

AMERICAN FICTION IN MODERNISM

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Abstract. *This thesis examines American fiction within the cultural and aesthetic framework of Modernism. It argues that American modernist prose transformed the inherited realist novel by representing crisis, fragmentation, urban speed, social disillusionment, and unstable identity through new narrative techniques. The study connects historical context with literary form: war, industrial modernity, migration, capitalism, and the crisis of the American Dream shaped prose fiction. Works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, and Harlem Renaissance writers show that American Modernism was a diverse movement united by experimentation.*

Key words: *American fiction, Modernism, fragmentation, narrative technique, Lost Generation, Harlem Renaissance, American Dream, stream of consciousness.*

Introduction. Modernism in American fiction emerged as a response to the deep cultural instability of the early twentieth century. The older nineteenth-century confidence in progress, moral order, and transparent representation became insufficient for describing a world marked by war, technological acceleration, urban alienation, and spiritual uncertainty. Daniel J. Singal defines American Modernism as a broad cultural formation rather than a narrow literary fashion, because it involved a change in values, perception, and forms of knowledge. In prose fiction, this change appeared through fragmented plots, unreliable narration, psychological depth, and symbolic structures¹.

The relevance of studying American fiction in Modernism lies in the fact that the modernist novel and short story became a laboratory for expressing the contradictions of modern life. American writers did not merely copy European experimental models; they adapted them to national problems such as the myth of success, racial inequality, regional memory, urban capitalism, and the trauma of the Lost Generation. Ruland and Bradbury note that twentieth-century American literature developed through constant dialogue between local experience and international aesthetic change. Therefore, American Modernism should be understood as both national and transnational².

Main part. American modernist fiction is characterized first of all by a crisis of narrative certainty. Traditional linear storytelling is weakened, because modern experience itself appears discontinuous. Instead of a stable narrator who explains the moral meaning of events, modernist prose often presents partial viewpoints, silence, gaps, and unresolved contradictions.

Frederick J. Hoffman observes that the modern American novel moved away from external description toward inwardness and formal experimentation. This tendency is especially visible in the representation of memory, desire, trauma, and social failure³.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's fiction demonstrates how Modernism reinterpreted the American Dream.

¹Singal D. J. Towards a Definition of American Modernism // American Quarterly. - 1987. - Vol. 39, No. 1. - P. 7-26.

²Ruland R., Bradbury M. From Puritanism to Postmodernism. - New York: Penguin Books, 1992. - P. 277.

³Hoffman F. J. The Modern Novel in America, 1900-1950. - Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951. - P. 28.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the dream of self-invention is not rejected in a simple moralistic way; it is shown as beautiful, seductive, and destructive at the same time. Nick Carraway's narration is retrospective and selective, which makes the novel a study of memory as much as a story of wealth and love. Richard Lehan argues that *Gatsby's* tragedy is connected with the limits of wonder and with the impossibility of recovering an idealized past. Thus, Fitzgerald turns a social plot into a symbolic meditation on time, illusion, and national desire⁴.

Ernest Hemingway represents another direction of American Modernism. His prose is outwardly simple, but this simplicity is highly constructed. Short sentences, repetition, dialogue, and omission create the famous "iceberg" effect: the emotional meaning is hidden below the surface of words. In *The Sun Also Rises* and his early stories, the wounded consciousness of the postwar generation is expressed not through direct confession but through restraint, ritual, travel, drinking, and silence. Carlos Baker emphasizes that Hemingway's artistic method depends on compression and disciplined selection. This method reflects a modern world in which language can no longer fully explain loss⁵.

William Faulkner radicalized modernist narrative by breaking chronological order and distributing meaning among several unstable voices. *The Sound and the Fury* uses stream of consciousness, temporal shifts, and interior monologue to represent the collapse of a Southern family and, more broadly, the decay of inherited social structures. Faulkner's fiction shows that the past does not disappear; it returns as memory, guilt, and obsession. André Bleikasten's study of Faulkner describes this narrative world as one in which language, memory, and loss are inseparable. In this sense, Faulkner's Modernism is both psychological and historical⁶.

Urban modernity also shaped American fiction. John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and later U.S.A. trilogy present the city as a space of montage, speed, advertising, mobility, and social fragmentation. Instead of one dominant plot, Dos Passos uses multiple characters, documentary fragments, headlines, songs, and cinematic transitions. Such techniques show how the individual is absorbed by mass culture and modern systems. Walter Kalaidjian's overview of American Modernism connects this period with new media, urban space, and experimental literary forms.

Dos Passos therefore expands the novel into a social panorama of modern America⁷.

American Modernism cannot be limited to white expatriate or Lost Generation writing.

The Harlem Renaissance was also a central part of the modernist transformation of fiction because it joined aesthetic experimentation with racial, cultural, and political self-definition. Writers such as Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, and Langston Hughes explored double consciousness, folk memory, migration, and the construction of Black modern identity.

George Hutchinson argues that the Harlem Renaissance changed American literary institutions and redefined the relation between race and national culture.

This means that American modernist fiction was plural: it included both elite experimentation and socially grounded cultural renewal⁸.

⁴Lehan R. D. *The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder*. - Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990. - P. 11-17.

⁵Baker C. *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist*. - Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972. - P. 53.

⁶Bleikasten A. *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*. - Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. - P. 41.

⁷Kalaidjian W. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*. - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. - P. 1.

The thematic expression of Modernism in American fiction is therefore closely connected with form. Fragmentation expresses broken social continuity; unreliable narration reflects epistemological uncertainty; symbolic imagery reveals the gap between dream and reality; and open structure resists easy moral closure. Modernist fiction also replaces the heroic individual with divided, wounded, or alienated characters. These figures are not passive; rather, their instability becomes the main artistic means for showing the pressures of modern life. As a result, the American modernist text becomes not only a story but also a structure of perception.

Conclusion. American fiction in Modernism represents a decisive transformation of prose art. It moves away from stable realism and creates new forms capable of expressing crisis, fragmentation, alienation, and changing identity. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, and Harlem Renaissance writers demonstrate different but related modernist strategies: symbolic structure, omission, stream of consciousness, montage, and cultural revision. Their works reveal that modernity is experienced not only as progress but also as rupture.

In conclusion, American modernist fiction should be understood as a diverse field where national myths, historical trauma, urban experience, and psychological complexity meet. Its innovation lies not only in new themes, but also in the discovery of new narrative forms. Through these forms, American writers gave literary shape to the unstable consciousness of the twentieth century and created models that continue to influence contemporary fiction.

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⁸Hutchinson G. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. - Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. - P. 19.