

## Canon And Its Changes Related To Brian McHale's Ideas In "Constructing Postmodernism" (1992)

**Tripa Felicia**

Teacher at

"Andrei Muresanu" School, Deva, Romania

Throughout time, changes in canon often occurred when the society passed through a severe crisis or when there was something which marked people's minds and beliefs, such as wars, famine, economic decline or political events. The impact of all these led to shifts in humans' minds and determined writers to adopt a new style, in concordance with the emotions and feelings lived by the society of that time. Each crisis determines changes both at the social and artistic levels and I think that it is vital for the literature to change when it offers no longer solutions to the problems of the individuals in daily life.

Taking into consideration the main characteristics that defined each époque, we notice that the changes which occur in the mind of the individual are more than obvious. If in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the society was divided in an inappropriate way, and the power belonged to men, there were male writers exclusively, the Enlightenment came with rigor, precision, liberty and rationality. Soon after, the Victorian Age brought dramatic changes in canon with the writer as "the manager of the performance" and having the role of a "puppeteer", or dealing with the lower classes, illustrating the abuse and neglect of children, the slowness of justice or exposing the doctrine of "laissez-faire". The publication of novels in installments as well as the women who began reading novels proved that the society was in full development and that important changes had produced in religion, male-female relationships, it was the age of industrialization, the age in which writers exploited sentimentalism in their works. There followed modernism and postmodernism, which continued the ideas shared by the previous centuries, and which gathered and presented what was the best from all the literary trends: they showed that everything was hidden in the individual's mind( he suffered psychological changes), it was the individual who had to be self- conscious of his position.

The fragment under discussion, that means "Constructing Postmodernism", belonging to Brian McHale, tries to show that the changes in canon were not present just at the level of the ideas and messages conveyed, but also at the level of form, of the style of writing, of the vocabulary used. As language evolves all the time, changes of perspective and comprehension of the phenomena in the world are clearly and in a different way expressed.

Brian McHale's fragment suggests that in modern English the power of words is unbelievably great. According to him, the use of the pronoun "you" implies a certain degree of subjectivity, of fiction, as it offers freedom of interpretation to the reader. Behind "you", there is always hidden the voice of the narrator, whose authority is in this way diminished, this pronoun establishing a more intimate connection between the author and the reader. "You" also offers the opportunity of exploring the narrative universe, of discovering the limits of fiction and reality, the boundaries of the truth presented by the text. Its presence in the text makes the author connect deeply with his readers, the author being the master who can distort time, events and even control the command of emotions, of inner feelings and thoughts.

As any act of communication implies both an addressor and an addressee, showing that there must be something which connects the former to the latter as well as something which makes the difference between them, I think that each and every act of communication has as main purpose the conveyance of a message, the exact representation of a figure, a well-defined picture, each of these being presented by the witness's point of view. Both the key-words "compels" and "hypothesize", which appear in the fragment, determine the reader believe that "you" implies an intricate obligation, making him imagine a certain world,

presented from a certain perspective. It is the moment when the reader starts asking himself about the degree of realism which lies in the text, about what the author wanted to express and why in such a complicated and unexpected manner.

Instead of using “he” or “she”, the author looks for an alternative to old traditional forms, looking for stylistic novelty and trying to present things from another perspective. If “he” or “she” imply a certain degree of impersonality, creating a distance between the addressor and the addressee, “you” brings an intelligent alternative to all these and makes the reader come closer to the text and feel he is part of it.

Obviously, I feel that in the text there is a great distance between its actual form and the form adopted by the texts in the past. Each and every word has a hidden meaning, sending to a certain image or idea. The text offered by McHale offers greater liberty of expression, it shows that in the modernist and postmodernist text, the narrator is always hidden somewhere, always present, and self-conscious. At his turn, the reader is intrinsically involved and takes part to the actions performed by the narrator and his characters, being a witness to the events which happen in there.

