

THE END OF HISTORY, THE DESTRUCTION OF THE STORY AND THE DEATH OF THE HERO IN POSTMODERN DISCOURSE

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The issue of the narrative is closely linked to the formation of the universal story and the individual interpretation of it within the dimensions of time, space and action. Postmodernism demonstrates the proclivity to destroy these three dimensions, in other words, to deconstruct them. The most effective way to destroy the story, and even worse, the universal story is to deprive it of the goal, and linear development, where past, present and future are carefully outlined, and the hero envisages the end of the story as the natural, logical and supernatural consequence of his actions or even inactions.

Keywords: postmodernism, destruction, death, misinterpretation, transformation, non-existence, intellectual demand, mythology, punishment, collective unconsciousness.

Introduction

It has been established that Postmodernism obviously tends to deconstruct the dimensions of time, space and action, the consideration of which is indispensable in the interpretation of the universal story.

Among universal stories, we consider the birth, the fall and rebirth, which cannot be reproduced any more in the logical succession because of the blurred time limits (in short, the story of past tradition and future development).

Destroying these three dimensions, postmodernism deconstructs the model of the hero as an acting and thinking creature and replaces it with the model of the desiring machine, using the tools of sarcastic attitude, intentional misinterpretation and attack on the language as the “main source of all-embracing deception” (Levitan et al, 2018). Later the attack on the language is transformed into an assault on Logos itself and as a result of these perpetual

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assaults the idea of Logos is fragmented into multiple discourses. Thus, the hero is lost among these various discourses, and ceases to exist as an actor because of the absence of his objectives. The death of the hero entails the death of the author (as proclaimed by the guru of postmodernism Roland Barthes), and the demise of the story itself, which is vividly reflected in postmodern literature and philosophy. The whole debate might be reduced to the role of conscious self (EGO) in the given time period and the assessment of its activity. In modern discourse existence manifests itself as an action, while in postmodern discourse any activity is presented as non-existing.

Modern and postmodern culture

Modern and postmodern cultures assume that mankind lost the dimensions of inner depth of perception of the height of ideals. Camus predicted the advent of these times long before they arrived. “Faced with the absurd world its elders had concocted, it believed in nothing and yearned to rebel. The literature of its time was in revolt against lucidity, against narrative, and against the very idea of a sentence. Painting was abstract, that is to say, it was rebelling against figurativism, realism, and simple harmony. Music was rejecting melody. And as for philosophy, it taught us that there was no truth, only phenomena (Camus, 2021, p. 19). Now all the recent manifestations of Meta stories, like meta-narrative or meta ideology, exist only in digitalized versions. When Nietzsche declared that God is dead, he just failed to mention that the mankind has faced the death of God for already several times, and each time it celebrated the rebirth of the “new deity”. However, the death of the hero marked a new stage in human existence, as it was not the simple murder, it was just deconstruction that gave no chances for revival. The cultures used to fall in disarray which is in their entropy, but all these disarrays are not premeditated actions as manifested in postmodernism. The decline of the hero has grown visible in the philosophical essays of many postmodern thinkers. As Michel Foucault stated, “Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same. More than one person doubtless like me writes in order to have no face” (Foucault, 1992, p. 34). The impersonality of the hero was one of the innovations of modernity. The hero genuinely demonstrated the idiosyncrasy which seemed to be typical and unique at the same time.

Both the hero and the writer were judged and assessed by the so-called “transcendent values” scale (no reference). The increased share of the reader’s participation in the process of literary production was declared later, due to the

rising aesthetical and intellectual demands. Roland Barthes pinpointing this new trend underscored: “Literature is like phosphorus, it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment it attempts to die” (Barthes, 1972).

The hero of the fiction narrative stepped into that literary discourse from the universal story. By “universal”, we mean the story that was reduced to its gist, leaving out the unnecessary details. Universal stories are generally either hero-centered or self-centered, as people are all supposed to be at least the heroes of their own life narratives. The actions generally evolved around the hero and his Task, which was later renamed into a Deed. All tasks in universal stories later developed into symbolic patterns. The God hides himself behind the metaphors, so every task realized by legendary heroes was transformed into a catchphrase with fixed meta narratives, like “cleaning of Augean stables”, getting the “Golden Fleece”, to say nothing about the main narrative of the European civilizations, i.e. the narrative of sacrifice of the hero mounting the cross for redemption. In ancient legends and myths the hero was instructed to perform this task, while in modern stories (or narratives) he felt committed or responsible for it.

In modern literature every action bears certain meaning. The hero often dies and his decease is even more meaningful because his death develops into moral metanarrative, attaching added value or the variation of the story of crucifixion in which the body dies but the idea continues to live. This idea of sacrifice and redemption is valid for all times and spaces, as people are heroes to the extent they are ready to sacrifice themselves. “You may have filled God beneath the weight of all that you have said but do not imagine that you will make a man that will live longer than he Michel Foucault” (Foucault, 1992, p. 232).

