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## THE FEATURES OF IMPRESSIONISM IN THE NOVEL “THE WHITE PEACOCK” BY D. H. LAWRENCE

*The article deals with the impact of Impressionism in the novel “The White Peacock” by D. H. Lawrence. The attention was paid to the origin of literary impressionism, its hallmarks and techniques taken from pictorial visual art. The connection between artistic and literary impressionism was defined. It was proved that D. H. Lawrence belonged to the group of writers who successfully employed impressionistic means of expression. The distinctive features of literary impressionism manifested in the novel were highlighted and analyzed.*

**Key words:** literary impressionism, painting, hallmarks, color, change, ambiguity.

**Introduction.** Having appeared in painting during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Impressionism influenced the other kinds of art including literature. The new methods and techniques of painting attracted many writers who tried to imply them in literary works. D. H. Lawrence as well as other impressionist writers also succeeded in creating a new kind of fiction. This aspect of his creative activity became the object of a number of researches.

Among critical writings focusing on Impressionism there are studies by Maria Kronegger, Ford Madox, James Nagel, Nicole Blair, Richard M. Berong, Max Saunders, Julia van Gunsteren, Daniel Weaves, etc.

They focused their attention on the origin and the development of the term “Literary Impressionism” and identified its hallmarks in the texts. However, naming V. Woolf, H. James, J. Conrad, S. Crane and some other writers as central figures in impressionistic literature, they left beyond the appropriate attention the creative activity of D. H. Lawrence. The attempts to fill in this gap were made by such scholars as William Hart, Keith Sagar, Jack Stewart, Ding Liming, Erin Elizabeth DeSimone and others. They pointed to Lawrence’s painterly writing and its relation to Impressionism and other modernist art movements. Though they are more likely to concentrate on the Pre-Raphaelite influence in his novel “The White Peacock” (W. Hart, J. Stewart) rather than its impressionistic features.

**The aim of the article** is to highlight the main features of Impressionism in the novel “The White Peacock” (1911) by D. H. Lawrence and to enhance the importance of his creative work for the development of literary impressionism.

**Discussion.** The term “impressionism” originates from Claude Monet’s painting “Impression: Sunrise” (1872) the exhibition of which marked the beginning of a new epoch in art in general and literature in particular. The exhibition of a group of artists (Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissaro and others) known as the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, etc., which took place in 1874 in Paris “demonstrated that contemporary life required a new language to represent the radical shifts taking place in society” [3]. The main objective of impressionists “was not to depict a photographic reality but to capture the essence of a fleeting moment” [10]. They rejected traditional techniques of realism and discovered the nature of color and the way one’s eye perceives it. These painters usually worked rather quickly, experimenting with colors, light and shadow “to provide suggestions rather than more fully rendered depictions of objects” [10]. In addition, they believed that one’s perception of a scene can be blurry and changing. Such ideas were frequently discussed and shared with the other representatives of the artistic community in Paris in particular musicians and writers. Hence, “impressionism as a movement developed simultaneously in painting, music, and literature” [10].

In literature Impressionism can be treated “both as aesthetic and as a collection of techniques” [10]. The impressionistic aesthetic is focused on “the sensory nature of life, the immediacy of perception, and the subjective interpretation of reality” [10] and the basic techniques include “narrative methods, characterization, figurative devices, and structure and form” [10].

As Maria Kronegger admits in her study “Literary Impressionism” (1973), the first to borrow the term “impressionism” from painting and applied it to literature in 1883, was Brunetière [11, p. 24]. Later it was picked up by literary critics who couldn’t agree on its meaning and time restrictions. For Ford Madox, for example, “Literary Impressionism overlaps with Realism at one end, and with Modernism at the other” [13, p. 427]. Maria Kronegger claims that “impressionism” is not limited to a short period, its high point in 1875 and its end in 1885 <...> it remains the predominant style to the present day in literature” [11, p. 33]. Though in literature the term “impressionism” had a much more controversial meaning than in painting, it acquired a number of rather distinct features. Such features can be found in a number of outstanding literary works with the “White Peacock” by D. H. Lawrence among them. The novel is considered as one of the most comprehensive examples which illustrates the influence of impressionist art on literature. On the other hand, the poetics of the novel correlates with the main tendencies of English literary modernism with its “advantage of intuitive above rational, attention to the inner word, disregard of the principles of liveliness, perception of life as a movement” [5, p. 87].