Another aspect suggested by McHale is that it may happen, at times, that the pronoun “you” be symmetrical with “I”, so that we have active interaction between the reader and the narrator. Thus, the text may offer a key of interpretation at the psychological level, leaving the reader to decide what processes of conscience the narrator has attributed to the text. By the presence of an act of communication, we realize that the originality of the author and, consequently, of the text are assured. In order to build a communicative act, the author has to take steps and make attempts, to sacrifice himself, to spend time and concentrate a lot, to try to catch the best images in the best words. The pronoun “I”, representing the voice of the narrator, offers the perspective of this one over reality. By writing to the first and second persons, the narrator wants to get closer and be more convincing for the reader. It is a great way of presenting his own interests by adopting not a neutral position (as we would have expected), but a different one, a position in which he confesses himself to the reader, exposing the troubles that cross his mind and the psychological impact that these ones have on him.

“The circuit of communication” is a complex way of maintaining that invisible line between the narrator and the reader, trying to establish equilibrium at the intellectual and cultural levels. Thus, the reader and the narrator complete each other, giving birth to the communicative act, this one assuring the development and complete assimilation of the idea. Modern society was highly influenced by all those great events that shocked and left traces in the human psyche such as the Second World War or the nuclear waste, facts which made the writers believe that traditional authorities are false as they produce harm.

What strikes me in the text is the presence of scientific terms, of specialized expressions or neologisms such as “addressor”, “addressee”, “textual communication”, “act of communication”, “the function of ‘you’”, etc., which prove that the text written by Brian McHale seems to expose a modernist point of view on the style of writing and stylistic form of a text. However, to my mind, the text offers itself a ‘change in canon’, as it shifts towards postmodernism by showing that there is no absolute truth and there is a high degree of subjectivity in writing. In addition, a change in canon is obvious here because communication should be free and encounter no hindrances.

Canon change from modernism to postmodernism is not always clearly delimited. As McHale states, if we use the first and second persons, it is obvious there will be no other narrative voice to guide the reader, giving him explanations and details. Thus, the work will become harder to understand and, consequently, the reader might compose a distorted image of what the writer wanted to express. However, canon remains the basic point which defines a certain époque and helps us be aware of the fact that society always changes. In most of the works there are an “I” and a “you” and not a “he” and a “she” just because the writers “turn

inward”, and want to show their own inner thoughts and their own perspective, as they are generally disillusioned by the outer world. In order to create a barrier and save themselves from the harm that the outer world can produce, authors have to be often cynic and use bitter words, they have to create a textual circuit, often containing words which have several meanings.

Time makes the individual suffer many transformations at several levels, but it does not have the same effect on canon, as this one is against time. Canon stresses on the essence of the individual, making him question about his own condition. What I have noticed is that the shift in canon from modernism to postmodernism provoked changes almost exclusively at the intellectual level, the psyche of people, almost each and every situation having a psychological explanation. That means that all the actions suffered by us are inherent in the human mind, truth and error always being relative.

To my mind, changes in canon always bring something new, always find a solution to something that could not be overcome, always offer a hint and help us surmount daily difficulties. Moreover, they have the power to show that daily problems must be discussed and analyzed in order to find solutions and in order to find them, we have to expose all the ideas and beliefs that run through human mind. We must have the power to express our inner thoughts because, after all, there is no absolute truth, and what we expose is just an opinion, a perspective, a specific point of view. Everything must be presented, even if it is shocking, even if it may produce anxiety or sadness, even if it strikes, in order to create a better world, in order to leave a point of reference and information about our époque to our descendants.

A new cultural trend is never easy to be constructed, but self-consciousness and time may offer the perfect guidance for that happen. In my opinion, it is always good to experiment and try to take morality as something personal, thus having the liberty of expressing freely and offer your own view to a specific issue. Along centuries, the shifts that occurred in canon, made us understand that it's all about communication, the way in which you address, to whom you address, what you want to express and why. Basically, the words you use, the person used in order to address to your audience make the difference. Even if sometimes people disillusion you, what you must do, is to continue wandering and try finding your own path, because life is a continuous quest. You have to find the right key, and then, the world is all yours. So, what writers must do, is to be aware of “the canon”, as well, and try to put an emphasis on their style, on the form of their texts and, last but not least, on the ideas conveyed, in this way assuring their eternity and the eternity of each generation, of each époque, of each cultural trend.