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**ПРОЦЕСИ МІФОЛОГІЗАЦІЇ ТА ДЕМІФІЛОГІЗАЦІЇ:  
 ПОСТСТРУКТУРАЛІСТСЬКИЙ МІФ СМЕРТІ СУБ'ЄКТА  
 ПРОЦЕССЫ МИФОЛОГИЗАЦИИ И ДЕМИФОЛОГИЗАЦИИ:  
 ПОСТСТРУКТУРАЛИСТСКИЙ МИФ СМЕРТИ СУБЪЕКТА  
 MYTHMAKING AND UNMAKING:  
 POSTSTRUCTURALIST MYTH OF THE DEATH OF THE SUBJECT**

Переосмислено постструктуралістську концепцію смерті суб'єкта у творах провідних американських постмодерністських письменників Джона Барта та Стівена Діксона. У центрі статті – розгляд постструктуралістських теорій суб'єкта (Дерріда, Лютар, Лакан), які значно спростили картину сучасної культури кінця ХХ ст. Складлося уявлення, що постмодерністська література займається небувалым демонтажем особистості, усуненням автора, відмовою від оригінальності – тобто руйнуванням усього, що становило сутність літературної творчості. Проведений у статті аналіз

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творів видатних американських постмодерністських письменників виявив відмінності між постструктуралістським міфом смерті суб'єкта та природою художньої суб'єтивності, яка знаходить нові втілення в літературі. Твори Джона Барта та Стівена Діксона – у центрі аналізу, який демонструє, що постмодерністські письменники прагнуть зберегти «людську речовину» літератури, ставлячи під сумнів привілейовану роль конвенціональних категорій «герой» і «всезнаючий автор». Письменники демістифікують постструктуралістський міф про «кризу суб'єкта», вибудовуючи перехід від суб'єкта як індивідуалізованого «Я» до розкриття в героях постмодерністських творів загальнолюдського й істинно гуманного.

*Ключові слова:* смерть суб'єкта, суб'єктність, автор, постструктуралізм, постмодернізм.

Переосмыслена постструктуралистская концепция смерти субъекта в произведениях ведущих американских постмодернистских писателей Джона Барта и Стівена Діксона. В центре статьи – анализ постструктуралистских теорий субъекта (Деррида, Лиотар, Лакан), значительно искаживших картину современной культуры конца XX в. Сложилось представление, что постмодернистская литература занята небывалым демонтажом личности, исчезновением автора, отказом от оригинальности – то есть разрушением всего, что составляло суть литературного творчества. Предпринятый в статье анализ произведений ведущих американских постмодернистских писателей выявляет расхождения между постструктуралистским мифом смерти субъекта и природой художественной субъективности, которая находит новые воплощения в литературе. Произведения Джона Барта и Стівена Діксона – в центре анализа, который демонстрирует, что постмодернистские писатели стремятся сохранить «человеческое вещество» литературы, подвергая сомнению привилегированную роль конвенциональных категорий «герой» и «всеведующий автор». Постструктуралистский миф о «кризисе субъекта» демістифіцируется писателями, выстраивается переход от субъекта как индивидуализированного «Я» к раскрытию в героях постмодернистских произведений общечеловеческого и подлинно гуманного.

*Ключевые слова:* смерть субъекта, субъектность, автор, постструктурализм, постмодернизм.

The prevailing critical myth of the subject's death is reconsidered in the paper with reference to the writings of hard-core American postmodernist writers: John Barth and Stephen Dixon. The paper's focus is on how an escalated poststructuralist attack on the concept of subjectivity (Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Foucault) resulted in misreading the complexity of culture at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many believe that in postmodernism Man disappears, the author is dead, and the art itself lacks originality – thus almost everything that constitutes the humanistic subject of art, is undermined. The analysis reveals what happens to today's postmodernist literature, what contradictions there exist between the poststructuralist myth of the death of the subject and artistic subjectivity as a fiction of selfhood, which is still constructed in American postmodernist literature. The works of John Barth, Stephen Dixon are at the center of the research. The analysis shows that postmodernist writers are trying to preserve the *human matter*, challenging and reconstituting the place of a character and an omniscient author as the main literary conventions. Thus, the contemporary myth of «subject in crisis» is demythified by the writers, revealing a dialectical process of transcending the subject as an individual ego in the direction of discovering either the commonly human, or essentially humanistic.