The hero of fiction or a legend is linked to both reality and meta reality, while the postmodern hero is connected only to a certain situation or opinion. This brings forth the social network hero as a paragon of transience and mutability, reaffirming the impossible longevity of human existence.

This idea of inconsistency and simulation of reality builds up a framework of hyper reality accompanied by moral relativism which is generally the means of abdicating responsibility.

Responsibility is one of the main pillars of modernity as well as part and parcel of any human meta-narrative. The hero is responsible for himself, and for the others as well. In Sartre’s play “No Exit” the heroes are held responsible for their lifelong actions even post mortem, which closely resembles the Christian narrative with its life-after-death meta reality with strong moral benchmarks and obstacles. In Camus’ novel *The Fall* the hero feels guilty for something he has

not ever done. Feeling guilty and responsible for inaction manifests one of the main standards of meta-narrative, when someone is just accountable before his inner self without the fear of external punishment, and makes his internal manifestations so realistic that they influence his life together with the lives of other people. “We have no need of God to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow men are enough” (Camus, 1984, p. 52).

The second typical hallmark of the hero-centered story is the clear-cut objective, teleological motif. In ancient times the teleological vector was determined by a task or a duty, in modern times - by inner calling, vocation and vision, perspective and motivation like in James Joyce’s novel “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”: “I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do, I will not serve that which I no longer believe, whether it calls me my home, my fatherland, my church” (Joyce, 1986, p. 93). Dismantle the goal and the end of the hero will follow, remove the suffering and the newly fledged postmodern hero appears on the scene. Thus, the postmodern writers deconstruct what was solid and meaningful and reconstruct the most fragile version of the former grandeur.

Deconstruction

Postmodernism tends to deconstruct a personal story. It seems highly probable as personal stories are based on a very fluid sensational ground. However, while deconstructing a strong universal story, the reader is thrown back to the primordial thinking patterns characteristic of primitive society. “The collective unconscious appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as sort of projection of collective unconscious” (Jung, 1994). Literature in itself ceases to be equal to the narrative or it gives up the idea of reflection, picking up the idea of the method “Literature is that neuter, that composite that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost beginning with the very identity of the body that writes”. Roland Barthes stated in his essay “The Death of the Author” (Barthes, 1977). But even long ago in primordial times the mankind possessed moral intuition and intuitive creativity, as a certain biological type endowed (or cursed) with these untypical qualities (Barthes, 1977). Nature acts much more expediently, than human beings. Moral foundations and the aesthetical categories are exclusively human creations, which are applied for no rational reasons, therefore, what can be considered luxury for the world of nature is sheer necessity for the humanity, and for the hero.

Moreover, in hero-centered literature everything human, creative and meaningful is not only inexpedient but unuttered as well, action or thought meant to be implied as a common metanarrative.

The main undercurrent of deconstruction procedure is also unuttered, and it is not above the verbal discourse but beyond it, as deconstruction is driven only by ontological incentives as any epistemological approach halts unjustified deconstruction. By unjustified deconstruction we mean the type of demise that is initiated for the sake of deconstruction process itself.

In short, in a very outspoken outright manner, in postmodern story or legend an attempt is made to replace the logos by chaos and theological linear movement by circular circuits.

There are several techniques of implementation, as Piaget put it “you try to connect everything to everything, and as a result nothing is connected to anything” (McLeod, 2021). As a result of this the hero-centered story is split into minute tiny sub stories, abolishing any demarcation between the story and discourse.

The writer is incorporated into the text, like in Barth’s works such as “*Letter*”, “*Lost in the Funhouse*” or “*Chimera*”. In *Chimera* the hero tries to remember his past or to figure out his future, and in both cases he fails, as immediate sexual desires, fear of impotency, and mean pursuit of revenge turn the former Perseus (Barth, 1992) from a stark incorporation of heroism into an aimless aging impotent man, lost in space and time.

In the new framework the hero is engaged in the hopeless and useless dialogues between his numerous identities. According to Baudrillard, “The disaffecting neurosis and frustration encountered by psycho analysis comes no doubt not from being unable to love or to be loved but by the radical disenchantment that comes from seduction and failure” (Baudrillard, 1992). Maybe lost is not the right word here, as being lost urges the hero to seek his route, but the postmodern hero never seeks it.

Any teleological movement generally implies these three stages of evolution:

1. Spirit of adventure
2. Hunger for self-realization
3. Search of the truth and ideal

Beyond the boundaries of teleological frame, the hero fails not only in the realization of his action, but also in his self-establishment. “The God image of

man was not destroyed by the fall but was only damaged and corrupted (“deformed”) and can be restored as Carl Jung claimed (Stein, 1999).

