


Theories of the End of the Novel

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Abstract

Compared to the other literary genres, the novel is the most recent form that emerged, for example, in English Literature with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century. It was the work of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding in England in the same period of time that popularised the novel especially among the middle class readers. In contrast to the classical genres, particularly the epic, the novel was about common man. It depicted the everyday life of ordinary individuals. During the nineteenth century, the novel developed and became a fully established genre. It was the era of the most refined examples of the genre in English Literature. In the twentieth century, especially after the end of the Second World War, the novel became the subject of the discussions about a sense of an ending. It was openly argued that the genre would not have a future. It was claimed that the novel would soon be a deceased genre. Although all those pessimistic prognostications have failed to predict the future of the novel truly, it is essential to comprehend why a number of writers and literary theorists participated in the discussions.

Keywords: Novel, rise, fall, time, theory.

Roman Türünün Sonu Kuramları

Öz

Diğer edebi türlerle karşılaştırıldığında roman, örneğin İngiliz Edebiyatı'nda, on sekizinci yüzyılın son dönemlerinde Burjuva sınıfıyla ortaya çıkan en son türdür. İngiltere'de aynı zaman diliminde Defoe, Richardson ve Fielding'in yapıtları romanı özellikle orta sınıf okuyucular arasında yaygınlaştırmıştır. Klasik türlerin, esas olarak da destan türünün aksine, roman sıradan insanı ele almıştır. Sıradan insanın günlük yaşantısını betimlemiştir. On dokuzuncu yüzyıl boyunca roman gelişip tam anlamıyla oturmuş bir tür haline gelmiştir. Bu dönem, İngiliz Edebiyatı'nda bu türün en iyi örneklerinin verildiği dönemdir. Yirminci yüzyılda, özellikle de İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında, roman bir tür son algısı tartışmalarının konusu haline gelmiştir. Bu türün geleceğinin olmadığı açıkça ifade edilmiştir. Romanın kısa süre içinde yok olmuş bir tür olacağı öne sürülmüştür. Bütün bu olumsuz beklentiler romanın geleceğini doğru bir biçimde tahmin edememiş olsa da, neden pek çok yazar ve kuramcının bu tartışmalara katıldığını tam olarak anlamak önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roman, yükseliş, düşüş, zaman, kuram.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Although it is to acknowledge that its official history had started much earlier, the idea of the demise of the novel – the genre which fully appeared in English Literature comparatively later than the other literary forms especially with the three practitioners of this particular literary category, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) and Henry Fielding (1707-1754), during the early eighteenth century – gained unexpectedly widespread popularity and reputation among some of the influential contemporary writers and literary theorists especially after the end of the Second World War. The exceptionally gloomy intellectual atmosphere of particularly the first two decades of the end-of-the-war period, which was eminently characterised almost in every nation in Europe with a deep feeling of disappointment felt by the generations,¹ specially created, although not for the first time,² a distrust of the future of the novel that had, almost half a century ago, delivered its finest examples written in English Language.³ Those writers and theorists, whose writings related to this specific issue will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of this study, principally speculated that the novel, like, for example, the epic as a classic literary genre, would have no future in its practical sense and eventually become a deceased form because of a number of reasons, but mainly due to the technological developments of the modern ages such as, to give an example, the cinema that could – as it was thus conjectured during the earlier decades of the art – potentially create a change in human culture and replace the act of reading the printed material. Nevertheless, the question to be asked should be how such a discouraging image of the novel whose future was seriously put into question could emerge among – especially the American – writers and literary critics one of whose theory of the end of the novel, for example, is based upon the perception that *“The novel is dead, we are told, but not because good novels are not being written – serious novels, innovative novels, experimental novels, or what Richard Kostelanetz calls ‘intelligent writing’ – but because good novels are no longer being read, considered, accepted, and published by the so-called ‘big’ commercial publishers”* (Federman 1977: 111). The novel, in stark contrast to this specific situation, had risen gloriously in English Literature in the eighteenth century; and the readers of this lately emerged genre, history of literature records, impatiently asked for ever new editions to enjoy from the first practitioners of the genre. The following remarks might be interpreted in a way to emphasise this special situation: *“During the second half of the 19th century the people of Europe enjoyed reading novels. There is no doubt that when the passage of time has sifted carefully the innumerable facts which made up that epoch, the triumph of the novel will remain as an outstanding and representative phenomenon”* (Ortega y Gasset-Rugg et al. 1957: 12). Therefore, a study of the nature of the emergence of the discussions about the end of the novel should first emphasise the unique condition of the rise of the novel as a genre among the contemporary English prose writers.