It should be noted that D. H. Lawrence “had a strong interest in painting. He spent a surprising amount of time in studying, teaching, and practicing the visual arts” [8, p. 4]. The writer developed his own style, but “was indebted to the Impressionists in his use of color, and the inner vitality for which he strove” [8, p. 65]. His painterly vision and interest in Impressionism shaped his literary works. As E. E. DeSimone asserts, “D. H. Lawrence writes with a distinct palette of words. He consciously selects specific words, which act as his brushstrokes, to illustrate his novels” [4, p. 1]. The above statement is true about “The White Peacock”. And it is not a mere coincidence that to create his first novel Lawrence was inspired by the picture “An Idyll” by Maurice Greiffenhagen. Although M. Greiffenhagen was a Royal Academician, in this very picture “the artist used loose and quick brushstrokes, building form through colour in the manner of his contemporary James Whistler and French Impressionists” [1]. The picture “An Idyll” was introduced into the text in Part I, Chapter III (A Vendor of Visions) where it has a symbolic meaning of suppressed passion between the main personages. The picture captured George and aroused Lettie’s enthusiasm. It had such a deep influence on them that it was difficult for both to hide the emotions.

Including in the novel the numerous pictures and painters (Copley, Fielding, Cattermole, Birket Foster, Girtin, David Cox, George Clausen, etc.) the author chose the image of an artist Cyril to narrate the story through his artistic vision. All these facts provide the grounds to look for the impacts of impressionism in the novel by D. H. Lawrence. Having analyzed his impressionistic prose and some relevant comprehensive studies by Maria Kronegger, Nicole Blair, Richard M. Berrong, Max Saunders, Julia van Gunsteren, etc. one may dwell on the following hallmarks:

1. **Rendering the reality.** Impressionists focused on the character’s perception of reality trying to depict it through his/her eyes. They concentrated on the inner life of the personage and wanted to grasp the world with the help of sense rather than intellect. The information is presented in the form of observer’s thoughts about the external life. It should be also noted that this feature adds much to literature in terms of psychology.

In the novel “The White Peacock” by D. H. Lawrence Cyril is both the personage and the narrator. He tells the story from his point of view but avoids direct judgements. It is the reader himself who has to appreciate the depicted.

2. **Time and order.** The authors tried to produce the effect of their experiencing the events simultaneously with the character. Like impressionist painters they wanted to depict the moments of being happening “hear and now”. While traditional writers and painters started from a definable subject, that is, experience previously organized and interpreted by the observing mind, impressionist artists started from perception. They rejected the traditional emphasis upon order, thought, and clearness [11, 35]. As a result, the plot often became blurred and “not bounded by a beginning and an end” [11, p. 52]. The lack of finish was also borrowed from painters. The Impressionists’ completed works looked like sketches, fast and preliminary “impressions” that artists would dash off to preserve an idea of what to paint more carefully at a later date [6].

In accordance with these principles, D. H. Lawrence’s novel “The White Peacock” begins with Cyril’s perception of reality at a certain moment. In Chapter I “The People of Nethermere” we read, “I stood watching the shadowy fish slide through the gloom of the mill-pond. They were grey, descendants of the silvery things that had darted away from the monks, in the young days when the valley was lusty. The whole place was gathered in the musing of old age. The thick-piled trees on the far shore were too dark and sober to dally with the sun; the weeds stood

crowded and motionless <...>” [12]. The moment of his observing the fish in the pond that reflected his pensive mood was interrupted by his friend George’s words, “I was almost startled into the water from my perch on the alder roots by a voice saying: “Well, what is there to look at?” [12]. The whole story does not present incredible events in the life of the personages but a certain period of life digested by Cyril’s consciousness. Correspondingly the author did not attempt to provide the orderly storyline and he left the ending open for the readers’ speculations. Cyril visited George who was in a rather bad health and mood: “When we went in to tea, he was, as Tom said, “downcast”. The men talked uneasily with abated voices. Emily attended to him with a little, palpitating solicitude. We were all uncomfortably impressed with the sense of our alienation from him. He sat apart and obscure among us, like a condemned man” [12].

