

A.P. Filimonova¹, L.M. Kharitonova¹, M.J.M. Sonmez²¹Ye. A. Buketov Karaganda State University, Kazakhstan;²Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

(E-mail: alexfilia@yandex.ru)

Concept of theatricality in the interpretation of the postmodern novel

In the article some problems of studying theatricality in the novel resulted from ambiguity of the term and the elusiveness of its possible theoretical implications are considered. It presents a cultural background to reveal the essential cultural nature of the phenomenon of theatre that causes the ambiguity and elusiveness of the concept. In this respect the article presents a discussion on the main features of theatricality attributed to it throughout different cultural periods. It concludes that the postmodern novel provides the most suitable material for studying theatricality in non-dramatic genres. Having studied the researches of theatrical semiotics, the author has concluded that they are to be considered as a way to avoid elusiveness of the term and to define it more precisely as a concept of the literature criticism. This discussion is channeled towards an understanding of which features of theatricality could be most useful in analyzing theatricality in novels. On this ground, it argues that the concept of theatricality in a literary text involves two main aspects: the structure of the chronotope and that of the character in the novel.

Keywords: theatricality, postmodernism, theatrical semiotics, chronotope.

Theatricality is a conceptual and interpretive term which today is widely used in many disciplines and fields of study. French theatrical semioticians are credited with having first coined the term theatricality (*theatralité*), meaning by it the specificity of theatre as constituted by the special position of theatre as anaesthetic system and the specific organization of a theatrical code as the language of the theatrical art [1; 139]. In modern culture, theatricality appears as a capacious multifaceted philosophical and aesthetical phenomenon related to different areas of human thought and, though initially originating from the art of theatre, transcending its boundaries and manifesting itself in all kinds of artistic experience.

The idea of theatricality has been essential throughout the whole history of European culture. Elizabeth Burns notices that the «part played by the theatrical metaphor as a compelling image in Western literature makes explicit the continuing presence both of theatricality, and of our awareness of it» [2; 8]. The perception of the theatre as a model of the universe characterizes some prominent cultural phenomena concerned with the investigation and comprehension of the nature of human existence, such as the Latin concept of *theatrum mundi* or the Shakespearian artistic philosophy coined in the numerous adages of his plays, often considered as anticipating the ideas of the modern theatre of the absurd:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. (*Macbeth*. Act V, Scene V)

The end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, an epoch from which many of the important processes of the modern art originated, was characterized by a notable inclination towards the mutual attraction of different kinds of art, the attempt to produce new artistic effects by combining the languages of different arts and transcending their distinctive limitations. In this situation the attraction of theatre as an inherently synthetic art was strongly increased. The idea of theatricality was again reactualized. It can be claimed to be an integral part of the culture of this and the following periods when theatre becomes an object of versatile and profound artistic exploration. The turn of the century witnessed the revival of dramatic art, the rapid upsurge and prosperity of new theatrical practices and theoretical ideas. The competing staging principles and acting methodologies were conceptually formulated; for the first time in the history of Western theatre stage directing arises as an independent professional art central for dramatic performance. Theatre attracted increased attention from artists of different literary movements. However, though such significant literary figures as Ibsen, Shaw and Chekhov accomplished the development of realistic drama in its most representative forms, the idea of theatricality per se was primarily activated by practices opposite to 19th century realism, those of modernism and the avant-garde. Searching for new forms of artistic integration and expression», «moving beyond the requirements of realism», these new playwrights reconceived the visual and verbal codes of theatre. The leaders of Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and Surrealism,

rejecting the codes and logic of realism, located the defining traits of their artistic programs in the overt exploitation of theatre's «stagedness» [3; 12].

Thus, the stage became an important arena of audacious artistic experiments, which later resulted in an extraordinary variety of new theatrical conceptions, from Bertold Brecht's epic theatre to the theatre of the absurd. Moreover, at that time theatre was widely viewed as a phenomenon whose principles are valid beyond the art of the stage as such. Among the playwrights, who adhered to these ideas, such dramatists as Maurice Maeterlinck, August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello, Alexander Block, and Bertold Brecht can be named. It was not only considered as the centre of aesthetical and stylistic experiments of the period but it assigned to itself the task of scrutinizing the dialectics of the social and spiritual life of the epoch, which witnessed an intensive intrusion of art into empirical reality and the conscious aesthetization of everyday life. This is evident, for example, in the modes of behaviour and art, fusing artistic and everyday practices of Joris-Karl Huysmans, Oscar Wilde, Andrey Block, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Tristan Tzara, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti etc. This inspired a desire to carry theatre from the stage into everyday, non-artistic life, beginning with characteristic attempts to destroy the boundaries of the aesthetical and the non-aesthetical undertaken by avant-garde artists such as Tristan Tzara and Andre Breton, as well as development of theories of artistic life-creation important for the ideology of aestheticism and symbolism, as found in the writings of John Ruskin, Oscar Wilde, Andrei Bely, and Andre Breton etc.

