

Facets of Ongoing Postmodern Tendencies: Consumerism and Self-Destruction

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In spite of the so many attempts to describe and define the currently emerging stages in the evolution of the modern, world, society, such as post-postmodernism, trans-postmodernism, pseudo-, digi- or meta-modernism, scholars and readers continue working with the commonly accepted concept of postmodernism in terms of its essential characteristics, among which, the cultural changes and effects brought about through its contesting, re-thinking ways of approaching traditional, respectively, modernist views on humans, society, arts, values, thinking, within the spirit of a newly founded cultural democracy. The contemporary postmodern stage generates a particular human behavior and identity by one of its dominant condition which is related to consumption cycles, consisting mostly in providing “increasing choices and the sense of consumer awareness (...), leading to the construction of a lifestyle on the basis of consumerism” (Tomlinson1990: 26), and creating an individual with typical psychological traits. In her book, *A Lullaby for God. Self Destruction and the Postmodern Consumerism*, (2023), Ioana Beteg sees consumerism as „power, wealth and dignity, in the eyes of the consumerist individual. One could argue that the thrill of consumerism, of owning and buying goods, could come from the modern and postmodern individual’s lack of self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction” (Beteg, 2023: 38); considering that the postmodern individual’s lacks „a genuine and sincere connection to the divinity” and the fact that he “has been cast away from the relationship to God”, thus being shattered his “stability and sanity”, his only way of remodelling and reshaping his identity most often resides in consumerism, even if this “could be a superficial way of reconquering oneself and the world around him”, even if it means “accepting to live as a miscellaneous self, made up of goods rather than emotions” (38).

Choosing to link consumption with self-destruction as outcomes of postmodern chaotic and hazardous life conditions and style, the author reflects on specific strategies leading to individuals’ ruination of themselves on the American stage, considering it “the ultimate morph of alienation (...), is the most powerful postmodern fragmentation of the self (...), the final decision, the most brutal way in which one takes revenge over the world or takes control over himself, over his body” (95). Her selection of titles are meant to cover a large range of novels and authors, from Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald to Vladimir Nabokov and J.D.Salinger, to Philip Roth and to the two authors, Chuck Palahniuk and Kurt Vonnegut, whose works stand for examples of how the entire theoretical approach and debate on consumerism and its consequences were carried out.

The author’s gaze on the discourse of postmodern consumerism and self-destruction conflates a number of issues related to the condition of the individual when exposed to emotions (love, hatred), reason or faith, facts (social environment), reactions to lack of freedom or options, referred to as *The paradox of trying to organize the chaos* in the chapter about Suicide as an act of creation, or as *The self as the enemy*, the final part of the chapter explaining the Post-consumerist alienation. The fictional characters epitomizing the critical status of frustrated self, motivated their present conditions, namely, that of faithlessness, delusionalism, perspectivelessness, by rebelling against “social conventions”and thriving to “arrange the puzzle of their identity”(170), respectively, that of anxiety and insomnia, both generated by fears, by struggling to find ways to eliminate them artificially, chemically, in a constant attempt to change or even kill their recent identities as “a means of escaping living in illusion”(276).

The closing chapter of Ioana Beteg’s book, *The post-apocalyptic consumer*, reports on

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several typical elements shaping the transgressive fiction, among which one identifies "Violence, alienation, brutality and raw sexuality (...) of a character that feels that he does not belong to the world he is forced to live in" (279). In trying to decipher his subjective dystopia, "he is bound to take on consumerism as the primary means of living his life" (279), often deciding for isolation which, he thinks, is able to "bring along change" as "it is rooted in an intrinsic need for change; it is not only a change in the outer atmosphere of the transgressive characters' worlds, but also a change in attitude and in behavior" (281), as the findings of the research have demonstrated.

Consumerism, always ready to provide the illusion of comfort and solace, especially, Postmodern consumerism, "acts as an incentive towards the destruction of the self, being a secure, safe and pleasant chaperone in one's journey towards the inevitable demise" (341), as revealed by the purposely selected texts; and, as it has been concluded in the present study: "consumerism deprives the individual of his own identity, allowing him to constantly zigzag between fragments of identities that would never fit together; consumerism acts as a melting pot of individuality, transforming the consumer into a ridiculous creator of nothing" (344); it is a statement that both authors and readers, scholars and students might find it interesting to reflect on under the pressure of the present social, historical, cultural state of affairs that individuals are facing in the globalized stream of a fast evolving world.

References

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