

CONQUERING THE CHAOS: MODERNISM'S MODERNISMS

(Petar Penda, *Aesthetics and Ideology of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot*, Lexington Books, Lanham • Boulder • New York • London: 2018)

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The very beginning of the 2018 brought a very valuable publication which will find its own place, there is no doubt, among all the lovers of literature and literary studies. *Aesthetics and Ideology of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot*, is one of those books that are able to offer so many bright, crucial answers thanks to the author's deep understanding and excellent insights into the problems he is dealing with. Furthermore, the book, apart from being very likable, would be very useful for all students, professors and researchers interested in modernism and all the questions this period opens. Also, the book testifies the basic postulates regarding academic research, writing and presenting given results in a way which once more proves the author's greatness and his intelligent and clever way which enabled him to overcome all the obstacles in the very exhausting process of researching and writing a book.

The book consists of 129 pages and the following chapters: *Acknowledgments* (ix), 1. *Introduction* (1-18), 2. *Modernism Reconsidered/Reconsidering Modernism* (19-30), 3. *Politics, Sex, and Identity in Lady Chatterley's Lover* (31-40), 4. *Private and Public Self: Ideology of the Aesthetic in Mrs. Dalloway* (41-56), 5. *To the Lighthouse – Structure Hidden Behind "Chaotic" Narrative Technique* (57-70), 6. *Politics of Multiple Identities in Orlando* (71-82), 7. *Aesthetics of Multiple (Dis)order in The Waste Land* (83-96), 8. *Aesthetics of Nihilism: Convention in the Service of Ideology in T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets* (97-108), *Conclusion* (109-116), *References* (117-124), *Index* (125-128), and *About the Author* (129).

As the author mentions in the *Introduction*, the main aim of this book is "to elucidate the relation between ideologies and aesthetics, that is, in what ways are ideologies promoted and presented in the particular works of T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence?" One more very important question in the book deals with the problematic relation between public and private life, not only in respect to Modernism, but to other literary periods as well. Furthermore, the author explains that "ideological is oftentimes tacit and its creators are not aware of its presence in their literary texts" (p. 2). It is very important to bear in mind that, according to professor Penda, ideological layers are very present in literary texts while the authors might be unaware of this presence.

One of the primary characteristics of modernism is the introduction of multiperspectivism, i.e. “observation of an object or idea from several different angles, which was common for modernist text” (p.5). It is multiperspectivism which professor Penda sees as a main segment able to join different fragments into a unity and explains that not all perspectives are equally important, as well as that “all spheres of life are burdened by ideologies and that we are all ideologues of a sort” (p. 7).

The chapter *Modernism Reconsidered/Reconsidering Modernism* correctly presents modernism, not as a unique movement, but as several different branches of the same movement, as well as a thesis that it seems impossible to describe modernism as a unique whole, bearing in mind the fact that ambiguities and paradoxes are present in the works of different authors as well as in the works of the same author. The main roots of this paradox Penda sees in historical and cultural changes, as well as in social and psychological consequences, which started in the late 19th century and brought immense disasters in the form of the two world wars so present and vivid (directly and indirectly) in the novels of modernism. Due to these problems and the very nature of the literary period, Penda correctly concludes that we cannot perceive Modernism as a whole because –“(…)there is no single modernism but modernisms”- (p. 21).

The same chapter deals with the crucial issue of sexual repression, which was a dominant theme in the previous centuries as well, especially during the Victorian era. As Penda notices, the sexuality in the Victorian era was seen as a principle too far away from all women, mostly because it was believed that they were “incapable of sexual passion” (p. 23). In comparison to the Victorian era, sexuality and its revised essence found its new place within the modernists’ works, such as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce. As Penda suggests, “sexual repression is the reflection of political repression” (p. 24), and the issue of sex is tightly related to power, social class system and the whole society in general. Although the theme of sex and sexual repression was not a new theme within literary worlds, it was presented in a new way, which seems to have potential to open very important questions that might be able to change if not the world, then the conscience of readers in the twentieth century.