Furthermore, after the appearance of self-reflective postmodern art and philosophy in the second half of the XX century, the concept of theatre emerged as a subject of intensive practical and theoretical reflection, for instance in the writings of Eugene Ionesco, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes. The uniqueness of theatre as a phenomenon present in almost all cultures and societies and capable of producing additional models of human existence has instigated attempts to explain and interpret it from different methodological positions — sociological (Guy Debord), anthropological (Milton Singer, Geertz Clifford), and psychological (Erving Goffman). Nowadays, especially with the proliferation of mass media's manipulative influence on conscious and unconscious human behaviour, theoreticians of different humanities and social disciplines readily support and cherish the idea of the total theatricality of the modern life, as well as the theatricality of the ways of perceiving it. The social consciousness of the modern period has been thought over as based on the principle of game and the spectacle. Humans and the world have been united not in myth but in the reality which has become a spectacle through which humans comprehend themselves. Numerous researchers, such as Guy Debord, Johannes Birringer, Susan Melrose, Juri Lotman, and Worthen have developed theoretical models of analysis based on the concept of performance, acknowledging that the cultural consciousness of the XX century is dominated by the ideas of theatre, role-playing, ritual, carnival, and stage directing. As Marvin Carlson states,

With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our conditions and activities, into almost every branch of the human sciences — sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics. [...] performativity and theatricality have been developed in these fields, both as metaphors and as analytical tools [3; 30].

The theatrical, masquerading character of social life has been especially emphasized in these kinds of studies, for its politics, economics and art have been perceived as transformed into a kind of all-embracing commercialized show managed by the essential traits of stagecraft. Society in these conceptions is considered to be a result of artificial ritualization of both political behaviour and everyday social activity.

The widest interpretation of the expansive concept of theatricality has obtained in modern philosophical studies, where it is enlarged and applied to human existence as a whole. It is endowed with an ontological meaning as an essential, primary quality of reality itself. The idea of *Theatrum mundi* was reflected and conceptualized as early as in Plato's *Laws*: «Every creature is a puppet of the Gods—whether he is a mere play thing or has any serious use we do not know; but this we do know, that he is drawn different ways by cords and strings». Nowadays, Peter Ouspensky in *A New Model of the Universe* defines the organization of the universe in theatrical terms and states that humans are inherently theatrical because the nature surrounding them always tends to ornamentality and theatricality. Nature itself enjoys the opportunity «to be or to seem something different from what it in fact is at this time and in this place» [4; 33]. The art of the stage, its principles and structure are seen as isomorphic to the «world theatre», as its equivalent and authentic embodiment. «The spectacle is the universal category in which species the world is seen» [5; 346].

As a result, the meaning of the Shakespearian adage «All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players» (As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII), was re-actualized in the new social and cultural

context of the XXth century and appeared to be highly suitable for reflecting the modern experience and the mechanisms of its comprehension. At the same time, along with such an expansion of the concept of theatricality and the proliferation of the spheres to which it can be applied and which consider theatricality among their research interests, the theoretical problems of its definition arise naturally, for it appears almost limitless in its possible meanings. In a wide variety of theoretical works theatre has become a universal, all-inclusive, and hence indistinct, concept: «the idea of theatricality has achieved an extraordinary range of meanings», say Davis and Postlewait [3; 1]. Thus, in spite of the intense attention of researchers, the term remains undesirably diffuse. This plethora of applications naturally causes a need to define more precisely the content of the concept if it is going to be applied as a model for analysis to a concrete field of study.

