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## **REALISM VS POSTMODERNISM**

The current paper postulates the idea of literary movements being the amalgam of romantic and realistic techniques that undergo changes as time goes by. As a short article like this precludes following the history of major literary movements in light of this postulate, this paper explains the rationale behind the postulate and discusses only the literary movement of Postmodernism, as encompassing Realism and Romanticism and the transformation of the last two undergone in the process of making the former.

*Key words: The history of literature, the literary movement of Postmodernism, Realism and Romanticism.*

**T**he history of literature is as old as the history of Homo sapiens. With the formation and development of language people discovered themselves as storytelling animals, which in turn led to the art of fiction that evolved along with the mankind. So many writers so many minds; different genres of literature proliferated and reflected «intellectual, linguistic, religious, and artistic influences» [4, para. 1]. Literature came to hold a mirror to life itself. But what kind of mirror was that? Emile Zola (1928) likened the work of art to «a window open to creation; there is, set into the frame of the window, a sort of transparent screen, through which one sees the objects, more or less deformed, submitted to changes more or less perceptible in their lines and in their colors. These changes correspond to the nature of Screen» [1, p. 250].

Zola then used the «Screen» metaphor to explain differences between classical, romantic, and realist representations of life. Thus the classical screen was a «fine sheet of chalk ... of a milky whiteness», whose images appeared in piercing, dark lines. The romantic screen «let all the colours through», alongside with «arge spots of light and shade», like a prism, or «a mirror without stain». The realist screen was «a simple windowpane, very thin and clear ... so perfectly transparent that the images come through and reproduce themselves afterward in all their reality». However, Zola noted that even the realist screen had a thickness that refracted its objects and transformed them slightly. Zola's «screen theory» is applicable to all literary movements as there is one life and accordingly, one mirror that changes throughout the time, that is one-dimensional. Therefore, we can speak of one reality only that has already happened (past), that is happening now (present) and is about to happen (future). It is generally accepted that reality can be either objective (existing outside our mind, independent of any conscious entity) or subjective (what we perceive, the inner reality of our mind). When we are sober, two forms of reality overlap. Whereas when we are asleep subjective reality takes the dominance. If applied to fiction, two literary movements/periods/techniques i. e., Romanticism and Realism can be said to encompass subjective and objective realities respectively. Although as distinct literary periods/movements they are time bound. As literary techniques they have been present in fiction since bygone times although in different ratios. Thus, other movements can easily been analyzed in light of the merging of romantic and realistic techniques. As the purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast only two of them elaborately, i. e. Realism and Postmodernism, we will not focus on the other movements. In order that you may draw some conclusions and for us to give some plausible examples let us look first look at Romanticism and then at Realism closely.

For this purpose I have decided to refer to the Russian and English sources that accurately generalize the literary movements the way they are accepted in academic fields.

Romanticism, main characteristics [13, p. 4–5]

- The idea of the freedom of the individual;
- That the individual is unique with his strong feelings, a rebel and proud loner, who hates the mediocre and doesn't obey the system, resists it and is placed in the centre of the «picture»;
- Romantic mentality and aesthetics are built on contradictions and antitheses; the main antithesis being the contrast between the ideal and the reality; of soul and reality;
- Soul is revealed unfolded in nature, in feelings (first of all in love) and art (it's the sphere of fantasy and imagination). Through these means only the individual is perceived and realized. Inner life, passions and moods of the individual make up the considerable part of the work;
- Space and time are boundless and vast. The action can take place both in the sky and on earth, in the waters of the stormy seas, in underground caves, unknown countries, in ordinary cities, in the specific time of history or in eternity;
- Wide use of mythological and folklore topics, biblical motives, historical and scientific materials;
- Main problems of the romantic works: loneliness, wandering, art and the artist, childhood, cult of intuition, cult of passion, crime and punishment, madness, cult of fantasy and imagination, etc.