3. **Change.** Julia van Gunsteren admits that “change” is “one of the basic motifs of the Literary Impressionists” [7]. The artists believed that time changed the objects, and our perceptions of them were also changeable. That fact urged them to paint a series of works depicting the same object at different periods of time. For example, Claude Monet created a set of 15 canvases representing a group of haystacks in the outskirts of Giverny (1890–1891) and a series consisting of 31 canvases of Rouen Cathedral. Painting the same object at different moments and from different points of view he aimed to observe the changes. Similarly, literary impressionists often described the same character, a particular place or thing for several times emphasizing the changes that had happened.

Thus, to create the complex images of his characters D. H. Lawrence frequently provided several descriptions at different times, drawing the reader’s attention to the inner changes caused by the time and outer circumstances. For example, at first, he describes George as “a young farmer, stoutly built, brown eyed, with a naturally fair skin burned dark and freckled in patches”, whom Cyril’s mother considers “an unlicked cub” spoiled by his mother, while Cyril’s sister thinks that “he is rather good looking” (Part I, Chapter I) [12]. Later at Lettie’s party she notices, “you are different to-night” hearing in reply, “it’s because things are altered too” (Part I, Chapter IX) [12]. In Part III, Chapter II when the main characters came back to Nethermere on Christmas the author states that “there was a slight change in everybody <...> George looked very healthy and happy, and sounded well pleased with himself” [12]. And in the end of the story we observe the same per-

son with “discoloured and rather bloated” face and “swollen” nose who did not look like George any more but rather like a “condemned man” (Part III, Chapter VII) [12].

4. **Light and color.** They became the categories of primary importance in Impressionism for both painters and writers. The writers emphasized the importance of light effects in nearly all the descriptions of interiors and exteriors. They referred to a specific illumination (lighting) by the sun, stars, fire, a lamp, a lighthouse, etc. The images of fog, mist and shadows were frequently used in the texts.

Impressionist painters “experimented with ways of depicting light and color, juxtaposing spots of color, for example, and letting the eye – or the brain – fuse them together in the mind of the perceiver, thus producing more intense hues than could be produced by the mixing colors on the palette” [10]. Writers used bold colors and created unusual undertones as well.

A special attention is paid to light and color in nearly all the works of art by D. H. Lawrence. Indeed, a writer must feel the world outside like a painter to provide such a description of an ordinary autumn afternoon, “The sun sinks into a golden glow in the west. The gold turns to red, the red darkens, like a fire burning low, the sun disappears behind the bank of milky mist, purple like the pale bloom on blue plums” (Part I, Chapter V) [12]. Rich nuances of colors reflecting the author’s painterly vision can be found throughout the whole novel as it is demonstrated in Part II, Chapter I “It was a beautiful evening, still, with red, shaken clouds in the west. The moon in heaven was turning wistfully back to the east. Dark purple woods lay around us, painting out the distance. The near, wild, ruined land looked sad and strange under the pale afterglow. The turf path was fine and springy” [12].

5. **Ambiguity.** Richard M. Berrong in his study “Modes of Literary Impressionism” argues, “Impressionist painting, especially Monet’s, is also distinguished by an absence of sharp contour of form” [2, p. 211]. He admits that depicting objects which lack sharp outlines is not very difficult to do in painting, but when transferring this technique to language an author has to find a solution.

