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JULIAN BARNES AS A POSTMODERN HUMANIST

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ДЖУЛИАН БАРНС - ГУМАНИСТ ПОСТМОДЕРНИЗМА

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Abstract. This article enlightens one of the greatest contemporary English writers Julian Barnes as a postmodern humanist by studying his several novels and his own conversations on his works and gives some justifications on his true humanism by comparing his humanism to the humanism that was prevalent in the period of Renaissance.

Аннотация. Эта статья освещает одного из величайших современных английских писателей — Джулиана Барнса как гуманиста постмодерна, изучая его несколько романов и его собственные разговоры о его работах, и дает некоторые оправдания его истинному гуманизму, сравнивая его гуманизм с гуманизмом, который был распространен в период Возрождения.

Keywords: postmodern literature, postmodern humanism, Julian Barnes, Metroland, Flaubert's Parrot, The History of the World in 10½ Chapters.

Ключевые слова: постмодернистская литература, постмодернистский гуманизм, Джулиан Барнс, Метроленд, Попугай Флобера, История мира в 10½ главах.

Julian Barnes, an outstanding English contemporary postmodern writer, a highly acknowledged novelist and the author of ten novels, two volumes of short stories, three collections of essays, and four detective novels was born in the family of teachers specialized in French who probably ignited his initial interest in French literature. Although he had studied law and qualified as a barrister he found much more pleasure in reviewing the books than defending a criminal. He might have rejected to stand for the rights of the criminals, but he decided to defend the rights of every living creature on earth or else to oppose them at all with his literary works which help us to recognize him as a postmodern humanist. Fundamentally, postmodernism stands for neither this point nor that one, it is both. When he said in one of his interviews: “I don't feel roots there, I don't feel roots anywhere” [2, p. 9] might make us apprehend it as a territorial root on the surface but those who have read his works infer that he freed himself from any type of root that might relate him somewhere he doesn't belong to with his heart. In his postmodern novel “The History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters” Barnes accurately asserts with the morally superior voice of the woodworm that “man is a very unevolved species compared to the animals” [1, p. 28] might confirm our claims above. It's not the writers to stand for men but men finally should start to learn how to be humans and further behave like humans as animals aren't to be labelled as “malicious”.

Before going further it would be necessary to define the term “postmodern humanism” as it is not the same as the humanism of the Renaissance. The Renaissance humanism is a system of beliefs that emphasize humans and their values, capacities and worth. It can as well be understood as a cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance that accentuated human potential to attain excellence and promoted direct study of the literature, art, and civilization of classical Greece and Rome. It can simply but simultaneously be defined as a religious humanism. Whereas postmodern or secular humanism can be traced back to a time when a new theory was generated by a famous German philosopher F. Nietzsche who proclaimed with his madman that “God is Dead” [4, p. 125]. Approaching the XX century the idea changed to a different point where it applies for that human beings due to their religious beliefs have their evil garments on. The overall conception of Nietzsche’s theory probably resulted in the ultimate rejection of the existence of God. Since the period of Enlightenment, the problem had been the religion as the main source of malevolence. In order to remove every tiny particle of the evil from the society, it became urgently necessary to get rid of religion as far as religion is “the service and worship of God or the supernatural” which ultimately asks to eliminate God – Christian God. People might hate religion because “Father Christmas ran all-male team [1, p. 57] “whereas children still believe that “reindeer flew”. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they believe in it because they are more religious or so but because they are more humanistic. And only after a century postmodern literary representative displayed their overreaction to every practice of evil with the punitive form of the literary devices such as black irony and sarcasm to preserve untainted humanism. However, we cannot completely infer that postmodern humanism deals with the eternal issue of vice and virtue like renaissance humanism did, it just gives some particular essence to the further issue of evil triggering problems on earth. Postmodern humanism inquires for the right of every nation, every human, every animal and even every insect.

The humanist playwrights in the period of renaissance mainly focused on the perfection of their characters, the main characters — mainly protagonists should follow the moralities of the society, try to abstain themselves from the sins, stay humble and pious. For instance, in “The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus” by Christopher Marlowe — the main character couldn’t abstain himself from the Greatest sin and to learn magic gave his soul to the devil – Lucifer and consequently or plainly ended up in the Hell. Or in “Macbeth”, the main character simply turned from protagonist into a villain as he became enslaved to his ambition. In every example work of this period we can feel that they have some amount of fear. Though Faustus decidedly chose to end up in the Hell and entertained himself in the temporary fame of magic he was almost ever living with fear. The same thing can be observed with Macbeth, he decidedly ruined his reputation in front of his people by wrongly claiming for the throne and murdering the king. He also had that fear when he said “sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep” [5, p. 33-34]. But postmodern humanists’ characters’ character perfection isn’t based on fear but love. “It’s feeble to become religious because you are afraid of death approaching” [2, p. 116]. Barnes stated in one of his interviews which makes us easily infer that to perfect your characters due to some kind of fear is already a proof that you are coward which already annuls your claims to be true humanists. Only true humanists might react seriously to the statement when somebody’s humanity is questioned, like in his work “Flaubert’s Parrot”. When people claimed that “Flaubert hated humanity”, he took it as an offence and had enough to say against these claims and questioned their own humanity, or else their feelings on humanism.

Postmodern humanists also speak about character perfection but they totally deny it when it’s based on some kind of fear. Barnes’ all characters are fearless. It might be due to his own fearless mannerisms. It seems if his characters are afraid of anything, they turn to be the last cowards. Therefore, Barnes must have been postmodern humanist from the beginning of his literary career as he portrayed Chris’ later life in his first novel “Metroland” by looking backing at his youth when he

was fearless, full of dazzling imagination of the life and had different expectations of the life but twisted the vice versa of his expectations and turned into someone who he himself once despised. The problem here might be the imperfection of the characters' charismas but not the fear [6].

From his conversations and works it's not that much difficult to understand that everybody has the same God, but Barnes has his own God, when he acclaimed "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" can make him a profound postmodern humanist, but simultaneously we might be leaving his works under some narrow shadow by categorizing thus, then forward we will carry on our studies on the novelist's precious works.

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