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REALITY AND IDENTITY IN ZOE HELLER'S NOVEL "WHAT WAS SHE THINKING?: NOTES ON A SCANDAL"

This research endeavours to explore the peculiarities of representing reality and identity in Zoe Heller's novel "What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal". One of the aspects touched upon in this research is post-postmodernism which is helpful in disclosing the topic. Radical openness is considered to be among its major characteristics. The paper outlines the factors contributing to the emergence of many realities as well as the crisis of identity which, in their turn, lead to terrific consequences. Due to generating numerous realities the contemporary society features the mythological status. The perception of reality is seen as a bifurcation phenomenon. It is revealed that during a person's lifetime their identity undergoes changes. Realities and identities interact. We also discover a renewed interest in interhuman interaction through connection and communication. It is also emphasized that shifting from identity to solidarity in our understanding has a huge potential in view of sharing identity with other people because it means feeling in solidarity with them. The female characters Barbara Covett and Bathsheba Hart illustrate correspondingly the old type of personality and the new type of personality. It is witnessed how their identities and realities correlate and what mark it leaves on them as well as their surroundings. The analysis shows to what extent their ethnic identity determines them. The selected text fragments shed light on the challenge of manifesting one's true identity into the world which is likely to lead to generating artificial identities. The internal reality and external reality do not coincide, the same concerns identities. The examination of the topic urges to pay heed to the significance of becoming conscious of personal past experiences to be able to live up, as close as possible, to their authenticity, not the roles alleged or imposed by others.

Key words: *post-postmodernism, reality, multiplicity of realities, mythologism, identity, solidarity, dignity, psychoanalysis, ethnopsychology.*

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РЕАЛЬНОСТІ ТА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТІ У РОМАНІ ЗОЇ ГЕЛЛЕР «І ПРО ЩО ВОНА ДУМАЛА?: НОТАТКИ ПРО СКАНДАЛ»

У статті досліджуються особливості репрезентації реальності та ідентичності в романі Зої Геллер «І про що вона думала?: Нотатки про скандал». Одним із аспектів, що знаходиться в центрі уваги цього дослідження, є пост-постмодернізм, що сприяє розкриттю теми. Серед його головних характеристик – радикальна відкритість. У статті окреслено фактори, що спричиняють появу багатьох реальностей, а також кризи ідентичності, які, у свою чергу, призводять до складних наслідків. Реальності та ідентичності корелюють. Через таку кількість реальностей сучасне суспільство має статус міфологічного. Сприйняття дійсності розглядається як явище біфуркації. Зауважено, що протягом життя людини її ідентичність зазнає змін. Оприявнюється новий інтерес до міжлюдської взаємодії з допомогою спілкування та налагодженню зв'язку. Також підкреслюється, що перехід від ідентичності до солідарності в нашому розумінні має величезний потенціал з огляду на те, коли ми поділяємо простір ідентичності з іншими людьми, оскільки це означає почувати солідарність з ними. Героїні вищезгаданого роману Барбара Коветт і Батшеба Гарт ілюструють відповідно старий тип особистості та новий тип особистості. Ми стаємо свідками того, як співвідносяться їхні ідентичності та реальності і який відбиток це залишає на них, а також на їхньому оточенні. Аналіз показує, наскільки визначальної є їхня етнічна ідентичність. Вибрані фрагменти тексту висвітлюють виклики проявлення своєї справжньої ідентичності у світі, що може призвести до генерування штучних ідентичностей. Внутрішня та зовнішня реальності не співпадають, те саме стосується й ідентичностей. Вивчення теми спонукає звернути увагу на важливість усвідомлення особистого минулого досвіду, щоб жити якомога ближче до своєї автентичності, а не до ролей, які проєктуються або нав'язуються іншими.

Ключові слова: *пост-постмодернізм, реальність, множинність реальностей, міфологізм, ідентичність, солідарність, гідність, психоаналіз, етнопсихологія.*

Introduction. The number of scholars manifesting interest in studying "reality" and "identity" in literary texts published in the early 21st century has been increasing, which is caused, evidently, by the ubiquitous alienation. The orientation on overcoming the identification crisis in a society gives impetus to the development of post-postmodernism. In this work we employ the terms "post-postmodernism" and "metamodernism" interchangeably.