As demonstrated above, throughout the human culture theatricality has been developing into a model of human existence, both individual and social. Therefore we consider it crucial to apply this concept for analysis of the most reflective and self-reflective literary genre that is the novel. Studying of theatricality as one of the constitutive principles of the novel is expected to yield the most interesting insights and findings. It should be indicated at the outset that our study deliberately leaves aside questions of generic features of plays and functioning theatricality in dramatic works per se, focusing upon the functioning of theatricality particularly in the novelistic forms. Examining the novel is considered as especially representative for the purpose of studying theatricality in non-dramatic genres, due to its specific generic nature as understood and explicated by Bakhtin. In his conception, the novel as a genre is distinguished by openness, incompleteness and the lack of a strict canon, which enables the novel to incorporate various generic conventions and produce different modifications of itself [6; 43]. Further, as can be inferred from Bakhtin's arguments, the novel is the most reflective genre of modern literature, and as one of the main objects of its reflection, has its own generic essence. Being in close contact with contemporary life and directly deriving its inspirations from the ever developing and complicating reality, it is existing in a continuous search for its own authenticity, exploring and violating its own limits, establishing and destroying its own principles. This presupposes a great integrative capacity for the novel, which readily employs the principles of other literary (as well as non-literary) forms as material out of which to construct its own modifications and to evaluate its own potentiality. In this sense, the art of theatre as a culturally significant and generically distinct phenomenon is supposed to serve a similar function and to fulfil one of the most urgent generic needs of the novel. Besides, as it has been well acknowledged, the novel is an inherently self-reflective genre, hence it needs constantly to construct an outer point of view of itself, there is a «need for an auditorium», the necessity to constitute the audience.

In postmodern novel these characteristics of the novel developed into outstanding features.

Regarding theatricality, the particular interest in this mainstream movement of XXth century art and humanities is determined by the fact that this period has been especially noted for theatricality becoming an important cultural concept, a part of the integral artistic style of the epoch. The general cultural, sociological, and political context of the postmodernism era is, as has been stated above, openly theatrical. Picking up the baton from modernism, its successor sees theatre as an efficient epistemological model, appropriate for investigating the life beyond the stage per se. It actively expands theatricality into the neighbouring arts and literary genres, including the novel.

The postmodernism tradition is oriented to the primacy of an artistic form, overtly concerned with theoretical issues, such as the processing and mechanisms of narration. Postmodernism's aesthetic principles are generally defined by its multi-systemic and multi-coded artistic practices. Employing pastiche — one type of postmodernist parody, and techniques of intertextuality, postmodernism has become capable of adopting a variety of forms, structures, and alternative approaches to constructing a literary text. As a self-reflective art, investigating its own nature, postmodernism is interested in constructing multileveled polyphonic narratives capable of producing the effects of multiple reflections, which make the fabrication of the text emphatically tangible [7; 28]. It therefore consciously employs the discourses of other arts and different artistic languages to explore the ultimate boundaries and authenticity of phenomena, as well as the effects of their transgression and hybridization.

Theatricality as the language of theatrical art has been naturally adopted for these purposes and, along with the concept of play, has become inherent in the nature of postmodernism. As Davis and Postlewait argue, theatricality is to be considered as «the definitive condition or attitude for postmodern art and thought» [3; 39]. Hence, on the one hand, without considering it, any deep comprehension of this art is actually insufficient; on another hand, due to the overtly histrionic character of postmodernist culture,

studying its artistic works is found to be particularly illuminating for revealing the nature of theatricality itself.

In postmodern literature, theatricality can be considered as one of the devices used in realizing its self-reflexivity, the novel's metafictional nature. As Patricia Waugh formulates, «metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality» [7; 2]. She later explains that metafiction does this by drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book modified in terms of contemporary philosophical and literary theories; this, in its basic metafictional implications, is analogous to the metaphor of the world as a theatre.

The theatre metaphor as a means of arranging the metafictional quality of the novel is approached by Waugh in the section of her book named «All the world's a stage» where she mostly examines fictionality as characters «playing roles within fiction» [7; 116]. Actually, in many of her postulates she coincides with those of Abel on metatheatres. For example, while discussing Muriel Spark's *The Public Image*, she explains the attempts of the novel's protagonist, who has realized the fiction-making process determining her life and tries «to step out of her image» [7; 116], in a similar way to Abel's explanations of Hamlet's and Don Quixote's metatheatrical consciousness. Abel sees their awareness and conscious creating of their own roles as ways to escape being manipulated by outer scripts [8; 93].

Thus, it can be concluded that the postmodern novel employs theatricality in the function of exploring and exposing its metafictionality. Though the idea of theatricality has been in various degrees productive throughout many historical and cultural periods, we argue that it is more fruitful to consider that type which has been formed in postmodern culture and reflected in postmodern literature. It has appeared to coincide with the principles of aesthetical conceptions of postmodernism, which thrives on the actualized features of theatricality, and, in turn, has influenced the concept as well as its theoretical comprehension.

Postmodern novelists intentionally introduce in their works motifs loaded with culturally reflected meanings, which is one of the prominent functions of theatricality. Their novels exhibit the general principle of play at the narrative level and use polyphonic and nonhierarchical narrative strategies, which, as Bakhtin claims, are characteristics of the carnivalized. This results in generic ambiguity and hybridity, which serve as the base for constructing their multi-generic texts.

