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**JOHN BARTH VS. ROLAND BARTHES: THE POETICS
OF REPLENISHMENT IN AMERICAN POSTMODERNIST AUTOBIOGRAPHY
ДЖОН БАРТ VS. РОЛАН БАРТ: ПОЕТИКА ОНОВЛЕННЯ
В АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ПОСТМОДЕРНІСТСЬКІЙ АВТОБІОГРАФІЇ
ДЖОН БАРТ VS. РОЛАН БАРТ: ПОЭТИКА ВОСПОЛНЕНИЯ
В АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ПОСТМОДЕРНИСТСКОЙ АВТОБІОГРАФИИ**

Запропоновано новий погляд на сучасну постмодерністську автобіографічну прозу Джона Барта та його сучасників, яку вже не можна розглядати в рамках постструктуралістської концепції смерті суб'єкта та автобіографізму як «стирання обличчя». В останні роки ствердилося уявлення, що постмодерністська автобіографія демонтує особистість автора в тексті та руйнує усе, що становило сутність літературної автобіографії. Аналіз творів видатних американських постмодерністських письменників виявляє відмінності між постструктуралістськими постулатами про зникнення автора або його тотальну фікційність у жанрі постмодерністської автобіографії та творчістю письменників, які в цьому жанрі по-новому оприявлюють присутність автора в тексті: як людини та як митця. Вивчено ставлення Джона Барта, який проголосив нову епоху «літературного оновлення», до резонансної анти-автобіографії Ролана Барта «Ролан Барт проти Ролана Барта». Виявлено принципові зміни у підході до зображення автобіографічного суб'єкта. В останніх романах автор – це не система знаків, він з плоті і крові самого реального письменника Джона Барта, оточеного друзями і близькими і явленого у фактах особистого життя, творчого темпераменту. У літературі кінця ХХ і на початку ХХІ ст. помітні процеси художньої деконструкції і радикального переосмислення як самої можливості відновлення автобіографізму в колишніх правах, так і смертного вироку йому.

Ключові слова: стирання обличчя, анти-автобіографія, суб'єкт, автор, постструктуралізм, постмодернізм, Джон Барт, Ролан Барт, Поль де Ман.

Предложен новый взгляд на современную постмодернистскую автобиографическую прозу Джона Барта и его современников, которая не вписывается в рамки постструктуралистской концепции смерти субъекта и автобиографизма как «стирания лица». В последние годы утвердилось представление, что постмодернистская автобиография разрушает личность автора в тексте и все то, что составляет сущность жанра автобиографии. Проведенный в статье анализ произведений известных американских писателей выявляет отличия между постструктуралистскими постулатами об исчезновении субъекта или его тотальной фикции и творчеством писателей, которые возрождают присутствие автора в тексте: как человека и как художника. Изучено отношение Джона Барта, который провозгласил новую эпоху «литературного восполнения», к резонансной анти-автобиографии Ролана Барта «Ролан Барт

против Ролана Барта». Выявлены принципиальные изменения в подходе к изображению автобиографического субъекта. В его последних романах автор – это не система знаков, он из плоти и крови самого реального писателя Джона Барта, окруженного друзьями и близкими и явленного в фактах личной жизни, творческого темперамента. В литературе конца XX и в начале XXI ст. заметны процессы художественной деконструкции и радикального переосмысления как самой возможности восстановления автобиографизма в прежних правах, так и смертного приговора ему.

Ключевые слова: стирание лица, анти-автобиография, субъект, автор, постструктурализм, постмодернизм, Джон Барт, Ролан Барт, Поль де Ман.

The paper illuminates one of the most vexed problems of American postmodernist autobiography that is usually viewed through the lenses of poststructuralist theory of the death of the subject and the theory of de-facement. The paper shifts the focus by accentuating the problem of autobiographical re-facement as a mode of contemporary postmodernist prose that proceeds with multiplying experimental “realistic” techniques, challenging the concept of autobiographical de-facement advocated by Paul De Man. The field of contemporary American fiction, where autobiographical replenishment is the core of its poetics, offers many avenues of exploration. The analysis of autobiographical writings reveals the difference between poststructuralist tenet of impossibility to create autobiography as life-writing and the art of the writers who restored the author as a man and as an artist in their autobiographical texts. John Barth, who was the ardent advocate of the literature of replenishment, created autobiographical texts with a recognizable author’s presence, rendering his personal experience directly. John Barth transgresses from the biographical author to the hero of the text as if questioning Roland Barthes’s belief articulated in his anti-autobiography “Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes” that “in the field of the subject there is no referent”. If Roland Barthes starts with declaring the impossibility to describe himself, John Barth, on the contrary, provocatively implements his project, creating «life-in-letters» as innovative postmodernist autobiographical replenishment.