¹ This situation can perhaps be better illustrated with the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno’s (1903-1969) comment that *“To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today”* (1951: 34).

² The same tone of frustration is evident especially in the works of the novelists of English Modernism who published in the early twentieth century.

³ See David Lodge’s *“Middlemarch and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text”* published in John Peck’s edition of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1992).

II. THE RISE OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Watt's Questions

It will be productive to start the discussion now with the following inquiries that are only some examples of the questions specially accentuated by the English literary critic and literary historian Ian Watt in his 1957 book *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, which has widely been accepted as one of the most acknowledged and the most influential works on the origin and the history of the novel as a genre in English Literature:

1) What truly differentiated the novel as a new genre from other comparable contemporary types of literature, such as, for example, the romance, when it first originally started to emerge in English Literature in the early eighteenth century?

2) What, during the same period of time, particularly characterised this specific genre as distinct from the types of the long-established prose fiction of the previous centuries?⁴

After a number of other representative inquiries, what seems to be interesting to the reader is the fact that Watt, as a distinguished literary critic, makes clear in his study, first of all, that the above questions – and including many others – are neither easy to answer properly nor likely to provide even adequate explanations to the critic since the first acknowledged canonical practitioners of the novel as a genre in English Literature (These novelists, as already stated above, were Defoe, Richardson and Fielding.) did not themselves establish a systematically well-defined working mechanism of the still emerging genre that would have possibly defined the special characteristics of this new literary type at that time. It even in the modern times would be a challenging attempt to form an explicit definition of the genre. As it is stated in this reasonable opinion, “*An adequate definition of the novel would, of course, have to be totally comprehensive, exhaustive, and infallible. It would have to borrow at once from the history of literature, the study of external form, and the study of the fictional matter of novels in general*” (Shroder 1963: 292). Indeed the problem with this particular historical case, as it is defined by Watt himself from the contemporary critical perspective of the modern times, is the situation that the almost prototypical works of these novelists, in other words, the first products of these writers, although all of those works were written and published as examples of the novel, displayed a great degree of difference among themselves. In other words, they shared a very limited number of common characteristics. Watt, therefore, argues that any expectations of the modern reader for discovering structural and thematic similarities among the first English novels would be thwarted (1957: 8).

Conditions of the Time

In addition to this highly significant issue, once again according to Watt's guiding analysis of the peculiarities of the rise of the novel in English Literature, the almost spontaneous – if not exactly spontaneous, but in a relatively short period of time – appearance of the above-mentioned three novelists during the first decades of the eighteenth century in England might not have been likely to be a coincidence. What today sounds to the critic to be the more logical explanation of this specific situation is similarly expressed by Watt in the following statements that mostly because of the special conditions that was provided by the period, those novelists were able to form the new kind of writing (1957: 8); and, therefore, any critical inquiry today into the origin of the novel in English Literature in particular should specially seek to reveal the true character of the time and how Defoe,

⁴ For example, the history of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the collection of the Middle Eastern folk tales, can be traced back to the early eighth-century Eastern literatures.

Richardson and Fielding could figure out the special methods of making use of the time (Watt 1957: 8). Watt's seminal study of the rise of the novel in English Literature, furthermore, provides the particular view that only after the appearance of some special socio-economic and socio-political conditions could these novelists be able to produce the new form of narrative fiction that would, in the future, be popularised both by the reader and the critic as the novel. However, what still needs to be done, as it was – although not surprisingly – not attempted by any of the pioneers of the genre in the eighteenth century in England, is to formulate a working definition of this new genre. More particularly, referring to Watt, this assertion properly means that it should be an explanation that is clear enough to define the particularities of the new genre as a new form of narrative fiction (1957: 8).