Apart from sexuality, modernists employed several other, very dominant topics, tradition being one of them. Again, there is a difference between the conception of tradition in the literature of 19th and 20th century. Tradition in the Victorian context was primarily seen as a mere fulfilment of duties (within family and society in general; even some of the most sacred ties were based on duties), while in the 20th century, as Penda sees it, tradition was “the source of their originality. (...) [B]y referring to tradition, paradoxically, they make a new concept of reality” (p. 25).

Chapter *Politics, Sex, and Identity in Lady Chatterley's Lover* opens with the statement that one of the Lawrence's intentions was "to change the human consciousness of morality" (p. 31), as opposed to puritan perception of sexuality and sexual act as a means of conception and nothing more. Lawrence was only one of the many who tried to fight, in his own way, against "the rigid Victorian norms" regarding the comprehension and the role of sexuality in life and literature by insisting on accepting "sexual frankness and insistence on body's desire and sensuality" (p. 31). Penda explains that, although sexual act belongs to Eros, in *Lady Chatterley's Lovers*, it is "opposed by a stronger force, that is, by puritan society" (p. 32). Although sex represents one of the essential parts of human nature, it is still opposed to civilization, in the first place because it is obvious that (civilized) society lost all bonds with nature. Because of this, it is very frequent that characters even in the 19th century were seeking love outside cities (civilized surrounding), where they might be able to (re) establish bonds with nature, themselves and with their lovers. Professor Penda finishes the chapter by stating that Lawrence wanted to imply that the eroticism and sexuality "should not be an alien to men and women", because it is sex which helps us "to know ourselves better" (p. 39).

As it is well known, the life and works of Virginia Woolf are in a close relation to Bloomsbury group. The stigmatisation of the group resulted in generally accepted attitude that Virginia Woolf was a writer without understanding of political injustice and social inequality, as stated by professor Penda in the chapter *Private and Public Self- Ideology and Aesthetics in Mrs. Dalloway*. Also, the author puts stress on Woolf's new view of reality: she was among those modernists who introduced multiple perspective which is best seen in the different perception of World War I and the period after the war. It is not only the case that Woolf's characters have different points of view or perspectives, but the division can be seen within one single character. In this chapter Penda also argues that "[q]uestioning reality also questions the concept of the absolute truth and it introduces notions of *realities* and *truths*" (p. 44).

It is exactly multiple perspective, argues Penda, which enables creation of a new map of individuals and the society, while at about the same time Woolf is preoccupied to create a new unity made of fragments which, according to her, means that there "is more than one reality" (p. 47). Very important question regarding the relation between public and private sphere Penda solves by stating that those two spheres are inseparable, "as they often reflect each other" (p. 49) and adds that "(...)public and private lives, like those of Septimus and Clarissa, are inseparable" (p. 53).

Chapter Five, *To the Lighthouse – Structure Hidden Behind "Chaotic" Narrative Technique* brings, among other issues, a very interesting explanation of *To the Lighthouse*. As Petar Penda claims, this novel is purposely created by the use of fragmentation and loose structure in order to introduce and emphasize

the chaos in the mind of the characters and V. Woolf. The novel, according to Penda, is dealing with “both her personal and the general human condition in the 1920s, the latter represented by structural ‘chaos’, fragmentation, the stream of consciousness, broken images, etc” (p. 58). We may say that the last metaphor, *broken image*, is very important and very clearly reflects (English) modern literature, both poetry and prose at about the same time. Broken image is lost faith, the main state of the *waste land* which was very evident in Europe after the two world wars. It is the metaphor of broken image which disables writers and their characters to find their own place in this world, to be optimistic regarding the future of the whole civilization.

Petar Penda goes a step forward and clarifies that Virginia Woolf manages to establish balance between the Victorian and the modernist novel in terms that *To the Lighthouse* “represents balance between tradition and an experiment, the outer social world and the inner life” (p. 59). Her works can be perceived as an attempt to be free from tradition by plotless novels, lack of clear genre division and non-linearity. This chapter brings a very bright innovation that is crucial for deeper understanding of the novel. Namely, professor Penda explains the main postulates of quantitative analysis (introduced by Franco Moretti) in literary studies and uses it to analyse *To the Lighthouse*. Because all of the characters are associated with the Lighthouse, Penda takes it as one of the *characters* in this research. The network proves that the Lighthouse is not the most important structural element in the novel, but it is Mrs. Ramsey. She is, according to Penda, the character who brings harmony and order and the chapter is closed with remarks that the novels of Virginia Woolf break with the tradition of the Victorian novel.

