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Artistic synthesis in the paradigm of postmodernism in the literary works of the 20th century

Abstract. *The paper concerns global problematics in literary trends of the 20th century, art synthesis and its features. A number of definite patterns is discussed leading to the emerging of tendencies bordering on postmodernism and the movements close to it.*

Key words: *art synthesis, postmodernism, Kurt Vonnegut, impersonality, simulacrum, conceptual synthesis*

Художній синтез у парадигмі постмодернізму в літературі 20-го сторіччя

Анотація. *Стаття присвячена глобальній проблематиці у сучасних літературних процесах 20го сторіччя , художньому синтезу та його рисам. Обговорюються ряд патернов та характеристик виникаючих внаслідок тенденцій на межах постмодернізму та напрямків близьких до нього.*

Ключові слова: *художній синтез, постмодернізм, Курт Вонегут, симулякр, концептуальний синтез*

Conceptual synthesis as a specific phenomenon of the contemporary literary process. The term was first offered by L.G. Andreev in his works relating to the turn of the second and third millennia "From the " Decline of the West "to the "end of history " (2000) and" What did the history of the second millennium end with? (Art synthesis and modernism)" (2001). Based on a large-scale analysis of the most significant events in world literature of the last century, which were reflected in the works of the greatest writers of this period, L.G. Andreev has noted a number of characteristic phenomena, which appear to be definite patterns.

According to the scientist's point of view these patterns may include in the first place "the emergence of complex ideological and aesthetic systems, the very classification of which is difficult in many cases, whether it's realism, or modernism, or neo-baroque, or neoclassicism". Secondly, the growing interest of realism and non-modernism art for modernism (and postmodernism as its variation) due to the fact that the latter is "obviously wasting away". Thirdly, the emergence of such peculiar phenomena as a "post-modern romanticism",

"postmodern realism", existential-realistic synthesis (an example of creative works by late Sartre, marked with the desire to create a "universal method of cognition")¹.

Altogether these patterns lead to understanding that in the art practice of the past half century along with realism, modernism, postmodernism and popular literature, a new tendency was formed. It is characterized by the pursuit of integration, a peculiar symbiosis of different narrative techniques and ideological orientations for the purpose of the most complete and comprehensive reflection of the increasing complexity of reality and human fate.

This phenomenon was called the art or conceptual synthesis by Leonid Andreev, Russian literary critic. It is quite clearly demonstrated in the works of such famous writers as Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, William Faulkner, Louis Aragon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Heinrich Theodor Böll, Günter Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Milan Kundera, John Fowles, Umberto Eco and others. Another unifying feature for these names is humanism illuminating their literary works, permanently shown through at times extremely complicated poetics, which gives rise to the difficulties in interpreting the works of recent decades as Leonid Andreev says.

In conditions of total postmodernism, the writer's use of modernist / postmodernist methods and narrative technique automatically leads to his inclusion into the category of the postmodernists. Spiritual-humanistic meanings of the literary work are not taken into account, although they largely determine its success in readers and in criticism. And this gives rise to the situation where the humanistic oriented works and purely postmodern works creating spiritually deprived world of empty simulacra and intertextual games are placed in the same row.

¹ Андреев Л. Г. От «заката Европы» к «концу истории» / Л. Г. Андреев // «На границах». Зарубежная литература от Средневековья до современности: сб. работ / Отв. ред. Л. Г. Андреев. – М.: «ЭКОН», 2000. – С. 240–255.

For example, in one of the last works about K. Vonnegut by Todd F. Davis "Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade; or, How a Postmodern Harlequin Preached a New Kind of Humanism" (2006), a researcher, adhering to the established opinion about this writer as a postmodernist cannot get out of the vicious methodological circle: how should we explain the explicit humanism of postmodernist Vonnegut?

T. Davis considers early and late works by K. Vonnegut only in the postmodern field, as clearly stated in the table of contents, where the first chapter, for example, is called "Post-modern (Midwest) morality: The act of affirming humanity in a screwed-up world", and the final third chapter is called – "Apocalyptic Grumbling: Postmodern righteousness in the late novels". According to T. Davis, the center of each novel by Vonnegut is the conflict between his humanism and postmodern emptiness of life, but at the same time his novels, allowing the writer to improve his "ethical universe"¹, do not bear the burden of great classical prose.

The contradictory position of a researcher leads him to the paradoxical views: Vonnegut is an absolute postmodernist, but the difference is that he is a postmodernist performing search to fill a void in the heart of the postmodernism splitting. That is, T. Davis admits that the essence, the core of postmodernism is splitting, emptiness, nihilism, and Vonnegut attempts to fill this void with humanism. But postmodern aesthetics fundamentally rejects both humanism and any search for ethical reasons. This principled position of postmodernism was formulated by one of its famous theorists and apologists Ihab Hassan in the book "Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature" (1982), in which he identified a postmodernist writer as "a radical skeptic, who finds the phenomenal world gratuitous, and reality merely " a nice place to visit", without foundation. Therefore, a distinguishing feature of postmodern literature is "... estrangement from wisdom, from society, from the history, consistent rejection

¹ Davis, Todd F. Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade – Albany: State U. of New York Press, 2006. – 192 pp.

of all obligations and relations with the world that was created by people, as well as an optional rejection of any form of life in the society" ¹.