The Defining Characteristic

What specially appears in the present to have been the contemporary generic problem in terms of the rise of the novel is that although the first practitioners of the novel in English Literature knew that they were indulged in a truly new practice never attempted earlier in its canonical sense, they were not fully aware, as it was practically just too early for them as writers, of the defining characteristics of this new literary practice. This specific situation, therefore, can be summarised in Watt's discussion that the new practitioners of the genre considered their situation as a special condition. They knew that they were indulging in a new practice. In addition to this, these novelists were fully aware of the distinction between the traditional literary forms and the novel. However, they were unable to formulate their divergence from previous trends (1957: 8-9). It was definitely not a mere coincidence that especially Defoe, Richardson and Fielding were practising the new genre. The situation was actually that they were naturally unable to provide neither for themselves as writers nor for the readers of their novels an authoritative clarification of the specific generic qualities of their fictional narratives. Therefore, even though these novelists could not fully define the new genre that they were practising, some other professionals have made some related theoretical interpretations. In other words, instead of these novelists, literary theorists and critics of the following eras have clarified the special qualities of the new genre for the posterity (Watt 1957: 9); and it is these theorists and critics who have acknowledged that what truly defined the essential characteristic of the novel was its realistic interpretation of the contemporary reality (Watt 1957: 9).

The novel as the latest genre in the early eighteenth century in English Literature was particularly characterised with its systematic practice of realism as its most illustrative characteristic. Although the earlier genres, for example the romance, or the gothic, had already displayed rather realistically-drawn features in terms of their special methods of the development of characterisation, plot and time, it was the novel that truly and fully featured realism in general as its defining quality in literature. Realism, as one of the – if it actually was – characteristic features of literary works, had been naturally quite limited with the earlier genres since those genres enjoyed the unique possibility to freely make use of fantastic elements in their narratives. That is to say, before the rise of the novel, plausibility and fantasy had been occasionally employed together by the writers in English literature.⁵ In addition to this issue, realism in the novel in general manifested itself first in the novelist's choice of common figures especially in terms of the elements of the characterisation of the protagonists. Earlier genres conventionally tended to depict more or less ideal figures, which

⁵ Even in the early nineteenth century, S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834) borrowed from the fantastic literature in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

could exactly represent the notions of honour, bravery and loyalty, as their protagonists who were, in a socio-economic scale, never the same as the actual members of their audience, or the reader. The novel, for the first time in literary history, talked about and described the life of the common man in great detail even if the idea of the common man could sometimes create negative connotations for the contemporary reader. In other words, in its practical sense, this means the appearance of such unconventional examples in literature. Instead of ideal roles for their protagonists, the first novelists gave their characters even disturbingly unconventional identities (Watt 1957: 10).

Individualism

Compared to the other canonically acknowledged types of fictional narratives, the novel is the most individualist genre that aims to present a meticulously drawn psychological analysis of man as an individual in the society although this specific feature has been interpreted as the claim that "*Watt's account of the novel's social dynamism focuses on formlessness as the true sign of life and nature*" (Aravamudan 2011: 21). No other literary genre, earlier than the novel, had succeeded in fulfilling such a project. In other words, this specific situation addresses the fact that among the other genres, it was the novel that specially concentrated on the portrayal of man as an individual (Watt 1957: 13). The novel is so original a genre that particularly its birth and rise as an autonomous type in the early eighteenth century in English Literature with Defoe, Richardson and Fielding had marked a complete break with the literary tradition of the time which was mostly characterised by the contemporary authors' loyalty to the literary convention. This feature, in a more accurate sense, reflects the fact that especially the classical literary forms displayed the specific characteristics of the cultures that they were born in. The central motive of the protagonists for initiating the story was to discover the universally recognised truth. Therefore, those forms of literature frequently referred to the elements of the national histories of the cultures (Watt 1957: 13). The novel exemplifies the truth of the individual as opposed to the general truth. Instead of the ideal truth, man's experience to discover and comprehend his own truth is suggested, which has eventually made the novel an original genre as it is still in the present. Moreover, the novel is an unconventional enterprise since this new genre suggested the notion of the unconventional in terms of literary tradition. In addition to this, the name of the new genre connoted the idea of the new as part of its focus on the character specially described not as part of a group but as an individual human being (Watt 1957: 13).