In this paper I attempt to uncover ways of portraying reality and identity in the novel written by the contemporary British writer Zoe Heller "What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal". We also intend to dwell upon factors causing the existence of many realities and the crisis of identity.

Post-postmodernism and reality. The post-postmodern generation of authors in English literature pushes aside skepticism about the possibility of objective and universal knowledge of reality. Their contribution lies in the intentional creating of incomplete and multiple worlds. Hence, according to the theorists of metamodernism, T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, this can be characterized with the help of metaxis metaphor, the condition of in-betweenness as humans are suspended on a web of polarities – the one and the many, eternity and time, freedom and fate, instinct and intellect, risk and safety, love and hate... I. Hassan admits that the modern culture explicates itself in the paradigm of the unity of multiplicities which is expressed in contemporary texts with the help of ideas related to antinomies "a person – the world", "rational – intuitive / subconscious", "physical / real – metaphysical / imaginary". T. Hundorova stresses that one of the paradigmatic manifestations of post-postmodernism is transit culture which is post-traumatic. Within this transition there is the dialogue between "I" and "the world", "body" and "the surrounding", "consciousness" and "being". "In general, transit culture is a certain hermeneutic framework: the cognition of reality is always associated with some incompleteness, there always exists gaping hole in reality cognized by you" (Гундорова Т.: 2013, p. 12–13).

Post-postmodernist reality is created in a special way, and at the same time appears as split and potentially multiple. In the works of post-postmodernism, there is the motif of the schizophrenic split of a personality and, as a consequence, the perception of reality as a bifurcation phenomenon. The constructed schizophrenic reality sometimes appears to be the last opportunity for protecting from the Truth, which cannot be perceived by a person due to the biological limitations.

Modern society is a society of constant uncertainty, and, therefore, such a society can be said to

be determined by its own uncertainty. Modern society is a transcendental society, it is always beyond itself. This is not an ideal society, because it constantly creates new realities and is not frozen in any social hierarchy. Thus, modern society acquires a mythological status. It constantly creates itself as a myth, because each new stage of social creation makes the previous stage perish into non-existence as such, while at the same time leaving it in the present in the status of a monument of the past, that is, a thing detached from its temporal discourse and absorbed by another temporal discourse, for which it is only a thing in space (Димерець Р. Й.: 2000, p. 69). He distinguishes three types of reality statuses: 1) I-reality (reality-here-and-now); 2) communicative or mythological-utopian reality (the reality that arises in the process of transmission and perception of information by I-realities); 3) We-reality (communal reality). In the process of communication, myths and utopias are created, through which information about the Other is transmitted, which conditions the creation of a social or communal status of reality (Димерець Р. Й.: 2000, p. 68).

Most people's reality as well as fictional characters' can be described as perceptive reality. In fact, reality is what we perceive it to be. We tend to term reality as what we can see, hear, feel, taste and smell and our senses can be manipulated. Nevertheless, we share a common reality (an external reality / a social reality) as we share the same world physically (different social institutions). Perception is subjective and interpretation of events is also subjective since it is based on our own experiences. Our internal reality is created by our external reality and then our internal world creates our external world. This makes an eternal circle. From my perspective, what can be experienced in the epoch of post-postmodernism in the real world and literary texts is the transformation of a mere participant of events, who can be easily disorientated, into an observer who leads an authentic purposeful life and who is capable of self-correction.

Post-postmodern fictional world contains the combination of the authentic and the hyperreal, something that exists and something than can exist. Renewalism steers away from foundationalist ideas,..." (Rudrum D.: 2015, p. 208). Contemporary authors are fully aware of the fact that there is no such thing as stable notions of truth, faith, ethics and morality, but it is still important to realize how to live with each other.

Post-postmodernism and identity. In the literature of post-postmodernism we observe the return of the subject, an exceptional post-postmodernist sensibility, which is due to the fact that characters of the

novels seek to express themselves in their relations with the world, showing their real world that can conflict with other subjects of reality.

Texts of contemporary culture feature the idea of “multiplicity of reality”, in which a person is present, the idea of combining the bio-neurochemical and the metaphysical in a person. As a result, the present national / ethnic identity ... is the product of “changes and interactions”, of “choice and not only heredity” (Appiah K. A.: 2005, p. 62–113), the result of “background and her / his own consent” (Hollinger D. A.: 2006, p. 23-31), (Sollors W.: 1986).