Realism, main characteristics [13, p.13–15]

- Broad description of real life;
- True to life description of events;
- Typical characters;
- Unlike romanticism where self-expression and the essence of being are significant, for realists the analysis of the social essence of being and the cognition of inner patterns of historical and social processes are significant. Thus realism presupposes socio-historical determinism of the described events and characters;
- In this sense realistic technique reveals an affinity with science, it relies on facts of reality, accumulates and systematizes them. Exploration of the world and the human is based on the analysis and synthesis of the phenomena of the world. Realism strives to establish relations, provide the interaction of «cause and effect», follow the work of laws of being;
- Typicality; realists perceive the personality as a result of certain epoch, social environment, upbringing – in other words the private «inquiry» of the whole range of external «reasons» of social order;
- Realist characters are in evolution, which is prominent in the most productive form of the novel in the *bildungsroman*;
- Realism is linked not only with the self-improvement of the character but also of the actions, plot and the «non-intervention» of the author.

Romanticism, main characteristics [7, p. 6]:

- Preoccupation with social and political affairs
- Realistic topics based on folk tales and ballads
- Plain feelings and true emotions
- Emphasis on individual freedom
- Nature in a typically idealized form embracing tradition
- Introducing cultural nationalism
- Exploring national history
- Bringing back medieval national roots including history of language, institutions, thought and architecture
- Rejection of artificialities
- Imagination – mixture of factual details and adventurous doings
- Simple in style, popular in appeal
- Creative, innovative, exploratory in approach
- Inclusive in interests

Realism, main characteristics [6, p. 4]:

- Faithful representation of life

- Concentrating on middle-class life and preoccupations
- Scenes of humble life
- Criticism of social conditions
- Characters are at the centre of interest as opposed to a plot
- Subjects portrayed with simplicity and respect but little elaboration
- Honest, matter-of-fact style
- Objects or figures are represented impartially and objectively

After reviewing the characteristics of these two literary techniques now we can turn to Postmodernism to see how these three are related and if Postmodernism can be treated as the amalgam of the latter two. This is especially relevant when Postmodernism claims that «there is nothing new under the sun» and therefore, nothing original, i. e. everything that had happened happens according to a spiral model only in a higher order:

- Like Romanticism Postmodernism rejects the philosophy of Enlightenment (which stressed that «logic and reason were the best response to stupidity, cruelty and superstition» [9]). However, unlike Romanticism, Postmodernism does not accept anything as reliable means of knowing things.

- Freedom, imagination and emotion are common to both Romanticism and Postmodernism.
- Subjectivity and emphasis on individualism and solitary life in society are common to both Romanticism and Postmodernism.

- Fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the Middle Ages is common to both Romanticism and Postmodernism, whereas Postmodernism does not always idealize it but often has an ironic attitude or deconstructs it.

- The same aspiration for detailed realistic and factual representation can be observed in both Realism and Postmodernism, although the latter tends to go further and explores the alternatives also.

- Mistrust in science is present in Romanticism and Postmodernism, because the former cherishes nature and the latter denies all metanarratives.

- Romantics were relativists, which means they looked less for absolute truth (in morality also) than Enlightenment thinkers did. As we know, postmodernists deny all kinds of ultimate truths. And even then realists realized that there were few absolutes and people were neither completely good or bad, but somewhere in the middle. Subsequently, realists avoid being preachy, as do postmodernists. Postmodernism is also associated with the tendency to dissolve binary categories and expose their co-dependency which can be seen as the highest level of relativity.

- All three, i. e. Romanticism, Realism and Postmodernism have produced psychologically complicated and multifaceted characters that replicate the turmoil of ordinary people.

- In a «nature versus nurture» dilemma all three side with the first. In Romanticism individuals are driven by their strong passions; in Realism heredity shapes the human character; in Postmodernism the individual is regarded as an effect of desires or discourses and power systems.

- In Realism most action happens in the minds of the characters. While in Postmodernism the same is true, those happenings are also likely to be phantasmagoric or «romantic».