The novel narrates the everyday individual experience of man consciously drawn in a rather small-scale perspective compared to the conventional literary genres. The subject matter of the novel is only the common man without any other greater supplementary indications. This unconventional feature makes the novel different from, for example, the forms of classical literature. Therefore, it is quite meaningful when any kind of enquiry into the true nature of the novel would reveal again the distinction between the novel and the other literary genres of the period. It was the originality and the individuality of the story which established the novel as a distinct genre (Watt 1957: 13). What provides the novel with unique authenticity in this later stage in history in terms of the plot and the character is the novelist's tendency to keep away from following the traces of traditional narratives. Because of this specific inclination to originality in the subject matter, in other words, the eighteenth-century English novelists were different not only from the previous writers of their own nation but also from the writers of the classical civilisations (Watt 1957: 13). The novelist, instead of taking the plot from mythology, national or continental history, or classical

literature, invents original narratives that would appeal to the contemporary characteristics of the reader. This direction has gradually developed into its modern form for the first practitioners of the novel initiated the future examples of the genre decidedly characterised by the portrayal of events that were either invented by the writers themselves or based on the contemporary circumstance (Watt 1957: 15).

The Idea of the New

Especially after the English Renaissance of the sixteenth and during the prevailing neoclassical character of the seventeenth centuries, literary criticism and critical theory in England systematically emphasised the great value and timeless significance of the examples of classical literature and its genres. In direct contrast to this particular approach, the novel specially underscored, in the eighteenth century, the idea of the new. Therefore, it can be asserted that the choice of unconventional plots for the novel was an indication of this feature (Watt 1957: 15). The protagonist of the novel is an individual character who is portrayed differently from, for example, the tragic hero. There are no established norms and rules that this new type of protagonist should strictly follow. The only norm for this realistically pictured character is absolutely the rules of plausibility and believability. Because of this particular element, the novelists developed their fictional constructions through the natural sequence of simple events. They did not keep themselves stick to the rules of the literary convention of the time (Watt 1957: 15). Besides this, for example, what Defoe as a novelist performed through his fictional narratives was revolutionary enough to suggest the idea that he created a new literary fashion for contemporary writers. It was, in its modern sense, the writing of autobiography (Watt 1957: 15), which would have been even unthinkable in the examples of the canonical literature of the earlier centuries.

The special emphasis on the individual experience is essentially related to the novel's realistic character. In other words, the novel as a literary genre displays its realism mainly through its narrative technique. The novel provides a narrative that is simply detailed enough to create a realistic background – actually, the realistic illusion⁶ – for the story and the character. It is thus particularly argued that the novel became, especially in the eighteenth-century English Literature, a distinguished genre through the existence of everyday details in its narrative, which notably contributed to its realism (Watt 1957: 17-18). Realism, however, is still too broad a concept that there have always been difficulties to provide a satisfactory explanation for its status in fictional narratives. Moreover, realistic fiction as a term sometimes connotes paradoxical interpretations. Because of this special issue, it should be reduced to a special mode of narration (Watt 1957: 17-18). Only through the choice of a special technique of narration, does the realistic effect of the novel become comprehensible. Furthermore, it is the technique of narration that the novel describes the realistic elements it has.

⁶ This is especially one of the concerns of the postmodern theory of literature.

