Eva Simková

Mgr., PhD , Department of British and American Studies
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia
0917326705
orcid.org/0000-0002-7733-8785
eva.simkova@student.upjs.sk

The Meeting of the Postmodern and Metamodern in the Characters of Ali Smith´s *Autumn*[4]

Анотація. У цій статті розглядаються теорії та методології метамодернізму та постмодернізму. Головні герої роману «Осінь» (2016) шотландської письменниці Алі Сміт досліджуються крізь призму цих методологій. Стаття має на меті довести, що кожен з головних героїв уособлює один із двох згаданих рухів. Таким чином, ця стаття покликана відобразити занепад постмодернізму та становлення постміленіальної чутливості в її сучасному літературному прояві. У статті порівнюються та протиставляються головні герої «Осені». По-перше, представлена інформація про постмодернізм та думки різних науковців про його завершення. Тут також окреслені власні погляди щодо долі постмодернізму і того чому ці науковці виступають активними прибічниками поширення ідеї про його занепад. Далі у статті йде мова про виникнення нової постміленіальної чутливості. Дослідження зосереджується переважно на русі неоромантичного метамодернізму. Неоромантичний метамодернізм бере свій початок у культурологічних працях Тімотея Вермюлена та Робіна ван ден Аккера. Звідти він проникає у різні сфери мистецтва, включаючи літературу. У статті проаналізовано наявність ознак метамодернізму у шотландській регіональній літературі, а саме, у творі Алі Сміт «Осінь». У висновку вказується, що у зображенні головних героїв «Осені» Алі Сміт прослідковуються риси обидвох літературних рухів – постмодернізму та метамодернізму.

Ключові слова: Алі Сміт, постміленіальна чутливість, метамодернізм, постмодернізм, шотландська література, аналіз образу героя.

Abstract. This article introduces theories and methodologies of metamodernism and postmodernism. This article applies each of these methodologies to the main characters in Ali Smith´s Autumn (2016). The aim of this article is to prove that each of her main characters in Autumn (2016) personifies one of the two movements. Thus, this article is meant to serve as a reflection of the

---

decline of postmodernism and the rise of postmillennial sensibility in its contemporary literary production. This article compares and contrasts the main characters of Autumn (2016). Firstly, it provides information about postmodernism and introduces the opinions of various scholars on its decline. It also presents individual takes on the fate of postmodernism and why those scholars advocate its decline. This article further presents the rise of a new postmillennial sensibility. This article focuses mainly on the movement of neoromantic metamodernism. Neoromantic metamodernism has its roots in the works of Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in cultural studies. From there, it has been surging into various spheres of art, including literature. This article analyses its presence in Scottish regional literature, precisely in Ali Smith′s Autumn (2016). Finally, it offers a conclusion of the representation of the two literary movements – postmodernism and metamodernism in the main characters of Ali Smith′s Autumn (2016).

Keywords: Ali Smith, postmillennial sensibility, metamodernism, postmodernism, Scottish literature, character analysis.

Introduction. "Autumn. Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. That's what it felt like for Keats in 1819. How about autumn 2016? (4, p.2)" This is the question Hamish Hamilton asks in his *Reader′s Guide* to Ali Smith′s *Autumn* (2016) and it is, a rather deceptive one, considering the postmillennial literary trends and, mostly, metamodernism. In their book, *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013), scholars Monica Germanà and Emily Horton aimed to highlight "the prevalence of postmodern motifs, structures and influences" in the novels of the contemporary Scottish writer, Ali Smith. However, their ideas were different from those of Mary Horgan, who despite the presence postmodern elements of pastiche and intertextuality, describes the works of Ali Smith modernist, stating : "I want to suggest that the interventional, numismatic practice I have been exploring, and Smith's own writing practice, might well be designated modernist. In the most basic terms, Smith's characters experiment with language and form, and make new. So far, so textbook modernist" (7, 164). Could Ali Smith′s *Autumn* (2016) present an oscillation between postmodernism and metamodernism – a fairly new and popular movement which takes the rejuvenation of modernism and applies it to contemporary art, culture, philosophy and literature?

Methodology. This paper aims to answer the question above, familiarise the reader with some quintessential notions about metamodernism and compare and contrast the main characters in *Autumn* (2016). The claim in this work is that Ali Smith used her main characters in *Autumn* – Daniel and Elisabeth - as a personification of postmodernism and metamodernism in order to highlight the decline of the former and the rise of the latter. With the usage of close reading technique I shall attempt to prove my claim by presenting the most suitable passages from *Autumn* (2016), and inspire other researchers to widen the study on metamodernism and contemporary postmillennial literature.

The notion that postmodernism is on decline or dead even has been present for quite some time in the literary world and major literary scholars did not hesitate to hit the final nails in its coffin. Mary Holland (2013) views postmodernism due to its deconstructing tendencies as antihumanistic, lacking heart and meaning, which caused the decline of its popularity amongst readers. In other words, she claims that postmillennial literature, much like the postmillennial individual, grew out of postmodernism (1).

Results and Discussion. According to Alan Kirby (2015), "postmodern philosophy emphasized the elusiveness of meaning and knowledge" (51) and thus did not provide any truth whatsoever. In addition to Kirby, John McGowan (2015) refers to postmodernism as a movement informed by "a colossal ambition" - complete restructuring of Western system of thinking failed to bring the much desired changes (64). Irmtraud Huber (2014), while still believing in a postmodern sensibility, expects its decline in the near future. She blames postmodernism for the decline of realism and "the postmodernist claims about the power of discourse and the inaccessibility of the real, the fragmentation of the subject and the impossibility of truth" (6). Linda Hutcheon (2015) is certain that postmodernism is over (5). While she is still positively convinced of the postmodernist effect on the postmillennial art and culture; she no longer considers the postmillennial art and social sphere postmodernist as such (5).

Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) have also noticed the inability of the postmodern aesthetics to respond effectively to contemporary social conditions that have been crucially shaped by an ecological crisis. The rising awareness of the ecological changes happening in our ecosystems is seen as underlining the need to combine the aesthetic and ethic in the way that cannot be found in postmodernism. They claim that postmillennial art is marked by a neo-romantic sensibility that brings back the romantic appreciation of beauty alongside the rising significance of myths, legends, folktales and the search for the reconstruction of a positive relationship between humans and nature. They see this re-emergence of the neoromantic sensibility as a part of a new stage in the development of modernity which they refer to as metamodernism.

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker with their revolutionary article "Notes on Metamodernism" issued in 2010 are considered the pioneers of metamodernism in cultural studies. Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) claim that with the ecosystem slowly collapsing, the financial sector in crisis and the geopolitical situation changing with great frequency, there is a desire for a transformation in society and the emergence of the positive "we can do it" attitude that politicians express across media (2). This new postmillennial attitude to the world is also reflected in the combination of the aesthetic and the ethical into a new principle of aest-ethical that relies on such notions as reconstruction, myth, and metaxis. These trends are spreading hopefulness and sincerity, which are sensibilities that can no longer be tied to postmodernism (2). Thus, Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) believe that a new name for this new era is needed. In their

opinion the term metamodernism fits the role the best, while the prefix "meta" bears several meanings: "with", "between", or "beyond".

Metamodernism is understood primarily as a product of oscillation: "between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivity and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (5-6). A crucial role in this oscillation is assigned to the metamodern strategy that revives the neo-romantic sensibility which "has been expressed in a wide variety of art forms". Vermeulen and van den Akker perceive the neo-romantic sensibility mainly as an oscillation between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony and they identify such specific examples as "negotiations between permanent and the temporary", "questioning of Reason by the irrational", "re-appropriation of culture through nature", attempt to restore "to the cynical reality of adults, a childlike naivity", return to mysticism (8).

Luke Turner, the author of the "Metamodernist Manifesto", is another theorist who claims that "the discourse surrounding metamodernism engages with the resurgence of sincerity, hope, romanticism, affect, and the potential for grand narratives and universal truths, whilst not forfeiting all that we've learnt from postmodernism" (252). Other theorists also support the idea that metamodernism is aligned to the return of grand narratives. Bent Cooper considers metamodernism "as a movement representing a post-ideological, open source, globally responsive, paradox-resolving, grand narrative" (252); Seth Abramson writes that metamodernism is based on the " return to a belief in metanarratives, which operate as a guidance mechanism for humans by organizing many of our smaller narratives" (252); Hanzi Freinacht states that "in response to complicated crises, we need meta-narratives; we need to create and be guided by new stories about humanity, society, and progress" (252). In general it is agreed by most parties that there is a need for a grand narrative in the contemporary society that would help people deal with the contemporary crisis and search for solutions of the problems in the relationship between the individual and community on a small scale but also the bigger problems of humankind on the global scale. Alexandra Dumitrescu in her article "Foretelling Metamodernity" (2006) offers the following characterization of metamodernism:

> *The concept of metamodernism suggests a step forward, or rather beyond modernism and postmodernism, surpassing both of them. It designates the attempts to outrun the ideological and cultural tendencies of postcapitalist and post-communist societies and paradigms....As a global phenomenon, metamodernism represents the result of cultural mechanisms of self-defense and self-adjustment that bring about an age of globalization and holistic approaches after an age of excessive specialization.*
>
> *(2, p. 47)*

She also argues that in contrast to postmodernism, metamodernism thinks and operates on a large scale. Metamodernism evaluates human relationships and societal rules on the global scale. Metamodern authors find it important to "identify

inborn taboos (or moral commandments inherent to humans as social beings) that cannot be ignored if we are to be wholesome human beings" (original emphasis, 4). On the level of intellect, postmodernism and metamodernism support opposite stances. For postmodernism, analytical intelligence is the key for our spectrum of understanding, all others are to be discarded or disregarded. Metamodernism, in contrast, supports the existence of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, a unity of emotions and intelligence, offers "an attempt to recover spontaneity, authentic intellectual joy and innocence to one's mental frame" (4).

David James and Urmila Seshagiri's article "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution" (2014) expresses their belief that contemporary literature should deal with the legacy of modernism and discusses a selection of contemporary novelists (Julian Barnes, J. M. Coetzee, Ian McEwan, Cynthia Ozick, Will Self, and Zadie Smith) with the aim to examine the modernist aspects in the texts that have been traditionally read as postmodernist. They argue that in fact, modernism never really ended, instead, it reappeared on the brink of the new millennium with the new force (97). They consider metamodernism an innovated version of modernism, stating that "metamodernist narratives distinguish themselves from an earlier postmodernism through self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarization as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century" (94). Thus, James and Seshagiri (2014) try to find out how contemporary fiction seeks to reconstruct modernism as a paradigm (88).

Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers (2018) offer an important point that metamodernism already has a significant presence in Irish literature, specifically poetry. They draw on Wit Pietrzak´s study about contemporary Irish poet Paul Muldoon, who is known to frequently use the techniques of comedy and pastiche in his poems (721). Kersten and Wilbers mention Pietrzak´s conclusion, according to which:

> *Muldoon's work may be classified as Metamodernist because it not only balances "postmodern levity" with a commitment to uncovering "the deep structures of social economy", but also combines playfulness and seriousness. Although Muldoon's employment of intertextuality and pastiche seems to be more in line with Postmodernist writing, Pietrzak argues that the poet's interpretation of them stems from Joyce's High Modernism.*
>
> (13, p. 721)

According to Kersten and Wilbers (2018), Pietrzak also mentions the importance of Joyce´s and Beckett´s strong and lasting influence on contemporary Irish writers (721).

Another significant change that metamodernism has brought into the development of the 21st century literature is the rise of new possibilities in the explorations of the postmillennial novel. Metamodernist novels according to Pieter Vermeulen (2015) aspire to imitate modernist novels both stylistically and

technically. The main change from modernist novels lies in the growing emphasis given on regional dialectic realism and the portrayal of new social and political agencies (14).

This decline of postmodernism and rise of metamodernism is easily observable in the main characters of Ali Smith´s *Autumn* (2016). I aim to identify the oscillation between metamodern themes such as subjectivity, the exploration of the self, hope, unity, purity, return to nature, individualism and anarchism represented by the character of Elisabeth and postmodern themes such as fragmented realities, pluralist societies, antihumanism, scepticism, dystopia, the constant search for an identity and heightened sense of an individual´s self-centeredness reflected in the character of Daniel.

The story of *Autumn* (2016) revolves around the friendship of a century old Daniel, who has lived his youth during the peak of the postmodern era, and Elisabeth, Daniel´s neighbour and protégé. The story starts in 2016, when the old man Daniel lies in coma, his death imminent and dreams about his younger self, walking naked and experiencing the beauty of nature and getting ready to become one with it.

> *There's a little copse of trees. He slips into the copse. Perfect, the ground in the shade, carpeted with leaves, the fallen leaves under his (handsome, young) feet are dry and firm, and on the lower branches of the trees too a wealth of leaves still bright green, and look, the hair on his body is dark black again all up his arms, and from his chest down to the groin where it's thick, ah, not just the hair, everything is thickening, look. This is heaven all right*

> (14, p. 10)

The passage above can be read as an allusion for a current shift in literary movements since the old, dying Daniel can represent the decay of postmodernism. Daniel finds solace in his dreamlike coma, which he perceives as death. But instead of desiring life, he wants to stay in this dreamy, romantic nature, where he is in his twenties again and feels unity with the ground, the leaves. This dream scenario can be related to a new postmillennial sensibility, neoromantic metamodernism. His wish is to go back to nature, become one with the tree, the dirt, the ground, and the leaves which have a rejuvenating effect on his old body. His old self starts to transform back into the young one. Daniel chooses to let his postmodern life go and accepts the return to nature. Instead of wanting to run off on different travels and adventures like during his lifetime, he now "wants to make a bed there" (10). Instead of the pictures of the celebrities, writers and artists he met during his life, he has no desire to reconnect with either of them.

Daniel´s mind races to John Keats, a romantic poet and reflects on how similar and terrible was his life and that of Keats, whom he refers to as "the poor chap" (10). His association with Keats might suggest that Daniel himself might have become a Romantic, and the terrible life of Keats, whom he pities in the segment, could be his

own life very well. Later, he covers himself with leaves so the girls in the "paradise" will not see him naked (10). Although this is a Biblical reference to Adam and Eve Daniel wants to keep himself covered for the reason of decency and not to dishonour the girls. This stands in a striking contrast with the postmodern Daniel who due to his flamboyant nature had several extramarital relationships, at least one of which resulted in a birth of a son (11). In the end of the dream, as the old Daniel is regaining consciousness in the hospital, he starts to have flashback from the unpleasant times from his life and starts to feel old, worn out and sad. As he states: "Daniel Gluck looks from the death to the life, then back to the death again" (12). But for Daniel, these words are bitter and have their opposite meaning – in his dreamlike paradise, life is death and death means life. The dreamlike world of the vegetative state gives him more meaning, purity and tranquillity, than regaining consciousness and coming back to the reality of life.

On the contrary, Elisabeth, the other main character, is young and living her dream, much to most people´s dismay. In this passage, Elisabeth becomes a standout character who cannot blend into the crowd due to her different lifestyle expectations.

> *It is a Wednesday, just past midsummer. Elisabeth Demand – thirty two years old, no-fixed-hours casual contract junior lecturer at a university in London, living the dream, her mother says, and she is, if the dream means having no job security and almost everything being too expensive to do and that you're still in the same rented flat you had when you were a student over a decade ago – has gone to the main Post Office in the town nearest the village her mother now lives in, to do Check & Send with her passport form.*

(14, p. 14)

In the passage chosen above, Elisabeth´s introductory chapter starts in the middle of summer, ordinary Wednesday and it has almost a fairy-tale hint in it. Midsummer indicates a beautiful warm weather, the age 32 indicates youth. The first hint of the character indicates a young woman with a warm personality, which she is. She works no-fixed-hours, so she has extra time to think and contemplate and read which her childhood hobby was and she has grown to become a junior lecturer of literature at a university. In a way, despite highlighting that she has no job security, limited budget to live her life and depends on temporary living arrangements, she is living a considerably free and happy life. Her mother and others throw heavy criticism on her due to her living arrangements – hence the living the dream comment. Elisabeth can be considered a personification of metamodernism. While groomed by Daniel who had lived his life with a postmodern taste, Elisabeth has grown to be young, fresh, idealistic, romantic in her approach to freedom and life.

However, in the novel, she is surrounded by people who oppose her lifestyle and are critical of Elisabeth. In the passage it is her mother, who is also a remnant of the postmodern world, and also the people at the post office, who show hostility

that she does not have to join them in a "queue of angry people stretching out the door for the self-service weighing machines, for which there's no ticketing system" (14). The failure of ticketing machine points to the failure of postmodernism, which was celebrated as the era of technological advancement, but often brought more frustration than help to people. Elisabeth´s ticket machine works without an issue and while there is a crowd in front of her, she spends the time strolling to a bookstore buying a book to read it. When she returns to the post office, it is as if no time has passed since she left:

> *Through the windows, there on the other side of the road, she can see the grand municipal building that used to be the town Post Office. It's now a row of designer chainstores. Perfume. Clothes. Cosmetics. She looks round the room again. The people sitting on the communal seat are almost all exactly the same people who were here when she first came in. She opens the book in her hand. Brave New World. Chapter One.*
>
> (14, p. 14)

In this paragraph, Elisabeth glances out the window and sees the impact of consumerism on the town – chain stores, perfume, and clothing and cosmetic sellers standing on a place where the municipal house used to stand. Something that inherently belonged to the townspeople has now been commercialized and became a consumer market. The inside of the post office does not look any better. While behind the window, the townsmen have lost their municipal building, inside the post office people are being robbed of their time. Elisabeth´s uniqueness of character lies in the fact that she does not belong to either the people inside or the ones outside. She seems to be the only person in this part of the novel who is an external observer and can see beyond things the others are immune to (apart of Daniel). And while the readers never get to find out whether Elisabeth is consciously aware that she is a personification of a new, different generation of ideas and values, she nevertheless stands up to the system by refusing to stoically wait or being overwhelmed by anger as the rest of the people at the post office. Instead, she takes out and starts to read her new book called *A Brave New World*. The name of her book can be interpreted as Elisabeth choosing to be a part of a new world, a new generation, which is not going to waste their time or fear for not using it up well enough.

Conclusion. In her novel *Autumn* (2016), Ali Smith uses her main characters to criticise the postmodern notions of consumerism, technological dependence, fragmented realities, pluralist societies, antihumanism, scepticism, dystopia, the constant search for an identity and heightened sense of an individual´s self-centeredness, while praising the metamodern themes of subjectivity, the exploration of the self, hope, unity, purity, return to nature, individualism and anarchism represented by the character of Elisabeth and in the dreams of Daniel. In this article I presented some of the passages from *Autumn* (2016) I have found suitable to support my interpretation of the main characters and some themes in the

novel, which I aim to research further to contribute to contemporary postmillennial literary scholarship and further study metamodernism in contemporary literary works.

REFERENCES

1. Corsa A.J. Grand Narratives, Metamodernism, And Global Ethics. *Cosmos and History*: *The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*. 2018. Vol. 14, No. 3. P. 241–272., www.cosmosandhistory.org.
2. Dumitrescu A. 2006. Foretelling Metamodernity: Reformation of the Self in Jerusalem. Messi@h and Rosarium Philosophorum: Academia.edu, 2006. P.1-5.
   https://www.academia.edu/38268733/Foretelling_Metamodernity_2006.pdf.
3. Germanà M.H.E. Introduction. Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives . London : Bloomsbury , 2013 . 8 p.
4. Hamilton H. *The Man Booker Prize 2017*. [online] Autumn Ali Smith. Available at:<https://thebookerprizes.com/sites/manbosamjo/files/uploadedfiles/files/Autumn%20-%20Ali%20Smith(1).pdf> [Accessed 20 May 2020].
5. Hassan I. Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust. *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century*, edited by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris, 1st ed., Bloomsbury Academic. 2015. P.13-30.
6. Holland M.Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature. 1st. ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 240 p.
7. Horgan M. About Change: Ali Smith's Numismatic Modernism. *Contemporary Women's Writing.* 2016.Volume 10, Issue 2, P. 155–174. https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpw014
8. Huber I. Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 291 p.
9. Hutcheon L. Epilogue: The Postmodern ... in Retrospect and Gone Forever, But Here To Stay: The Legacy of the Postmodern." *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century*, edited by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris, 1st ed., Bloomsbury Academic. 2015. P. 3-12.
10. James D. , Seshagiri U. Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution. *The Changing Profession.* 2014. Vol. 129, No. 1.
11. Kersten D.& U. Wilbers. Introduction: Metamodernism. *English Studies.* 2017 99:7 P. 719-722.
12. Kirby A. The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond. *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century.*2015. P. 49-60.

13. McGowan J. They Might Have Been Giants. *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century.* 2015. P. 61 - 74.
14. Smith Ali. Autumn. New York: Pantheon Books, 2016. 272 p.
15. Vermeulen P. Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. 192 p.
16. Vermeulen T., Robin van den Akker. (2010) Notes on Metamodernism. *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* . 2010. № 2: 1–14.

Олена Горенко

*доктор філологічних наук, доцент кафедри філології
Закарпатського угорського інституту
імені Ференца Ракоці ІІ
orcid.org/0000-0002-3406-7559
м. Берегово, Україна, +38 095 5285555
gorenkoelena57@gmail.com*

**Дискурсивний потенціал власного імені на межі
міфологічного та релігійного світоглядів**

Анотація. У статті розглядається специфіка синтезу міфологічного і релігійного типів мислення на початковому етапі формування дискурсивного потенціалу власного імені у апокрифічній та клерикальній літературах. У текстах раннього християнства ще відчуваються впливи попереднього язичницького світосприйняття. Однак, на цій багатошаровій культурній основі визріває нове відношення до власних імен у більш системній, ієрархічній інтерпретації. Таким чином апробуються різні варіанти психологічно обґрунтованого, достатньо органічного заміщення попередньої моделі свідомості. Поступово ієрархічний підхід до імен стає традицією. Звичайно, що найбільші магічні властивості мало ім'я Бога. Шанобливе ставлення до магії Імені Божого у офіційних релігійних текстах сприяло появі його різноманітних інтерпретацій. Естафета піднесеного сприйняття імені Божого передається і наступним століттям. У клерикальних і літературних текстах Середньовіччя існує багато посилань на такі дива, котрі, між іншим, не сприймалися як дива, а вважалися цілком достовірними фактами. Певна увага приділяється також і відомим українським легендам про створення світу, в яких відчувається вплив гностико-богомільського вчення