- The purpose is the same: for Realism and Postmodernism – to stimulate the nature of reality more accurately – indefinite, unknowable, and ever changing.

- Both Realists and Postmodernists consult with their associates to be accurate with scientific descriptions. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) reportedly consulted with associates in order to learn more about specific subjects, so as to portray them in their fullness [5, p. 6]. Ian McEwan gives credit to Neil Kitchen (MD, FRCS (SN), Consultant Neurosurgeon and Associate Clinical Director, The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square, London) for his help with his novel *Saturday* [3, p. 292]. In *Enduring Love* he expresses his indebtedness to several authors of non-fiction books («I am indebted to the following author and books: E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, *The Diversity of Life*, *Biophilia*; Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory*; Steven Pinker *The Language Instinct*; Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*; Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal*; Walter Bodmer and Robert» [3, p. 292]).

- There is a kind of grimness and focus on the negative aspects of life to both Realism and Postmodernism that is unappealing: T. Dreiser or T. Hardy's novels, Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* or Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, etc.

- Both Realists and Postmodernists employ simple and direct languages.
- Like Romantics Postmodernist don't consider leadership as a primary objective for art (not encouraging society toward a higher good).
- Like Realists Postmodernists address social problems of the day; they condemn hedonism, consumerism, and economic globalism etc.

These were some points to explore how much the three literary movements overlapped and how much of romantic and realistic techniques Postmodernism had. However, Realism and Romanticism have not kept their original form which they had in the second half of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century but have undergone some transformations in postmodern context. Romanticism has shrunk, as Postmodernists do not aspire to originality (That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun, Ecclesiastes 1:9 [10]) and are not idealistic (no ideal love, beauty or state). As for Realism, its envelope is pushed to embrace Romanticism as well, thus, the discursive importance of Realism is magnified and therefore, Postmodernism becomes so eclectic trying to embrace the unembraceable and unpretentious – trying to be as close to real life as possible and humorous – ridiculing every problem it can't settle. Works such as John Fowles' *The Magus* (1966), Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008) exemplify it in the best manner.

In a word, Postmodernism can be considered to be the Realism of late capitalism aiming to embody the reality of commodification and all the complexities of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century where the virtual world is becoming as important as the real world. Even the forerunner of Postmodernism, Umberto Eco never saw it as an independent movement: «I have come to believe that «postmodern» is not a movement confined to a particular time, but a state of mind or, more precisely, an approach to intentional art. One could even say that every epoch has its own postmodernism, just as it was said that every epoch has its own mannerism» [11]. At this point, it is worth remembering the story behind *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605) that parodies chivalric novels written before it.

Another interesting facet of Postmodernism is about fragmentation. The world is supposed to be a fragment itself (Jean-Luc Nancy is in broad agreement, and in *The Sense of the World* (1993) suggests that we must learn to conceive the world as an absolute fragment. The world does not depend on anything: it is absolute. The world will never be complete: it is a fragment. Existence is therefore an absolute fragment [2, p. 84]) and thus is depicted as such. Although this is only an assumption postmodernists as advocates of this idea usually portray life in fragments making an attempt to reflect those small fragments/scenes in minute accurate details. Kevin Hart's words: «What's important about the postmodern is that it allows us to live without the illusions that modernity dangled before us – that, if we were reasonable and worked hard, we might all be free and prosperous and happy» [2, p. 10] once again confirm the fact that postmodernity calls us to be realists and free ourselves from illusions and reconcile with postmodern «reality». Now we all have our own micro-narratives (postmodernism's like a broken mirror reflecting surface made of fragments and at the same time reflecting each person looking in it) and «black» is not always black because we tend to see things through different perceptions. Rejection of binary oppositions and grand narratives consequently erases boundaries between «low» and «high» culture creating chaos and giving way to diversity and pluralism that means everything and anything can be questioned and must be questioned.