Metamodernism reveals the problematics of atopic reality. The talk is about the presence of a subject in several dimensions of reality simultaneously. The subject of the reality cannot quite understand which reality is genuine (Vermeulen T. & Van den Akker R.: 2010). Oscillation between realities occurs due to the crisis of identity and vice versa, it causes emotional sufferings since subjects feel they are unable to overcome the crisis. In the novelistic discourse, thus, there are uttered complicated issues linked to human identity, interaction between man and politics, man and ideology.

The human nature is not infallible. People may be underrated based on their gender, class, appearance and other features. In J. Harris’s novel “Gentlemen and Players”, Miss Snyder, being one of the main characters, consciously and unconsciously feels this underappreciation in her childhood in the external reality, and it affects her identity and transforms her into a criminal whose revenge is destructive. Stepping beyond the boundaries of the imperfect “Old Man” is impossible to the advantage of “the New Man” (Pepperell R.: 2003) because of the lack of connection between spirituality and the physical body.

In the literature of post-postmodernism there is explicated the motif of searching harmony between a man and the Truth; the Truth cannot be understood with the help of the intellect. The motif of human opposition to the chaos of creation is revealed; the chaos can be tamed if a person analyzes situations, other people’s deeds not only through the intellect or emotional perception of events. Intellect appears to be only one of the factors of realizing the incomprehensible chaos, and a person being a part of it is able to succeed in cognizing this chaos by means of modern scientific achievements: nanotechnology, neurobiology and neurochemistry as well as humanities.

One of the main theoretical developments of post-postmodernism is ‘renewalism’ (Pepperell R.: 2010, p. 3). It is a new approach to literature that combines some of the most important shifts mentioned previously, such as a return to realism and a

renewed interest in inter-human communication and connection. Renewalism is provoked by a desire and an urgency to rediscover values – such as meaning, communication, connection – that had been ignored or rejected by postmodernism. It essentially tries to embrace both the possibility and the impossibility of those values (Pepperell R.: 2010, p. 122).

In contrast to the above-mentioned scholars, D. Hollinger resorts to the term “solidarity”. He asserts: “The problem of solidarity is shaping up as the problem of the twenty-first century. Yet the centrality of this problem to our time, and to our apparent future, is often obscured by the popularity of the term *identity*” (Hollinger D. A.: 2006, p. 23). He explains that this word usually refers to a cultural and psychological, rather stable or static condition whereas in the USA it is commonly used to assign political and social roles to individuals. In his work “From Identity to Solidarity” D. Hollinger underscores that sharing an identity with other people is to feel in solidarity with them.

Analyzing Reality and Identity in “What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal”. The limits of human perception are superbly conveyed in Z. Heller’s novel. It is narrated by Barbara and every detail is presented from her perspective. Barbara writes a manuscript about the affair between Sheba Hart, who is her colleague and friend at school and Stephen Connolly, a fifteen-year-old pupil. It is revealed in the novel how male and female teachers are viewed when serious issues emerge. Barbara’s perception of reality is limited which comes from her limited viewpoint. It turns out, thus, that she is an unreliable narrator. Barbara’s behavior and deeds are justified by overwhelming obsession. It becomes apparent that both Sheba and Barbara are living in their imaginary worlds. The ramifications of this are painful for both of them. Both women’s skewed inner perceptions of reality ruin their lives externally.

Identity is created by people through the course of their lives. Two key fragments of the text enable the reader to comprehend the theme of reality and identity in the novel, one of them is the following: “For most people, honesty is such *modus operandi* – such an aberration in their workday mendacity – that they feel obliged to alert you when a moment of sincerity is coming on. ‘To be completely honest’, they say, or ‘To tell you the truth’, or ‘Can I be straight?’ Often they want to extract vows of discretion from you before going any further. ‘This is strictly between us, right?’... You must promise not to tell anyone... ‘Sheba does none of that. She tosses out intimate and unflattering truths about herself, all the time, without a second thought’... It is a class characteristic, I think