Let us compare the widely known metaphor of the writer as a canary in the mine by K. Vonnegut with this postulate. After the publication of the novel "Slaughterhouse-Five" he wrote: "I sometimes wondered what the use of any of the arts was. The best thing I could come up with was what I call the canary in the coal mine theory of the arts. This theory says that artists are useful to society because they are so sensitive. They are super-sensitive. They keel over like canaries in poison coal mines long before more robust types realize that there is any danger whatsoever" ². Or his words of a writer's mission from "Cat's Cradle": "When a man becomes a writer, I think he takes on a sacred obligation to produce beauty and enlightenment and comfort at top speed" ³.

However, T. Davis finds nothing better than to leave K. Vonnegut in the postmodernism trend, persisting on the "postmodern humanism", characteristic for the writer and the "paradox of postmodern humanism, a position that affirms humanistic values while maintaining a postmodern perspective" ⁴.

Such contradictions, so characteristic in assessing the creation by a number of well-known contemporary writers or their particular works, marked by the use of narrative techniques characteristic for postmodernism, raise questions over the nature of this conflict. They lead to the conclusion that if the humanistic tendencies of a writer are so distinct that do not fit in the paradigm of postmodernism, then, the postmodernism attributed to him is not postmodernism, but something else, say, artistic synthesis?

The literary work of above mentioned writers and many other ones really inhere the wide and free use of a variety of narrative techniques developed by

¹ Ihab Habib Hassan "The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature", University of Wisconsin Press LTD, London, 1982. – 315pp.

² Kurt Vonnegut speaks «Physicist, purge thyself». Chicago Tribune, June,22, 1969.

³ Vonnegut K. Cat's Cradle – New York : Holt, A Delta Bok, 1963. – 233 p.

⁴ Davis, Todd F. Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade. – Albany : State U. of New York Press, 2006. – 192 pp.

realism, modernism, postmodernism, the use for the purpose of "merging of creative energies in the synthetic art, which is meant to absorb the whole spiritual self-determination of the nation in its focus" as Vyacheslav Ivanov said¹. The emergence of this tendency, so isomorphic to the very nature of art, Vyacheslav Ivanov referred to the end of the nineteenth century. He believed that it originated as a reaction to the increasing critical culture and cultural differentiation, leading to "an inevitable competition of one-sided truths and relative values", to the isolation and closure of artistic movements and schools that were contrary to the nature of art. And therefore he noted with satisfaction "a number of symptoms, which indicated incipient tendency toward reintegration of cultural forces, to their inner reunification and synthesis"².

At that stage the idea of artistic synthesis as "merging of art energies" of various artistic-aesthetic movements in the name of creation of the nationwide, all-human, spiritually sublime art could not be implemented. Further dispersion of the art was actively continued by modernism. Each of its many movements (futurism, dadaism, surrealism, existentialist novel and existentialist drama, "new novel" and "new "new novel", absurd drama, etc.) categorically proclaimed its principles and artistic techniques as the only true and the last word in art.

But from the middle of the twentieth century the thirst for full-blooded art was growing again – artistic synthesis. T. Mann spoke about a literary work capable to put the question about the person in conditions that threatens its very existence, and about humanity in all its breadth and give an answer for it. It can only be a work, "inspired by that interest in a man, which is not isolated within the individual, but extends to the universal" ³.

¹ Иванов Вяч. Родное и вселенское; [Сост., вступ. ст. и прим. В.М.Толмачева]. – М. : Республика, 1994. – 428 с. – [Мыслители XX века].

² Иванов Вяч. Родное и вселенское; [Сост., вступ. ст. и прим. В.М.Толмачева]. – М. : Республика, 1994. – 428 с. – [Мыслители XX века].

³ Манн Т. Собр. соч. в 10 т. – Т.9 : О себе и собственном творчестве [пер. с нем.]. – М. : Гос. изд-во худож. лит., 1960. – 686 с. (р.177)

For the realization of this idea, from which it could be possible to extract "something necessary for people, some inner content"¹, T. Mann considers it possible and necessary to use all the means of modern literature, "which it has – starting from the potential ideas and finishing with narrative techniques"².

In fact, in the above judgments T. Mann clearly identified the essential elements of the artistic practice, in course with which the most significant works of the most famous writers of the second half of 20th – beginning of 21st centuries were created – Louis Aragon, Heinrich Theodor Böll, Günter Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, Kurt Vonnegut and others.

Despite the diversity of their use of creative styles and narrative techniques, all of them, one way or another, are in the force field of humanity in the broadest sense of this word. They always put the age-old question of the man who seeks himself, inquiring about his destiny, his place in society and in the world. And all of them in one way or another, in spite of sometimes severe and impartial criticism of modern man and the illogical social world order established by him, seek to bring to this unordered world a little order and the belief that man is, according to William Faulkner, will not only survive, but win.

Therein lies the fundamental difference between the literature of artistic synthesis from the post-modern literature, which describes the world as absurd, while separating literature from humanism and declaring the creation of impersonal texts in which meanings, according to Roland Barthes, "should loom somewhere in the distance"³, suppressed by language buzz or empty language games.

¹ Ibid, p.173.

² Ibid, p.172.

³ Барт Р. Критика и истина. Введение в структурный анализ повествовательных текстов // Зарубежная эстетика и теория литературы XIX – XX вв. Трактаты, статьи, эссе. – М. : Изд-во Моск. Ун-та, 1987. – С. 349–422. (p.543)