In postmodern fiction everyone gets a space to self-express; here the big bad wolf tells us the «true»/«innocent» story of his crimes (Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, 1989), Grendel (John Gardner *Grendel*, 1971) narrates his story which makes us believe he was not a snarling nasty monster but an intelligent outsider, Cecilia, Robbie and Briony (Ian McEwan *Atonement*, 2001) interpret the same episode at the fountain so very differently that eventually it brings about an adversity, etc. Narrating the events from different perspectives can be seen as new realist technique that appeared in order to depict the objective reality more accurately and broadly, from all possible/interested perspectives and points of view. It is also worth mentioning rewritings of some popular novels, such as *Jane Eyre* from «true» realist perspective (D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre*) or things that happen after happy marriage (like in most Jane Austin novels), e. g. Graham Swift's *Ever After*.

As reality is multifaceted, there is always the controversy of this or that novel being postmodern or not. We have to turn to Wittgenstein's theory of Family Resemblance and take it as natural when a certain postmodern novel does not demonstrate all the postmodern characteristics but only some of them [12, p. 66–67]. Postmodern characteristics crisscross the works; there is no definite number of conditions but a cluster of factors making the work postmodern. In real life we seldom get answers to all our questions, and neither do we in postmodern novels; neither Stephen nor the reader learns what happens to his daughter Kate after she is kidnapped in the supermarket (Ian McEwan's *Child in Time*), etc. Jeanette Winterson in her introduction to *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (a postmodern novel, written in 1985) gives a very good reason for choosing an extra-ordinary way of narration, which best describes her intentions to be as close to real life as possible:

«*Oranges* is an experimental novel: its interests are anti-linear. It offers a complicated narrative structure disguised as a simple one. [...] You can read in spirals. As a shape, the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement. But is it movement backwards or forwards? Is it height or depth? Draw several, each drifting into each and all this will be clear. [...] I really don't see the point of reading in straight lines. We don't think like that. Our mental processes are closer to a maze than a motorway; every turning yields another turning, not symmetrical, not obvious. Not chaos either. A sophisticated mathematical equation made harder to unravel because X and Y have different values on different days» [8, p. XVII–XVIII].

Postmodernism has been the subject of many heated debates and is still considered a controversial issue. Where some critics declare its death, others speak of it as conservatism. Others divide it into two (negative and positive), and some even speak of Postmodern Realism. Some Russian critics greet the advent of Postpostmodernism and many more see it as the end of Modernism. As the discussions continue, the absurdity of the whole issue is being revealed and many wonder if Postmodernism exists as an independent phenomenon or not. If the law of dialectics is applied, the postmodern is said to be the result of negation of the negation, i. e. the negation of Modernism, which in turn negated the kitsch that Postmodernism brought back and made the norm. Leaving aside its current state and by acknowledging romantic and realistic techniques standing behind all the literary movements we can explain even such a complex phenomenon as Postmodernism without losing sight of literature echoing the life of society.

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В данной статье анализируются идеи о направлениях различных литературных движений, где соединяются романтические и реалистические методы, которые претерпевают изменения со временем. С учетом объема статьи рассматриваются общие черты основных литературных направлений в свете этого постулата. Сделана попытка обоснования этого положения, основной упор делается на литературном движении постмодернизма, как охватывающего реализм и романтизм одновременно и процесс преобразования последних двух под влиянием первого.

*Ключевые слова: история литературы, литературное движение постмодернизма, реализма и романтизма.*

У статті аналізуються ідеї про напрямки різних літературних рухів, де з'єднуються романтичні й реалістичні методи, які зазнають зміни з часом. Враховуючи обсяг статті, розглядаються загальні риси основних літературних напрямів в аспекті цього постулату. Зроблено спробу обґрунтування цього положення, наголошується на літературному русі постмодернізму, який охоплює реалізм і романтизм одночасно і процес перетворення останніх двох під впливом першого.

*Ключові слова: історія літератури, літературний рух постмодернізму, реалізму і романтизму.*

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