– this insouciant frankness... But Sheba is the only genuinely upper-class person I've ever known. Her throwaway candour is exotic to me, in its way, as a plate in an Amazonian tribesman's lip" (Heller Z.: 2003, p. 2–3). Human beings are not inclined to interact without conventionalities creating external reality full of them. It is something out of ordinary to be direct. People speak their minds unwillingly. It is dangerous to show your authenticity and it becomes natural to wear masks since a person risks being misunderstood, humiliated, judged, punished, unaccepted. Nevertheless, in her husband's presence she pretends to be happy, however, this is just visible reality created for him. She has a family and at the same time she is missing something, just like Barbara who feels incredibly lonely – she has neither her own family nor children, just her job. Both characters consciously and unconsciously seek someone who will make them complete. J. Bowman points out in his article that the ancients understood identity as a continuity with the past. Our identity may undergo alterations in the course of life under conditions that we are open and trust one another. "It is of high importance to relearn to trust one another as fellow citizens instead of as servants of the state. But in order to trust one another, we must first know who we are" (Bowman J.: 2019). Sheba is afraid to fully trust her husband. Sheba's husband Richard is a hypocrite since Sheba's relationship with a student repels him, he appears to have forgotten that Sheba was his student when they got married and it was already his second marriage. Richard's fossilized identity and stagnant reality are artificially maintained by his ego, Sheba and those surrounding him. She pities him because of his tough life and is ready to sacrifice her life. Male identities in the novel are less likely to transform. Richard prefers to perpetuate outdated gender stereotypes within the marriage. Barbara emphasizes: "But, then, one of the many things I have always admired about Sheba is her capacity to talk about low things and make them seem perfectly decent... Sheba talks because she is just naturally more loquacious and candid than I am. I am circumspect by nature and she ... isn't (Heller Z.: 2003, p. 1–2). Sheba, at least, talks about issues that worry her whereas Barbara, being too coward, has not even mentioned a word about her situation. She has emotional and mental issues but skillfully camouflages her passivity and aggression. Her reality is schizophrenic. Men's disinterest in Barbara leads her to obsession with Sheba and other women and longs for more intimate relations with her. In fact, she is implicated in ruination of Sheba's marriage. She refers to herself as a caretaker but insidiously betrays Sheba when finds out that she chose S. Connolly, not her.

Judgemental society (community) produces human identities who are sanctimonious and whose opinions are biased. Here is how Barbara speaks about newspapers (the second key text fragment): "There was a time when I placed a certain amount of trust in the integrity of the country's news organizations, but, now that I have seen at close hand the way in which reporters go about their business, I recognize how sadly misplaced that trust was. Over the last fortnight, I must have spotted twenty errors of fact about Sheba's case, in the newspapers alone" (Heller Z.: 2003, p. 5). Journalists are involved in creating the external reality which finally ruins Sheba's family. Sanctimony hampers the birth of a new identity that is able to stand against external realities.

Most likely it is not accidental that Sheba teaches pottery. It is, to a certain degree, symbolic: everyone can create their lives on their own and she attempts to, however, she is at the initial stage and her steps are not firm yet and she is making many mistakes. As is discovered, the school environment is not the one that favouring the balance between the internal and external realities, on the contrary, it disturbs equilibrium. How persuasive sound the words uttered by one of the school staff intending to say that external reality will cruelly devour anyone: "Why are all the curtains drawn? ... "...it's so we can't look out at them (pupils). So they can smash each other up – do their raping and pillaging – and we're not required to intervene". A lot of teachers at St George's go in for this sort of posturing cynicism about the pupils, but Bill is the chief offender: "Don't worry", Bill said to Sheba, 'you'll get used to the gloom" (Heller Z.: 2003, p. 13).