*Keywords:* death of the subject, subjectivity, author, poststructuralism, postmodernism.

Roland Barthes in his book «Mythologies» (1957), which has become the founding text of contemporary cultural studies, views culture as a field of second order semiological system of mythology [2]. Speaking about contemporary myth today, we cannot be

theoretically naïve, but know that in critical parlance it is already a province of semiology. This concept of myth as a semiological system runs through many years of contemporary thought, including literary studies. Every period constructs its own myth of truth or master narrative: an Enlightenment myth of absolute Reason, a Romantic myth of Nature and genius, a liberal humanist myth of the centrality of the Subject in culture, etc. The latter became the central concern of Poststructuralist demythization, which supplanted the old grand metanarratives by the new myth of the death of the subject.

The paper analyses a poststructuralist myth, of how an escalated poststructuralist attack on the concept of subjectivity (Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Foucault) resulted in misreading the complexity of culture at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many believe that in postmodernism Man disappears, the author is dead, and the art itself lacks originality – thus almost everything that constitutes the humanistic subject of art, is undermined. Elsewhere I studied the appearance of the subject nearly two centuries before the time which Foucault argues is its birthday [8, p. 312]. Now my focus is on what happens to it in today's postmodernist literature – my focus, so to say, is on the other end of the scale. I try to explore the contradiction between the poststructuralist myth of the death of the subject and artistic subjectivity as a fiction of selfhood, which is still constructed in American Postmodernist literature. The writings of John Barth, Stephen Dixon are at the center of my research.

Postmodernist writers faced new challenges, which John Barth summarized in the statement: «the self is not transcendable» [1, p. 52]. The paper investigates what happens to art when it shifts its center, as I believe postmodernism does, from the deep level of a character, typical of psychological realism and modernism, to the level beyond the individual personality, which I define as a level of mentality – a complex integrity of mental and spiritual orientations of character, of author and of reader. There is no need to deny that Postmodernism reconsiders and re-enacts all literary conventions and this one – the humanistic subject – in the first place.

Not only the selfless, decentered, fragmented character of a literary hero, but the situation of Man and humanity is the subject of this art today. Postmodernist literature has not been studied in criticism from this perspective before. The Postmodernist writers consider that any psychologically precise definition of character limits the possibility of an artist, as determinism, typical of realism, limited that art. Man cannot be assigned to play one role. Thus, John Barth in his voluminous novel «The Tidewater Tales. A Novel» (1987), introducing his hero – Peter Sagamore (whose name points to his real function in the novel: telling stories) – characterizes him, parodying the very principle of this character-drawing: «Peter Sagamore, 39 years old and 8 ½ months old [3, p. 22], and his wife «Katherine Sherritt Sagamore, 39 years old and 8 ½ months pregnant» [3, p. 21]. In Barth's storytelling art Peter and Kathrine are story-persons. The human situation is what matters – not an individual human destiny: «It is a story of women and men/Like us: like us in love,» Kathrine says [3, p. 22]. In Barth's books, especially in «Chimera», «The Tidewater Tales. A Novel», «The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor», «On with the Story. Stories», the writer starts the rediscovery of words and stories about Man and humanity in general. In «The Tidewater Tales. A Novel» the characters are retelling, reinventing, filling in the gaps of their beloved episodes from Homer's «The Odyssey» with its essentially human situations: love, faithfulness, jealousy, seduction etc. The conventional psychological identity of the hero is substituted by their *creativity and responsiveness to the signs of humanity* – Homer's «The Odyssey.» Nick lyrically reinvents the end of «The Odyssey», in his version Odysseus and Nausicaa are united and sail to a place called «The Place Where Time Stands Still», «where East may be East and West, but where past and Future disappear» [3, p. 207]. This situation