Chapter six, *The Politics of Multiple Identities in Orlando* brings interpretation that “the sex of almost all characters is not clearly defined” (p. 72), and Virginia Woolf’s opinion “that difference between sexes are minor and formal”(p. 74). It can be said that one of the main problems in the novel is, according to Petar Penda, “a lack of understanding between sexes” and that it was Virginia Woolf who was very critical about the ideological positions of male and female sexes. What seems to be of the crucial importance for the full realisation of individuality is not related primarily to personality, but to social norms. The following, seventh chapter, *Aesthetics of (Dis)order in The Waste Land* opens with the author’s correct attitude that modernist poets very often use “the idea of disorder and fragmented self” (p. 83). Disorder is a state seen and felt everywhere and all the time. Sometimes complete picture of the old world was disappearing very fast in the worst horrors in human history, so it is not strange that disorder is one of the most dominant themes in the literature of the 20th century. The syntagm “fragmented self” is quite appropriate to be found in the previous periods/centuries as well. The Victorian period was also marked by the so obvious presence of the fragmentation: first of all, because of the fast-changing world and industrialisation which transformed every single aspect

of the world and current values. The process was continued in the next century, but for other reasons. Eliot's *The Waste Land* might be seen as a spiritual continuum of the 19th century quest for the "sea of faith".

The Waste Land, as Penda concludes, nourishes ideas of both disorder and creating order. Creating order, among other things, implies that there should be solution(s), so rarely found in the Victorian era. As the author explains, one of the main tasks of this chapter is to "try to examine the interrelation of both Eliot's theoretical poetics and the poetics employed in *The Waste Land* regarding the ideological aspects of the aesthetic of disorderly order" (p. 84). The gap opened by disorderly order can be bridged (or at least it can be tried) by "restoring the past and conquering the contemporary disorder" (p. 87), because "establishing order and thus giving meaning to life and art seems of the utmost importance to Eliot" (p. 89). Petar Penda concludes that "Eliot created a new current of modernist writing, which would be raised to a new level in his seminal poem *Four Quartets*" (p. 95), which is the main theme of the next and last chapter, *Aesthetics Of Nihilism: Convention in the Service of Ideology in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets*. Penda notices that this poem is characterised with a sense of balance and unity. This sense is achieved by "[c]ontrasting beginning and end, birth and death, creating and destroying, and old and new" (p. 100). The author also notices the usage of opposition between sickness and healthiness. Namely, as Penda argues, "suffering through sickness is the only way of achieving spirituality, which is in line with Christian teachings" (p. 101). The treatment of time in the poem is best described with Penda's statement that Eliot "sees time both as the destroyer and the preserver" (p. 102). One more preserver, apart from time, is art. It is as well, the idea equal to life, while death and birth is the same thing: "while birth is the same as death, that is, our birth represents a return of the dead" (p. 103).

Conclusion of the book presents a real thesaurus regarding the very nature of modernism. So, the author observes, "Modernism indeed challenges the very nature of knowledge, reality, human experience, and perception" (p. 109). Modernist writers, according to Penda, managed to reach the essence of life by making fragments and putting lights on every single bit of it, regardless how small and trivial they might seem to be. He concludes that modernist writers, through questioning the meaning of life, achieved the knowledge that "order is just appearance" (p. 114) and adds that modernism is difficult to define and still alive, and briefly explains the relation of ideology and aesthetics in modernism in general.

Aesthetics and Ideology of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot is a must-read for all those who are dealing with (English) literature and literary theory. The book is very precious for various reasons: it is methodologically very precise, ideas are very concisely expressed; it opens the crucial questions and provides very deep and scientifically correct answers. Petar Penda proves to be one of those rare researches from new generation who has managed in not an

easy task to write a serious study of English modernism by opening a series of questions essential for deeper and correct insight into the very nature of the whole period. In order to try to justify the title of this review, we will conclude that both the author and the book have been very successful in conquering the chaos, as suggested by author's painting on the book cover.

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