In the novel the following question is uttered by Sheba several times: "What's going to become of me?" she asked again" (Heller Z.: 2003, p. 244). In fact, this sentence demonstrate that Sheba, in contrast to the other characters, is at the stage of transition, she is at a loss, she is bifurcated. It is the state of indeterminacy in which a person should change something, otherwise the process of stagnation and degradation starts. This forty-one-year-old woman is, perhaps, the only person in this novel who is not afraid to confess the way she feels, the only problem is that she has chosen the wrong listener, Barbara, who turned out to be unable to support her. Sheba recollects her teens years: she did not know her inner world well, her identity was not formed and decisions she made used to be spontaneous. She is not content with her external reality at present. Sheba's husband is much older than she is. Her son has Down syndrome and her daughter is uncontrollable. She is burdened to a certain extent as she feels that a family is not an achievement. She does not live her life to the full. As

is seen, seeking solace people are ready to enter even into inappropriate relationships (Sheba's love affair with Steven Connolly). Sheba is guided by her ideals and fantasies, she failed to embody in the past. Her spouse, a lecturer in Communications Theory can scarcely create the environment to help her to confide all her doubts, worries and fears with him. She stereotypically thinks it is too late to change something cardinal, believing she is buried in marriage and then admitting that it has been just an excuse.

Barbara Covett and Bathsheba Hart are British. Ethnopsychologically, we identify snobbery in the families of both female characters. By the image of the hats from the childhood, out of which, one had to be worn daily and the other – on special occasions her mother instilled in Barbara the postponement of her life whereas in Bathsheba's case her parents' constant comparisons with Bathsheba's brother cultivated the inferiority complex within her. Obviously, it is the recognition of one's own past failings, i. e. B. Covett's mother and B. Harts' parents. "British snobbery is different. It is highly specific and highly significant, not to say vicious" (Appleyard B. A.: 2016).

Psychoanalytically, Barbara's libido energy is suppressed by the conditions of social life, moral prohibitions and the super-ego, a sense of duty. Accounting the real conditions and opportunities for satisfying her desires, this woman is still unable to do it. She is trying to return to the unconscious holding on to thoughts, memories, resentments, related to the drives, in particular, through keeping a diary. In the sphere of her unknown within the dualistic drives "Eros" and "Thanatos" (life drive and death drive) she is driven by death which is traced through her destructive thoughts and deeds in relation towards herself and others. Bathsheba is subconsciously driven predominantly by life choosing, e.g. to plunge into the love affair.

Three of them are educators who are supposed to understand that dignity is one of the most important things to the human spirit. It means that we are valuable by virtue of the fact that we are human beings. A person has the right to make a mistake and correct it. Barbara wants to be treated with dignity but she herself fails to do this in relation to other people. Barbara's internal reality is unknown to anyone with whom she deals. Full of controversies, Sheba feels she does not lead a dignified life and does not fulfill her potential. Fear to show their true selves leads to interaction of their artificial identities and the distortion of external reality they share.

Conclusion. Post-postmodernism is marked by the renewed engagement with the social world. The crisis of human relations and the crisis of communication are observed in an English novel of the early 21st century. Post-postmodern texts feature renewalism, i. e. writers express a new interest in inter-human connection via communication. Humans are able to manage the world around them due to the process of constructing and exchanging the meaningful intersubjective relations through communication. Based on the analysis of selected text fragments we reveal that the lack of interaction causes the appearance of simulative realities and the crisis of identity. Reality cannot be cognized due to limitations of the human nature. One of the tendencies of post-postmodern metanarrative is longing for a person's authentic representation of their identity and reality in the paradigm of multiple realities.

The novel "What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal" introduces us to a comprehensive school for boys and girls, which being a social institution functions due to people. On the surface the characters share the common reality but their internal realities are different and contradictory. Sheba, Richard, Barbara as well as other characters act immaturely due to their poor thinking. We observe the veiled depreciation of the human dignity. It becomes evident, as J. Bowman justifiably declares, that: "If we are to restore peace to our society and ensure the freedom of future generations, we must regain the social structures and institutions that define identity, starting with the intrinsic dignity of the human person" (Bowman J.: 2019). Dignity is gained through the process of authentic interaction. In the paradigm of post-postmodernism the term "identity" can paradoxically be viewed in the light of two meanings: 1) there are characteristics that determine who we are which creates an abyss between us; 2) there is a close similarity or affinity between us and this brings us together, conciliates us.

In the external reality the characters demonstrate artificial identities, they pretend to be what they are not, this distorts the perception of the external reality by other people. Identities generate realities, which, consequently, impact on these identities. The clash of realities leads to the crisis of identity. The past and contemporary reality determines or influences the future reality and identity. The personal (internal) reality and social (external) reality interact. Hypocrisy gives birth to several identities within one person.

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