Keywords: de-facement, anti-autobiography, subject, author, poststructuralism, postmodernism, John Barth, Roland Barthes, Paul de Man.

The recent interest in autobiography reveals the poststructuralist trajectory from the denial of any possibility to render personal experience to the death sentence of this genre. Some scholars go so far as to declare that either all writing is autobiography or that autobiography is fiction. James Olney in his exemplary work traced tendencies in autobiographical writings from St Augustine’s “Confessions” to Beckett’s writing where he found “a momentary conclusion” of this genre [14, p. 172]. To stop at this point now will be, probably, historically incorrect. So I suggest looking further behind the experiment of Beckett. In new century literature maintains openness to other aesthetic alternatives that need further investigation. What we witness is a variety of situations in challenging the image of the self as a self-sufficient cogito, and the search for new possibilities in art.

The paper focuses on the problem of autobiographical re-facement as a mode of contemporary postmodernist prose that proceeds with multiplying experimental “realistic” techniques, challenging the concept of autobiographical de-facement advocated by Paul De Man [8, p. 67–81]. I believe that a close analysis of this phenomenon may specify John Barth’s concept of the “literature of replenishment” [4, p. 193–207] as well as enlarge on the catena of traits suggested by Ihab Hassan who assigns postmodernism at the turn of the century with what he calls “fiduciary” realistic traits [10, p. 211].

The field of contemporary American fiction, where autobiographical replenishment is the core of its poetics, offers many avenues of exploration. I have selected three comprehensively representative figures from different ends of life-writing spectrum (John Barth, Stephen Dixon, Joseph Heller) for demonstrating how literature today by the method of autobiographical re-facement not only re-enacts individual life but also represents a more universal human state.

Realizing all the differences in the autobiographical spaces in the novels of hardcore American postmodernist writers, including Ihab Hassan parabiography “Out of Egypt: Scenes and Arguments of an Autobiography”(1986) [9], my theory of an autobiographical re-facement is derived from their radically innovative texts, that display their consubstantial poetics, rather than from interchange with other critics.

The American writers question the disappearance of the fundamental principles of referentiality, highlighting areas of epistemological tension in the proposed post-structuralist critique of the concept of «the subject’s death»[6, p. 269–291].

I venture to start with the analysis of the writings of the patriarch of American postmodernism John Barth who is thought to be one of the most «autobiographical» writers today. Brian McHale, Alfred Hornung assign his novels «Chimera» (1972), «The Letters» (1979) to «autobiographical literature», without analyzing the changed nature of how the writer pushed his experience and his texts to their limit [11, 13]. John Barth’s novels display their recognizable idiosyncrasy and through it Barth’s recognizable logophilic radiating personality. The author writes about autobiographical impulse in his writing: “how our real lives really are lived, as well as a way of telling our life-stories” [3, c. 20], and seriously declares: “the self is not a fiction”, thus formulating a new aesthetic strategy while creating a special type of «life-story», where a hyphen – is not a sign of separation of life and literature but a symbol of their mutual transgression. The self passed over in the process of living and writing and only in writing and in reading it becomes recuperable.

John Barth, who like Stephen Dixon in his novels “I.”, “The End of I.” and Joseph Heller in “Portrait of an Artist as an Old man”, as well as many other postmodernist writers, realizing that the author cannot be omniscient in his knowledge of reality, that Balzac’s principle of universality is naïve and false, discovered new techniques to make himself visible.

Barth’s novel “Coming Soon!!!” (2001) [1] that exempted from critical interest can be viewed as a polemical argument directed at Roland Barthes’s zero degree theory of writing. John Barth transgresses from the biographical author to the hero of the text as if questioning Roland Barthes’s belief articulated in his anti-autobiography “Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes” that “in the field of the subject there is no referent” [5, p. 56]. John Barth’s book is built as a self-pastiche: the books written by him are detectable here throughout the text, outlining his writing-living progress. The plot centres on a competition between a professor Emeritus who is the writer approaching retirement, and a «novelist aspirant». But both (the aging and the young) have the recognizable personality of the “original” writer John Barth – Professor Emeritus at Johns Hopkins University, the author of “Coming Soon!!!”.