The failure of the hero goes hand in hand with the failure of the writer, the author or “the creator”. The logic of the wholesome narrative is split into many discourses, generating such terms as situationalism and opinionism.

It is often said that thoughts come to us, while emotions happen to us. In a certain situation even if the hero is indifferent and detached, the author binds the reader emotionally to the situation. While in postmodern discourse, in the same Chimera by John Barth neither the hero nor the reader is inside any situation, they are mere observers. Nothing comes or happens to us, we are torn off the theological, linear discourse and start moving in irregular circles re-rendering the same situation time and again. The interpretations involve not only the possible events, they question such concepts as existence or non-existence to manifest the blurred border between reality and its perception.

In this circuit we lose not only the hero, the author, but also dimensions of time and space, transgressed and blurred borders replace these concepts up to their full demise. In Vonnegut’s novel “Slaughterhouse N 5” the hero says “hello goodbye” merging the conceptual perception of greeting and bidding farewell thus eradicating the algorithm of time and space. Another version of the negation of time and space boundaries is timeless interpretations of the same situation where the reader is thrown back each time to the same story with but one reason, to entangle the reader in numerous probabilities of the same situation. In Burroughs’s story the characters pass from the state of being dead to being alive without being aware of the difference it makes. The hero takes at least one of these routes to accomplish what is called the “project of modern imitation on the literary level”.

Unfortunately, there is a certain confusion in terminology. Baudrillard for example named the postmodern narrative a hyper reality. The actual reality is blatant, however, it is just staggering to see how the metanarrative of the time exists in non-existing reality, (legend, myth) while in postmodern narrative time is decomposed in existing reality. This tendency manifests itself most vividly in social networks, say on Facebook.

Baudrillard referred to the reality as the copy without the original. This reality implies no standard, morality or aesthetical value. The sense of time and space is dissolved, fake personalities like fabricated avatars of Matrix heroes are thrown into the digital space. The pictures of numerous victims are followed by food delivery and furniture ads. It is a projection of the manufactured life and

manufactured hero. When speaking about that new type of a hero, postmodern philosophers focused on the idea of inconsistency and evasiveness. Every social event crowns a new hero and dethrones the old one, and heroism has nothing to do with ethics or virtue. As Baudrillard mindfully noticed.” We live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning” (Baudrillard, 1994).

Can a FB active avatar become a hero? Of course, it is highly probable, only on condition that it is a hero of simulation of unreal hyper reality. Thus, we generate not the heroes of actions but the heroes of comments and fake identities. These comments will never turn into catchphrases, they are disconnected from the universal story of the mankind and people more willingly react to the simulations of reality than reality itself.

Conclusion

The public is no longer shaken by the death of the hero, it merely consumes this death as a pseudorealistic spectacle. The public no longer rejoices the victory of the positive hero, it no longer demands any heroism.

This new spectacle promises rebirth without sacrifice and verbalization without reflection. In the given moment which will instantaneously be forgotten, wired to our interfaces, we decompose the meta story and the hero not only in reality but within our own ourselves.

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ՊՍՍՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՎԱՐՏԸ, ՊՍՍՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՈՉԼՉԱՑՈՒՄԸ ԵՎ ՀԵՐՈՍԻ ՄԱՀԸ ՊՈՍՏՈՂԵՈՆ ԽՈՍՈՒՑԹՈՒՄ

Անուշ Մեղրակյան

Պատումի խնդիրը սերտորեն կապված է համընդհանուր պատմության ձևավորման և դրա անհատական մեկնաբանության հետ՝ ժամանակի, տարածության և գործողության չափումներում: Պոստմոդեռնիզմը ցույց է տալիս այս երեք չափումները ոչնչացնելու, ապակառուցելու միտում: Այլ կերպ՝ պոստմոդեռնիզմը ամենաարդյունավետ միջոցն է համաշխարհային պատմությունը ոչնչացնելու, զրկելու այն իր նպատակից և գծային զարգացումից, որտեղ ուրվագծվում են անցյալը, ներկան և ապագան: Բնչ վերաբերում է հերոսին, ապա նրա պատկերացմամբ՝ պատմության ավարտը բնական ընթացք է, ինչն էլ դառնում է նրա գործողությունների կամ անգործության տրամաբանական կամ նույնիսկ գերբնական հետևանքը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ պոստմոդեռնիզմ, կործանում, մահ, թյուրըմբռնում, փոխակերպում, գոյություն չունեցող, ինտելեկտուալ պահանջ, դիցաբանություն, պատիժ, կոլեկտիվ անգիտակցություն: