THE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF DOCUMENTARY NOVEL GENRE IN THE MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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The article is devoted to the study of the specific features of documentary novel in Modern American literature. The characteristics and evolution of a documentary novel are emphasized through the initial works of American authors. A documentary novel differs from other genres because of the factual and appropriate information. Norman Mailer, Truman Capote are considered to be the pioneering documentary novel writers in the Modern American literature. The initial establishments of documentary genre novel are considered to be the notes, religious laws, chronicles, political pamphlets, diaries, letters and others. Mostly, in documentary novels, the harshness of reality and difficulties of life, which sometimes keep unanswered, may be illustrated with the vital essentialities. The documentary novel is inclusive and non-selective, for the novelist does not select the elements of his experience in order to project a total perspective on life. Main characteristics of a documentary novel and its target should be minimally structured and its language should be an objective and non-imaginative. Besides, a documentary novel is one of the essential literary genres in the Modern American literature, which unrevealed secrets or the reality of circumstances depicted in main descriptions. A non-fiction novel and a documentary novel are appropriate to describe works that are read like novels but are based on facts documented by the author. Both literary terms denote a novel version of nonfictional events in the different periods. The usage of various language, symbols, narrative, metaphor, personage, intertextuality and all other required...
INTRODUCTION

Social changes and problematic issues, confrontable circumstances are raised throughout the USA. Real facts and documents appeared in the novels, accordingly a documentary novel gained a significant role in many writers’ works. Besides, it was connected with the appearance of new journalism, the initial steps of these genres were put forward by Tom Woolf; within this name countably contributed to the development of a documentary genre, namely Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and others. Remarkably, the history of national facts, as a new literature took up in the documentary genres. Their first establishments are considered to be the notes, religious laws, chronicles, political pamphlets, diaries, letters and others.

MAIN PART

The documentary novel in the modernist era is divided into two distinct genres. The fictional autobiography represents an artist – hero who assumes the status of a real person inhabiting an invented situation; its documentary effect, it derives from the assertion of the creator’s claim to the privileged cognition and telling the truth.

Documentary effect of a novel is derived from the presentation of real facts, that consist of commonplace constructions of reality. In all its phases, then the documentary novel gives inspiration to tell the truth, associating this truth with claims to empirical validation. Brief knowledge about the genre maintains, if it increasingly calls into question the possibility of truth telling, this skepticism is illustrated more toward the capacity of fictional regularities to interpret and represent its referent.

More precisely, the documentary novel, as defined abovementioned definitions, is not a minor subgenre that can be readily relegated to the special margins of novelistic production at any selected period.

The documentary work is very much a twentieth-century phenomenon and perhaps, for this reason it has received very little critical attention by literary critics, and simultaneously by readers. One recent study which examines the documentary form

Key words: documentary novel, facts, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, chronicle, genre, factuality, real facts.
has been made by William Scott, who deals specifically with the United States in the 1930’s. According to Scott, documentary is ‘the presentation of actual fact in a way that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time. In the period of Great Depression America was involved both in the themes (the worker, the peasantry, the land) and in the artistic and reportorial techniques by apparent examples from Russia and Germany.

It is obvious that, although, the documentary genre claims to be objective and “real”, both objectivity and reality shaped for the reader by the man who wields the pen. In comparison to, non-documentary writers, they may be less conscious in selecting character backgrounds, and may draw a more dispassionate attitude towards the material, and it is the writer’s decision what to include or omit, what to exaggerate or deprecate. Consequently, while reading the documentary genre a reader must remember that the factualness or concreteness of what is told (in respect of details, at least) is not always guaranteed. Margaret Macdonald’s remark is instructive here: “To convince is a merit in a work of fiction. To induce someone to accept a fiction, however, is not necessarily to seduce him into a belief that it is real. It is true that some people may be deceived by fiction. They fail to distinguish conviction from deception”. [Leonora Flis. The documentary novel and its many theories., 2010].

Strikingly, the reader of a documentary work may expect less in the way of a gripping story then the reader of other types of fiction, for the interplay of personages, the build-up tensions, the resolution of conflicts, and other features which traditionally are connected with the fictional narrative, and secondary importance to the writer of the documentary fiction or non-fiction, who is more concerned with the documentary aspect of the work. In documentary novels, the harshness of reality is illustrated with the main essentialities, which readers imagine the reality without any exaggerations.

It is apparent that, some scholarly apparatus to bear on several well-known works of non-fiction that it would be characterized as “documentary novels”. Significantly, Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood, Norman Mailer’s The Armies of the Night and The Executioner’s Song, John Berendt’s Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, are pioneering novels of documentary genre in the Modern American Literature.

Some issues of great human priority maintain several discussions about the origin or evolution of a documentary genre. The twentieth-century thought regularly consumed human confidence in fact as indisputable realm of truth. We should come to consider that writers vitally choose several essential facts rather than others when constructing and composing their stories, that we cannot just ground our truth inclinations in an imagined domain of factual, objective clear reality that stands outside human perceptions or actions, that “real facts” might themselves be recognized as the part of the literary performance by which writers establish their credibility with the readers; and that factual forms of literature join existence as part of a real contract between writers and readers that is being renegotiated in the marketplace (Fact as a guarantee
of the veracity of a particular genre of writing).

According to Leonora Flis, Adjunct Associate Professor – University of Nova Gorica, a similar set of complications inflect our sense of what is “fiction”. The factual content of a story seems to have insufficient to do with the narrative strategies employed by writers. It should be claimed that, many literary techniques accomplish their own sense of reality as they do not pay attention to the kinds of the stories in which they appear. All stories, whether they are “true” or “untrue”, or based on “facts”, are constructed objects. Regarding the facts, a documentary novel is the source of response to the ambiguities and pressures of the present-day reality [Leonora Flis. The documentary novel and its many theories, 2010; 67-70].

First and foremost, it is a realistic function of a documentary novel, when readers imagine and shadow clear picture of events without any restrictions, belonged to the history. Meanwhile, inclusively its popularity and scholarly specific issues, assumptions about reflected ability of reality is described with its full dimensions.

Readers can have an idea about a human nature and a human situation against a background of an authentic reality: Hemingway provides an illuminating comment on his introduction to Men at War: “A writer’s job is to tell the truth. His standard of fidelity to the truth should be so high that his invention out of his experience should produce a truer account than anything factual can be” [Ernest Hemingway. Men at War, 1942; 14-15]. For facts can be observed badly; but when a good writer is creating something; he has time and scope to make of it an absolute truth. From abovementioned points, therefore, the documentary novel is considered to be a hybrid form of writing, a sense of history fiction and reportage. The essential value of a documentary work should provide a provisional and inevitable picture of events as vivid as described at least by an eye-witness of the authentic story.

Pivotal characteristics of a documentary work and its target should call to mind being minimally structured and should be written in an objective and non-imaginative language. The distinguishing concept of a documentary work contains influential contradictions or imaginative breakthroughs of writers’ aptitude.

According to recent evaluations of research, improvement in documentary genre in literature during the 60s and 70s had gained attentive literary logical assumptions. Besides, that was the most changeable period for the United States due to economic, political and spiritual crisis, War in Vietnam, students and anti-racial movements, “Watergate” scandal, improving unemployment and criminality, influencing all layers of population, called high interest towards the challenges of policy and social life circumstances.

Documentary, as a part of literary genre, from the academic point of views, its main aim is to illustrate the American life in more widely approaches, also to centralize global daily issues, which overwhelm other rituals of life.

Admittedly, a documentary novel is not superior to other modes of fictional dis-
course in its capacity of assertion, since all fictions assert their propositional content with equal force and sincerity; it should be believed that it does raise the problem of reference for explicit consideration. In order to investigate the truth-telling claims of a documentary novel, it is important to illuminate the assertive capacities of fiction and non-fiction in general.

Taking above into consideration, the factual and fictive discourses take more insurmountable connection in searching for a documentary novel’s accomplished elements through the reality. Hence, factual and fictive discourses are not unchangeable truth essences, but, meanwhile are historically different types of writing, signaled by, besides, incorporated with the help of alteration of literary conventions and generated by the changeable structures of historically specific bounds of production and intercourse. M. M. Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, literary critic and scholar who worked on literary theory, as well as the philosophy of language, has remarked in his views that, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between literature and non-literature and so forth are not laid up in heaven. Every specific situation is historical and the growth of literature is not merely development and change within the fixed boundaries of any definitions, the boundaries themselves are constantly changing [Bakhtin M.M. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.,1981].

The common argument that fictional and non-fictional discourse cannot be subjectively distinguished simply rests on one of three following counterpart notions. The initial notion, which can be named the “spectrum” argument, centers on the claim, that the considerable qualities of factuality and fictionality originate in separate facets of literary work, rather than in any informative paradigm and the task of criticism is to evaluate the literary impact of these upon the certain work’s rhetorical effect. Therefore, Paul Hernadi, a Research Professor in the English Department of the University of California, acknowledges a “microstructural theory of poetic discourse” which holds that any provided literary work is mentioned as the possession of connected aspects of varying discourses and should be assigned not as a text consolidated by a single non-exclusive frame but as a unity of heterogeneous elements influencing the richness of literary discourse in general. Thus Hernadi manipulates, the investigation of “generic conventions as reflections of historically conditioned preferences of writers and readers.” On the contrary, he advocates “the finest generic classifications of our time make us look beyond their immediate concerns and focus on the order of literature, not on the borders between the literary genres [Paul Hernadi, 1978; 80-86].

More specifically, the documentary narratives, as they are in the form of the literary journalism or documentary (or non-fiction) novels, that these studies examine are no exception. As inclined, both terms a non-fiction novel and a documentary novel are appropriate to describe works that are read like novels but are based on facts documented by the author. Both literary terms denote a novel version of nonfictional events in the different periods. Usually, documentary works widely fall in two catego-
ries: documentary novels can either be seen and interpreted as samples of historical and biographic metafiction, with modernistic and also post-modernistic bases, or as the documentary novels with an associated traditional, realistic base. The second type seems to prevail the previous one.

The documentary novel that commonly entered the American literary scene in an updated version during the 1960s was accompanied by the emergence of the journalistic – literary (essentially American) phenomenon of New Journalism.

As Leonora Flis argues, these narratives still can be called as mimetic discourse, but we cannot interpret mimesis as a neutral, direct transformation of empirical reality into an art form. For whether it may be a documentary or metafictional novel, there is an undeniably certain point of view that shapes the reality illustrated in the work. In other words, it may be dealt with a subjective interpretation of a portrayed situation or event. [Leonora Flis. The documentary novel and its many theories, 2010]

As mentioned by Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, a writer and researcher to describe an emerging documentary novel’s characteristics, in *The Mythopoetic reality* (1976), he interestingly claims that the only limitations that are imposed on the nonfiction novelist are that of the medium, the book he considers the documentary novel as inclusive and non-selective, for the novelist does not select elements of his experience in order to project a total perspective on life. [Mas’ud Zavarzadeh. The Mythopoetic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction novel, 1976; 89]

Furthermore, according to the ideas of Flis, some of the most typical features that can serve as proof of inter-relativity or overlapping between documentary narratives and metafictional texts can be of intertextuality, plurality of truths, self-reflexiveness of the narrative, the use of parody and irony, reliance on a proto-text, deliberate anachronisms and the tendency towards the evaluation of the past events.

Considerably, the proto-text can either be a historical character or a story to a national literary or cultural principle in *The Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer which was written in 1968, he describes the march of intellectuals on the Pentagon to the protest the war in Vietnam, which the author claims as “an obscene war, the worst war the nation had ever been in”, as well as Truman Capote, in his novel *In Cold Blood* inclines as his proto-text the murder of the Clutter family more precisely.

It should be noticed that, in his public viewpoint and in his writing style Mailer was one of the initial writers of the description of a documentary novel.

In order to corroborate this tendency, his own assertion may be restated that, he did not create a thoroughgoing, true account of Gary Gilmore’s execution portrayed in a massive sphere (over a thousand pages) in *The Executioner’s Song* (1979). In this literary work Mailer employs a full range of novelistic devices, mainly the techniques of dramatization and simultaneously he considers and receives the impossibility of pursuing objective truth in his writing, providing explanation how “two accounts of the same episode would sometimes diverge and that in such conflict of evidence, the
author chose the version that seemed most likely, for it would be vanity to assume he was always right.” [Norman Mailer. The Executioner’s Song, 1998]

Prior to The Executioner’s Song, Mailer’s outstanding effort at creating a non-fiction novel was The Armies of the Night (1968), subtitled History as a novel/ The novel as history on behalf of the Anti-Vietnam War march in October 1967, in which Mailer himself took part. In order to make his novels more believable he used the transcripts from tapes and movies made of his own participation in the event in Washington. Presumably, Flis mentioned that The Armies of the Night is a book of highly metaphorical literary journalism that employs a dual, schizophrenic narrator. The author uses the third-person narration, as well as, a “split” narrator, Mailer, the participant, and Mailer, the commentator.

Connectively, the external sphere of reference, clarifies the empirical data is the task of the Participant and usually he deals with it. Meanwhile, the scribe relies on the external issues and reveals the participant’s implicit reflections to them. Consequently, in Zavarzadeh’s notions “the reformer immediately brings to the narrative that larger ring of the actual, while the private scribe registers the inner circle of subjective reality” [Mas’ud Zavarzadeh. The Mythopoetic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction novel, 1976].

Documentary novels can in reality, be defined as a very ordinary possible swift response to the “hyperreal modern culture of “simulacrum”, displaying as a kind of metafiction, overwhelmingly, some analogues about these understandings, it may be recollected, despite the fact that documentaries appear to be the exact opposite, especially due to their use of realistic narrative techniques.

However, journalism and documentary novel in America was connected with each other and these genres are recognized as new genres in Modern Literature. Moreover, it has been since long time back recognizing itself as a powerful tool of communication and means of relations. In journalism the writers tried to provide with the implicit aim which main response was to work in the direction of accuracy, fairness, the fight between justice and injustice, free speech, objectivity, openness, skepticism, originality and creativity. One of the reasonable approaches was that they surely, paid tremendous attention to the recognition of current events, readerships, and public policies, besides they had strict responsibility on deadlines and textual discipline and clarity.

On the other hand, novelists relied on informing, educating and entertaining the readers, simultaneously, influencing the current problems among the society. Thus, the usage of various languages, symbols, narratives, metaphors, personages, intertextuality and all other required literary tools, novelists let the readers access to meaning and truth. Furthermore, writing documentary is a really tough challenge for the writers, due to the many facts and much information so as they are so messy that they do not yield to the demands of a story. The search for influential comprehension of obvi-
ous facts lead the writers to obtain the trustful information that could be expressed naturally and free from rude exaggerations. Literary journalist Tom Wolfe has written followings in his New Journalism:

The most gifted writers are those who manipulate the memory sets of reader in such a rich fashion that they create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader’s real emotions. The events are merely taking place on the page, in print, but the emotions are real. Hence the unique feeling when one is absorbed in a certain book, ‘lost’ in it.

It is acknowledged that there are several “boundaries of the form” in the documentary novel genre,
1. Immersion, or according to Wolfe “saturation” reporting;
2. Structure;
3. Accuracy;
4. Voice;
5. Responsibility;
6. Underlying meaning or symbolism.

Relatively, here it may be included also reliability of facts as the confession of readers depend on reliable data. Characters, also, should be neither invented by the author nor composed from two or more real people. According to Barbara Lounsberry the basic features of literary nonfiction are followings:
1. Documentable subject matter;
2. Exhaustive research;
3. The scene;
4. Fine writing.

It is important to note that, documentary novel genre was initially written in order to reveal the criminal injustices and the public affairs behind the pure society or the deteriorating social problems so as to be considered unwillingness to live under harsh circumstances.

Documentary novel’s significance is also worthy because such novels are obviously expected to play a crucial role in the literature. Unquestionably, documentaries are essential, usually, to help educate the citizen, raise awareness of social and political events, as well as serve as each citizen’s eyes and ears in scrutinizing the insightful forces of nature and society complicatedly, this genre shows readers an inevitable way to see and understand the world more deeply.

According to abovementioned data and knowledge, it may be fruitful in analyzing the documentary genre its subsequent rapport is mentioned here:
Strikingly, the viewpoints about these two writers and their writing styles are really different. As in his novel *In Cold Blood* Capote sees facts as symbols and then portrays them as such without alteration, in *The Armies of the Night* Mailer sees a fact, then reveals any amount of possible symbolic values and according to the symbols he portrays that seeing and consideration. Approaching differently, Capote portrays life as significant; Mailer portrays his search for significance in it. Capote presents actual objects in order to illustrate meaning, while Mailer presents his attempt to elicit meaning upon them.

Undeniably, Capote’s aptitude to give real-life accounts the feel and weight of a fiction piece have flourished the genre. Even, nowadays, a half-century after the first ever nonfiction novel, journalists, directors, writers, the people of arts, generally, all of them, understand and utilize ideas, themes, and techniques made popular by Truman Capote in our everyday media and literature.

A Times reporter also mentioned about the accuracy of the writer and wrote: “To record real life, (Capote) trained himself for two years in remembering conversations without taking notes. Friends would read to him, and he would try to transcribe what he had heard, eventually reaching the point where he was 92 percent accurate”.

As Truman Capote, usually tried to put forward the events which he was really witnessed himself; with personages, he gives the reader a detailed account of the main characters’ childhood, his writing style was the vital step towards the documentary genre. As Norman Mailer mostly relied on interpretation, his one-thousand-page account of the Gilmore execution is a reformative attempt to provide a comprehensive and persuasive interpretation of that event. Mailer’s creative and knowable tool of description is such that it allows history to come alive though it happened many years ago.

The apparent datum is that contemporary documentary novels simulate reality, they often develop it to a certain literary degree. Many writers, whose works can be
considered as documentary novels are aware of the fact and some of them openly claim it (for example, John Berendt, Norman Mailer) that their narratives can never give a fully accurate development of events, since, as soon as they are narrated, facts appear to have interrelated reflection of the author’s interpretation of the reality or history.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that a documentary novel is one of the most significant genres in the Modern American literature, since it is more complicated, reliable and surely, factual, which is its pivotal characteristics. Restating the notion about the initial documentary novel genre writers, namely Truman Capote and Norman Mailer are still recognized in literature with their forerunning milestones of novels.

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