Thus, the concept of theatricality is considered as manifesting the characteristic features of works of the postmodernist art, as well as manifesting the authors' individual artistic intentions. So theatricality is to be studied as an aesthetical principle employed by the novelists for organizing their formal and thematic structures.

To develop the adequate basis for investigating theatricality in the novel genre we have delved into the theory of theatrical semiotics which appeared to provide us with the most suitable tools and terms for the analysis. We argue that a semiotic definition works best for the task in hand. The works describing theatrical semiotics, such as those by Alter [9], Fischer-Lichte [1], Melrose [10] etc. can properly serve as the directing theory for analysis of novelistic texts. It has been concluded from studying their researches that the decisive aspects determining theatre as an aesthetical system are theatrical space and time. On this ground, this paper argues that one of the most significant structural elements through which theatricality is substantiated in novelistic discourse is that of the theatrical chronotope, and hence it is the most expedient feature to use in the study of theatricality as applied to an analysis of the novel. Using theatrical conventionality, the novel reflects and thematizes, literally or metaphorically, the constitutive qualities of theatre as an aesthetical system, which become the subjects of artistic reflection.

Thus, the primary aim is to reveal the constitutive principles of the theatrical chronotope and to examine the ways in which it is embodied in the novel. For this purpose, the novels are to be analyzed as presenting different variants of texts that employ the theatrical chronotope to exploit its different possible semantic implications.

Thus, theatricality as applied to the novel is to be used as a descriptive term and interpretative concept. It is one of the possible codes of reading and analyzing multiply-coded postmodern novels. The purpose of studying is to investigate theatricality as one of the constitutive principles of the modern novel considering its contextual historical aspects and theoretical applications. The main research intention is to examine the ways in which the idea of theatricality is substantiated in novelistic discourse, i.e. how the structural features of theatre as a specific aesthetic system are introduced in literary texts, and how theatricality, in turn, manifests the artistic conception of the authors, i.e. what functional role it has in generating the meanings of the novels.

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А.П. Филимонова, Л.М. Харитонова, М.Дж.М. Сонмез

Постмодернистік романның интерпретациясындағы театрлану концептісі

Мақалада және романдағы театрлануды зерттеудің терминнің біртектес еместігі мен оның ықтимал теориялық интерпретацияларымен негізделген кейбір мәселелері қарастырылды. Түсініктің бірмағыналы еместігі мен мағынасыздығын негіздейтін тарихи-мәдени контексте ұсынылған театр феномені табиғатын анықтайтын театрдың негізгі ерекшеліктері зерттелді. Постмодернистік роман драмалық емес жанрдағы театрлықты зерттеу үшін ең шынайы материалды ұсынады деген қорытынды жасалды. Театр семиотикасы бойынша еңбектерді зерттеу негізінде автор осы тұжырымдаманың көпмағыналы болуын болдырмауға және әдебиеттанудың терминін анықтауға көмектесетін шекараларын нақтылауды ұсынады. Романдағы театрлану концептісін іске асыратын көркем мәтінді ұйымдастырудың деңгейлері ажыратылды. Осы негізде көркемдік мәтіндегі «театрлану» ұғымы екі негізгі аспектіден тұрады: көркемдік хронотоп құрылымы және романның субъектілік құрылымы.

Кілт сөздер: театрлану, постмодернизм, театр семиотикасы, хронотоп.

А.П. Филимонова, Л.М. Харитонова, М.Дж.М. Сонмез

Концепт театральности в интерпретации постмодернистского романа

В статье рассмотрены некоторые проблемы изучения театральности в романе, обусловленные неоднозначностью термина и размытостью его возможных теоретических интерпретаций. Представлен историко-культурный контекст для выявления сущностной природы феномена театра, обуславливающей неоднозначность и неуловимость понятия, рассмотрены основные черты театральности. Сделан вывод, что постмодернистский роман предоставляет наиболее аутентичный материал для изучения театральности в недраматических жанрах. На основании изучения трудов по театральной семиотике авторами предложены необходимые уточнения границ данного концепта, помогающие избежать его многозначности и определить как термин литературоведения. Вычленены те уровни организации художественного текста, которые реализуют концепт театральности в романе. На этом основании утверждается, что понятие «театральности» в художественном тексте включает в себя два основных аспекта: структуру художественного хронотопа и субъектную структуру романа.

Ключевые слова: театральность, постмодернизм, театральная семиотика, хронотоп.