not different from his ticket out of the re-education camp. The chair should not be blindly read from one perspective. That is, being of capitnaess is a double-edged sword. The chair signifies equally in part the power and in another fear of admixture that is not assimilation; if it is assumed that the Asians should be submitted to the American culture, as Americans believe that they are superior, Asian culture is as well supposed to be more powerful in expressing identity. In the light of the chair, however, the success of the Captain in assimilating can be seen as an inspiration for the ultimate assimilation of the American-born Asian.; a man of tragic parcouer who can feel, without being subjected to time, the vagabonds, strangers, and foreigners. Beyond any consideration of the soil of Judeo-Christian culture where they live.

Identity crisis of the Captain should be read at the macro level; the analysis thus moves from the particular towards the universal understanding of identity complexities. The captain's reduction of the self (including his being and thoughts) is not self-imposed; it is rather an upshot of a political project. The Captain's embracement of the complexity implies rebellious thinking and thus becomes a revolutionary act. After his torture, he confesses:

Just as my abused generation was divided before birth, so was I divided on birth, delivered into a postpartum world where hardly anyone accepted me for who I was, but only ever bullied me into choosing between my two sides. This was not simply hard to do — no, it was truly impossible, for how could I choose myself against myself? Now my friend would release me from this small world with its small minded people, those mobs who treated a man with two minds and two faces as a freak, who wanted only one an-

swer for any question [14].

Later, the Captain grows into the ability to come up with a new realisation about a man with a double mission, which helps to realise something about Humankind by and large. That is why he states:

He was the commissar but he was also Man; he was my interrogator but also my only confidant; he was the fiend who had tortured me but also my friend. Some might say I was seeing things, but the true optical illusion was in seeing others and oneself as undivided and whole. [14].

If required to briefly put, it can be stated that the novel's treatment of the issue of identity moves beyond the particular towards the philosophical investigation of the factual nature of Man's identity. This is even true if the analysis conditions itself to the state of being, the most adamant communist. The commissar cannot be whittled down with any violence to his character. Human beings are by large of two minds, and hitherto they live in a world powered by their willingness to be trodden and simplified

3. Conclusion

As the reading of the two novels above aims to have unearthed, metamodernist literature with its narrative design and descriptive depth offers an insight into identity formation. Both modern and postmodern distinguishing features have contributed to the metamodern conceptions, be it about identity and other thematic nadirs. The take on of the interplay between modern, postmodern is the episteme of metamodern's original aspirational construct. The accounts to come tend to sum up the key roots of the oscillating and fragmented self pictured in metamodernist novels, *Sisters* and the *sympathizer*.

The novel *Sisters* is a narrative of an oscillation. That is, the literary work implies modern elements, yet by applying postmodern literary strategies. By the virtue of such an employment the author succeeds in engaging readers with many tactics of metamodernism. A reader of the novel *Sisters* cannot avoid swings to and fro, which cause vibration, a fluctuation between different opinions, purposes, and outlooks, between two polarities that are already established and widely known: a desire for sense/doubt about the sense, enthusiasm/irony, hope/melancholy, naivety/knowingness, empathy/apathy, totality/fragmentation, unity/plurality, authenticity/pastiche, involved/detached, elitist/democratic. One of the facets that argue for the oscillation of the novel is the author's swiftness from the first-person point of view to the third while narrating the story. While the story is told from July's first personal point of view in part, another is told by the very close third-person perspective. Both follow September and July's mother along with the Settle House's experiences and consciousness. The former is a key feature of modern literature, yet the latter characterises postmodern literature.

Another aspect of fluctuation is exhibited in the story's shifts back and forth between past and present, enacting the

characters' work to remember what strange things have predated their stay at the family's beach house. The Oxford House attaches sisters to their old memories. It is the environment where they grow up internally, playing imaginary games, telling stories, and inventing their seeming language. The same is valid for their mother Sheela who struggles to persist in the house. Regardless of the time, the relational aspect between the two sisters is also another feature of fluctuation; on the one hand, the novelist introduces the two sisters as being nothing alike physically, being it in terms of bodily features or age, yet they are much entangled in terms of their identities as they grow up. It is the case as well for the mother Sheela in her relationship with September; the more Sheela tries to be closer to her daughters, the more September bars her from their insular dynamic.

Following the appraisal, yet in the light of *the sympathizer*, via which the fragmentation originates in metamodern literature. The fluctuated self depicted in the targeted novel cannot be understood beyond metamodernist features. Authenticity is one of the aspects that distinguish metamodernist works. Throughout the novel, Nguyen's protagonist is identified as 'the Capitan'. Indeed, it deliberately put as the author believes in so that to communicate with authenticity – as form and content are ranked the same in terms of importance – the Captain believes that the subject's "performative struggle to communicate his innermost convictions" cannot take place beyond a textual construction in which the form cannot be separated from the content". This is also proved by the beginning of the novel which opens with the two facades of the self. In the coming eighteen chapters, the Captain pursues his confessions and tells his story of a communist spy working for the Southern Vietnamese police force. The Capitan believes that rather than obfuscating his 'genuine' self and beliefs; the style of his confession is an inseparable part of his authentic expression. Captain's focus on the truthful form in favour of authenticity can be framed as metamodernist negotiation between the desire to speak authentically and the self-reflexivity along with self-consciousness congenial to postmodernism. The metamodernist subject embraces this self-reflexivity and subsumes it into its quest for authentic speaking.

The second feature that styles *The Sympathizer* as a metamodernist novel is its optimistic len.; it is through an alternatively imagined world that the author explores a paradoxically optimistic belief in the sense that the novel pictures two extremities of dystopia- the deeply racist, consumerist and capitalist America of the 1960s on the one hand, and post-war communist Vietnam on the other. A critical dystopia is seen through providing a scathingly satirical criticism of both worlds but indicates an impossibly hopeful potential for transformation and an alternative future — even though it is never quite clear what shape this future would take. The novel's ultimate optimism is an explicit outcome of this dispersal and consequent connectedness. From the very beginning of the novel, the Captain presents himself as "a man of

two faces... a man of two minds... able to see any issue from both sides” [14]. On one level, this refers to his role as an undercover agent, but it also indicates his status as a bastard — his father having been a French priest — something, which is a source of much discrimination and shame throughout his life. This sense of optimism is tempered by the realities of human nature and the awareness that even compassion might prove to be too fragile to uphold. In brief, the search for revolution is the ‘most hopeful’ of things, even if the ideals of revolution are perhaps by its very definition already deferred and thus unlikely to be reached. Yet, even the acknowledgements that this search might only be a dream or a misleading illusion does not foreclose the attempt itself — despite what might be its inevitable failure. Indicating the metamodernist faith without belief — that hopeful faith in a spectral promise of certainty even while its infinite deferral is embraced — hope and optimism is to be found simply in the connectedness of the world: being not alone, sharing hopes and dreams with ‘[t]housands more’, even if the only commonality is being alive and wanting to live.

Taken as a whole, as already stated elsewhere, the paper seeks to unearth the metamodernist literature’s conception of identity. The analysis above uncovered the patchy and dithering self as a point of amalgamation between the two novels. Such a metamodernist representation of identity originates from the key feature of metamodernism as an oscillation between modernism and postmodernism.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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