In his autobiographical novels Barth virtuously does what Philippe Lejeune considers to be a Caesarian section [12, p. 192–223]. He presents his life as a book – a **book-Barth** – or rather, in view of the complicated post-modern poetics as a “metabook-Barth.” Autobiographism here is manifested in never-ending renewal and complication of the correspondence with reality.

However, if Roland Barthes starts with declaring the impossibility to describe himself, John Barth, on the contrary, provocatively implements this project, creating his own “life-in-letters” as innovative postmodernist autobiographical “arrangement”. Defining himself as “an arranger”, he confesses: “till I see, what I say, I can’t tell, *who I am*” [3, p. 324].

It is possible to call all his books that possess strong personal elements a self-life-writing, using this definition as a literary mode – not as the genre. It has a double focus: the life and the writing, that reveals the formation of his personality. Berndt Clavier holds an opinion that his very personal novels are «serious parody of the autobiography» [7, c. 165]. However, J. Barth does not build any burlesque – he just emphasizes the new quality of his text by directing light to the referentiality with the real autobiographical author-hero at its centre. His protagonist, like the author of this book – is about 60 years old, and he is the author of this text, and his Shelley is his hero’s and real author’s wife. The author humorously adds that he does not want her “to be a fiction». His father, sister, brother – that is, his whole life-circle is here and at the top – the real writer’s destiny.

It is noteworthy that J. Barth was the first to start this narrative experiment with the concept of **auto-lettered-fiction**, thus re-facing the author, some decades before Paul de Man’s resonant theory of defacement and prosopopea that became a catalyst in poststructuralist discussion of autobiographical subject.

Autobiographical re-facement becomes even more important for John Barth in his new volume novel “Every Third Thought. A Novel in Five Seasons» (2011) [2]. This personal impulse immediately signals itself in the intertext of the title – a line from «The Tempest» by Shakespeare. Prospero, when he executed his plans on the island, renounces his magic that for him (and for Shakespeare, who, as we know, abandoned stage and died five years later) equals death: «Every third thought shall be my grave».

A variety of personal overtones coming from understanding the interconnectedness between literature and life, the transience of human life and the inevitability of his life-end, permeates his book: «The Death of the Author is not the same as the death of the author». The theory of the author’s death, that worried him, as we know, half a century ago and to which he responded sarcastically, addressing Roland Barthes, now seems to him so insignificant in view of another death – not a theoretical one. But this novel is not about the loss of life and creative powers. The protagonist-writer George, who calls himself «post-mortem» (by homophonic analogy to «post-modern») adds “...still left First and Second Thoughts to get stuff done in” [2, c. 156].

Barth’s novels are **not** about a writer, who writes a “sunset romance” (as in Heller’s novel “Portrait of an Artist as an Old man”), they are the novels about himself, about what it means to write a novel being a mature artist in the third millennium – the same novel, which has already been written by him in his youth. As well as his book “Coming Soon”, this one is not a compendium of memories; neither is it introspection or recreation of his life-work. It is an associative revision of his **life-in-letters** – the principle which he used in the past, calling it “re-orchestration”.

So Barth exposes to deconstruction a standard autobiography in carrying out its main goal – to write a text that is autobiographical in conception about his childhood and adolescence: his twin sister; meeting with his second wife and happiness; about writing books devoted to «my Shelley”... Barth dedicates all his novels to her – his Shelly – his wife and muse. It gives the narrative a remarkable authenticity based on multiple transgressions within the context of his life and writing, illuminating his personality

of a writer and a husband. His books are indissociable from his direct biographical references. The writer bleeds his creative self in his books, establishing from his real but fragmented identity a cohesive re-faced narrative which manifests that his life **does not** become fiction in the act of being written down.

Veracity, sincerity and earnestness are no longer guaranteed by documented rendition of chronology of writer's real life but only by "*coaxial esemplasy*" [3, p. 20]. This all-embracing term was proposed by John Barth to define the phenomenon which according to him accentuates the connection between his story and the life-story of all men.

John Barth replenished the artistic devices that were polished by modernists: autoreflexion, autocommentary, nonlinearity, stream of consciousness. Importantly, these inherited traits coexist with the features of the new poetics of autobiographical re-facement. Only such prose, as Barth demonstrates, can be essentially sincere and true to life.

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