So did D. H. Lawrence in his novel “The White Peacock” where ambiguity also prevails. In Part I, Chapter VI like impressionist painters he managed to create a verbal picture with obscure and blurred contours. The following example proves the above statement, “Suddenly, as we went by the pond-side, we were startled by great, swishing black shadows that swept just above our heads. The swans were fly-

ing up for shelter, now that a cold wind had begun to fret Nethermere. They swung down on to the glassy mill-pond, shaking the moonlight in flecks across the deep shadows; the night rang with the clacking of their wings on the water; the stillness and calm were broken; the moonlight was furrowed and scattered, and broken. The swans, as they sailed into shadow, were dim, haunting spectres; the wind found us shivering” [12].

6. The **Landscape**. Impressionism transformed the Western conception of landscape painting from timeless and nostalgic idealizations of distant places to accurate and brilliantly colored representations of existing, often familiar sites seen at specific moments [10]. The impressionists in particular Monet, Pissaro, Sisley and others worked out of doors, the nature became the source of their inspiration but they treated it in their own way. Their experience of the external world is marked by subjectivity. Impressionists were convinced that “sky, earth, trees no longer have an existence in themselves; they are just the reflection of what they are traditionally considered to be” [11, p. 37]. That is why the landscape in impressionistic literature is “usually scribed with uncommon adjectives that are more concerned with human emotions than with depiction of the scenery” [9].

Very often dark colors, fog and rain were used by D. H. Lawrence as means of creating the scenery that could echo the personage’s mood. For example, in Part I, Chapter VII the author depicts Lettie’s disturbance and irritation with the help of the following description, “It was a grey, dree afternoon. The wind drifted a clammy fog across the hills, and the roads were black and deep with mud. The trees in the wood slouched sulkily. It was a day to be shut out and ignored if possible” [12].

**Conclusions.** Thus, the emergence of Impressionism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century greatly influenced not only the development of painting but also literature. A lot of writers were impressed by its new approaches to depicting the reality trying to transfer them to literature. D. H. Lawrence was among impressionist writers who could combine verbal and pictorial art in his creative activity. His painterly vision helped him to shape his writings. One can find a number of impressionistic features in his literary works including the novel “The White Peacock” in which the author pays special attention to the color and light, ambiguity, the rendering of the reality through the eyes of the personages, etc. This research could be an impulse for further studies of D. H. Lawrence’s novels in the light of the impressionist technique.

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### **РИСИ ІМПРЕСІОНІЗМУ В РОМАНІ Д. Г. ЛОУРЕНСА «БІЛИЙ ПАВИЧ»**

*У статті йдеться про вплив імпресіонізму на роман Д. Г. Лоуренса «Білий Павич». Звернено увагу на походження літературного імпресіонізму, його прикметні ознаки й техніки, запозичені з образотворчого мистецтва. Встановлено зв'язок між художнім та літературним імпресіонізмом. Доведено, що Д. Г. Лоуренс належав до групи письменників, які успішно застосовували імпресіоністичні засоби вираження. Виокремлено й проаналізовано визначальні риси літературного імпресіонізму в романі.*

**Ключові слова:** літературний імпресіонізм, живопис, прикметні ознаки, колір, зміна, неоднозначність.

### **ЧЕРТЫ ИМПРЕССИОНИЗМА В РОМАНЕ Д. Г. ЛОУРЕНСА «БЕЛЫЙ ПАВЛИН»**

*В статье говорится о влиянии импрессионизма на роман Д. Г. Лоуренса «Белый Павлин». Обращено внимание на происхождение литературного импрессионизма, его отличительные признаки и техники, заимствованные из изобразительного искусства. Установлена связь между художественным и литературным импрессионизмом. Доказано, что Д. Г. Лоуренс принадлежал к группе писателей, которые успешно применяли импрессионистические средства выражения. Выделены и проанализированы определяющие черты литературного импрессионизма в романе.*

**Ключевые слова:** литературный импрессионизм, живопись, отличительные черты, цвет, изменение, неоднозначность.