is connected not only with what Nick and Katherine were aiming to do, when they escaped from the marriage ceremony on their boat called »Story,» but with a commonly human desire to overcome death and be forever young. Through this artistic intertextuality Barth's characters acquire allhuman dimension, outside the limits of their physical, psychological and social identities, which are parodically subverted at the beginning of the novel. Instead, Barth creates the saga of allhuman life within our culture's mode of expression. Any certain identity is undermined and blurred: instead a complexity of mental and spiritual orientations typical of Man is created. A more vivid and striking example of this new *subjectivity without hero*, psychologism without individualization is Stephen Dixon's mode of writing.

Dixon, an American writer, is undeservingly neglected by serious criticism. One of the most shocking of Dixon's experiments, which could be called 'Subjectivity Degree Zero', is his story «The Hole» [5] with its focus on 'Lynch Mob Mentality' and on the crisis of humanity in the world. The text resembles a script or a recording of authentic conversations, which are centered on an act of terrorism. This immediately connects us with the reality we live in: the violent terrorists' attacks all over the world. In Dixon's story some school children and their teacher are entombed under the collapsed planetarium building, which is on fire. The rescue team made a quick small hole wide enough for a child to slip out, but not enough for the teacher. The parents outside are crying and hurrying up the rescue operation. The climax of the situation reaches its apogee, when the teacher blocks the hole, not allowing the children to get out. Thus, he tries to force the rescue team to dig a hole wide enough for himself.

The text is double-coded by the writer, and turns into *the test on humanity* for everyone in the scene: the characters, the narrator, and a reader as the main target of this test. Everyone is supposed not only to experience the mental and emotional shock but to ask questions, «What is right?» At the end of the story, though, everyone is safe, the mob is still wild with revenge. Being scared, the teacher disappears in the hole, and no one, even his son and the protecting policeman, can coax him up. The revengeful mob lynches his son instead, «They caught the son, dragged him back, kicked at his head and body till it seemed all his limbs, ribs and face were broken, then hung him upside down by his feet from one of the tree branches... and beat his already unrecognized face with their handbags ...» [5, p. 305]. The image both of extreme inhuman violence and of human extreme despair (women's handbags) is created by the camera-eye technique, by the absence of any comments and descriptive adjectives, but inside it there is pain and awe. Nothing is said about the father, the teacher. He was not found either dead or alive, but there is no other exit from the place. Was he a witness to his son's lynching? Could the parents' act of lurching the innocent boy, be justified? Could the teacher's action be justified? How to understand a policeman's approval? The openness and uncertainty, the plurality of all possible answers and moral judgments is constructed by the poetics of this text that does not provide any single author's perspective. Dixon creates the text, which is not the mirror for understandable reality. The questions «who is right?» or «what happened to the father?» remained unresolved for the readers, not because the answers are not in the text, but because they simply do not exist for this situation. The cognitive hesitation moves from one truth (or seeming truth) to hesitation and uncertainty in it, to a new version of truth and new hesitation. This constant combination of concrete human situation and «cognitive efforts» to understand it, create an inner mental space of the text. The author, the narrator, the character, and the reader are all involved mentally and spiritually into the understanding of the situation of Man and the nature of evil.

It will be naïve to declare nowadays, that the author is dead. The 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 themselves invisible. But still, the writers' positions can be scanned by the readers. The postmodernist writers explore new ways of creating connections between the text and reader, between hero and reader's response – the connections which are not mediated by an author's direct explanations. But they do exist in the inner space of the text itself.

Does this mean the disappearance of Man as the subject of art, does this mean that Postmodernism is essentially dehumanized art? The analysis of these texts aims to show that postmodernist writers are trying to preserve the *human matter*, challenging and reconstituting only the place of a character and an omniscient author as the main literary conventions.

Dixon started experimenting with this 'Subjectivity degree Zero' in the story «Said» (1980). This type of poetics could be called *the poetics of absence*: there are no characters in a traditional sense of the word, there is no plot as event, there is nearly no other words but the monotonous repetition of the word «said»: «...he said, she said. She left the room he followed her. He said, she said. She locked herself in the bathroom; he slammed the door with his fists. He said. She said nothing» [4, p. 99–100]. Here Dixon is probing how absolute this absence of a character could be and discovers other means to intimate the self. Nothing is said directly. But the reader imagines everything that is. On the background of this facelessness, the human situations seem intensely and intimately psychological. The play with the homophone 'said as sad' intensifies this effect. Probably this human matter was indicated by Barth, when he declared that «the self is not transcendable» [1, p. 52].

In a much more aesthetically complex manner Dixon develops this «said» strategy and at the same time questions it in his novel «30 Pieces of a Novel» (1999). In this very unconventional text the writer creates an exhaustible multiplicity of human situations. He does this outside the concept of character and outside the tendency to equate it with consciousness. The main character, Gould Bookbinder, is literally, compositionally, a *binding* means for these «30 Pieces of a Novel» and he himself is pieced by them. We may suspect that the writer expects his readers to do the same and that this is the main artistic strategy of the book and the principle of character-creation. Thus, Dixon both problematizes and bonds the decentered subject of postmodernist art. The «oral» speech again in the «said mode» controls the narrative and does not allow it to project an individual consciousness. It projects only a type of mentality of a generic Man, his loneliness and his longings, which are common and recognizable by everyone. Gould appears inside this «he said» technique and quotation marks. This creates a pseudo-documentary effect that registers only the details and actions without any inwardness: «She'd say, 'No, I'm okay, I can do it.' She doesn't say it; he didn't ask her or even give a look that said she need help, but he thinks she'd say it if that's what he'd said or had given that look» [6, p. 244].

The inner self is impersonalized through this «said mode» of the text, and as a result the character becomes twice removed from the reader by the speech of the narrator and by Gould's directly quoted speech. The postmodernist writer creates the character as a reading strategy: it is left to the readers to connect the dots between these «said» and direct quotes and to bond the decentered fragments of a hero into a character of Everyman. The emphasis on the personal disappears in this art, and that, which may seem personal, being shown in «said mode,» immediately melts in the atmosphere of impersonal – mundane everydayness. This «said mode» and the details which Gould

sees, all are used to plug us to the hero, but not from the inside, as in modernism, but from the level beyond his personal inner world.

What is important here is that Dixon questions the artistic validity of his «said mode,» and problematizes it. His Gould «? ... thinks he forgot one of the 'he says,'» and it appears, when his Sally is sleeping in his embrace, and Gould is happy. This sentence «opens» the text and the character, intimating the situation and displaying another artistic strategy – not 'said', but *lived lives*.

Postmodernism can be viewed not as the art of destroyed subject, but the art that substituted the old episteme, which can be called *character thinking* by a new one – an *open mentality*, and it is equal to the discovery of a new subject.

Thus, the contemporary myth of «subject in crisis» is demythized by the writers and reveals a dialectical process of transcending the subject as an individual ego in the direction of discovering either the commonly human, or essentially humanistic.

The subject is not flatly banished, but problematized and reconsidered. The questions «what is to be human?» and «what is Art?» become interconnected and even more vital than before. We may observe that Postmodernist literature faces the inescapable final return to Man as «thinking» and «perceiving» thing.

The analysis reveals that this shift in the centrality of values from the identity of the psychological character, characteristic of Modernism, to the search for general human identity, is the result of radical experiments in the sphere of mentality as the primary focus of this art.

The postmodernist writers are, in fact, doing what Foucault wanted to be the goal of contemporary thought: to demythize, by promoting «new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of individuality, which has been imposed on us for several centuries» [7, p. 208–226].

The postmodernist art is already integrated into world literary process as its classics, and the vision of Postmodernism as chaos and destruction of the human subject reveals that literary criticism substantially lags behind the real life of literature.

The process of subject recuperation in American postmodernist literature at the end of Millennium could possibly be turned by literary theoreticians into a new myth if Barthesian subtle logic is true: «Wine is objectively good, and at the same time the goodness of wine is a myth» [2, p. 158].

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