III. LITERARY THEORY AND THE DEMISE OF THE NOVEL

The Loss of the Possibilities

One of the earliest theoretical discussions about the pessimistically drawn contemporary situation of the novel and its supposedly unpromising future was championed by the Spanish philosopher and writer José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) in one of his collections of individual writings published as the title essay in *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel* in 1925. Ortega y Gasset, throughout this collection of essays, principally advocates the particular perception that literary genres, including the novel, due to a number of reasons, might become exhausted through time. Furthermore, he notably argues in this collection that literary genres display characteristics that are surprisingly very much like the particularities of other species that continue existing because of the possibilities provided by the most suitable conditions. Therefore, according to him, any dramatic change in the nature of such conditions might result in a problematic situation that would create a disastrous effect on the future of the genre. He thus claims that *"every literary work belongs to a genre ... A literary genre ... means a certain stock of possibilities"* (1925: 58). As a consequence of these possibilities specially underlined in the discussion, Ortega y Gasset further asserts, *"the resources of a literary genre are definitely limited. It is erroneous to think of the novel ... as of an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms"* (1925: 58). What has provided the novel, he particularly believes, with its autonomous status – also with its secure future – is the great – almost limitless – number of the possible themes that the novel narrates. A similar complication is stated as the claim that *"Since the novel draws its material from reality, the contemporary reality of author and reader, and art is essentially unreality, the novel becomes art only in one way: as irony, the comic criticism of the purely imaginary"* (Livingstone 1952: 645). It is indeed the availability of these themes that the novel has established a privileged position among the other literary genres especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the problem now is that *"The workmen of the primal hour had no trouble finding new blocks – new characters, new themes. But present-day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left them"* (Ortega y Gasset 1925: 58). This is the result of the situation in which the writer – who has even established a relation between the nation and the novel as stated here in this observation claiming that *"In Meditaciones del Quijote the problem of national identity is inextricably linked to the novel in two central questions which Ortega y Gasset poses at different places in the work: What is Spain? ... What is the novel?"* (Looney 2004: 50) – asserts it is becoming more and more challenging for the modern novelist to discover a truly original subject to compose the narrative with.

Ortega y Gasset's argument about the unclear future of the novel specially focuses on two main points of postulation. The first one is the difficulty for the novelist to bring forth ever new subjects for the fictional narrative; and the second one is to have the knowledge and the experience of impressing the reader of the narrative. He thus proposes the idea that *"During a certain period novels could thrive on the mere novelty of their subjects which gratuitously added and induced current, as it were, to the value proper of the material. Thus many novels seemed readable which we now think a bore"* (1925: 59). Although it does not truly sound to make a sense, he makes use of the idea of the lack of contemporary subjects for the novelist as the central concept of discussion in his reasoning about the state of the novel. As it is aptly asserted elsewhere,

the historical circumstance and the concrete process that leads, through Cervantes, to the creation of the modern novel; and to bear in mind, moreover, the assertion that its birth

coincides with the decline of epic poetry, whose last burgeoning was the novel of chivalry; considering all of which we will realize the difference, only intimated in the first section of the treatise, between the literary genre as poetic function and the literary genre as concrete historical form in which said function expands. [And] this historical form, as it affects the novel, is exhausted, as Ortega maintains (Ayala 1974: 408).

The reason for his lack of trust for the future of the novel is the presumed scarcity of the subject to narrate in the fictional medium. Ortega y Gasset asserts, “I believe that the genre of the novel, if it is not yet irretrievably exhausted, has certainly entered its last phase, the scarcity of possible subjects being such that writers must make up for it by the exquisite quality of the other elements that compose the body of a novel” (1925: 60). It is interesting enough to consider that this discussion becomes during the following decades – but especially after the end of the Second World War – one of the key arguments of the theory of postmodern fiction that specially demonstrates the statement that there is absolutely no subject that has not been already portrayed elsewhere. Because of the impossibility of discovering new topics for the novel, Ortega y Gasset claims that presentation has replaced narration, which he thinks is a replacement of adventure by analysis.

The Crisis of the Time

In addition to the above discussions, the idea of the end of the novel was articulated by the acclaimed German philosopher, writer and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) as well. Benjamin practically contributed to the same speculative discussions of the unpromising future of the novel through his critical writings. As a result, he published in 1930 one of his most outspoken essays, “The Crisis of the Novel,” directly related to the contemporary condition and the future of the novel which, according to the prevailing critical view, promised no future. What Benjamin, who “wants to show ... the historically transitory nature of specific types of art (lyric, drama, epic, novel, illustration, etc.) and, on the other hand, the weakening of art by the technical processes of material production (photography, film, radio, athletics), which encroach upon art as an autonomous realm with its own formal language and problems, if they do not make art altogether impossible” (Paetzoldt-Westphal 1977: 31), principally does in this essay is to make an easily recognisable comparison between the epic and the novel – the two frequently compared forms of literary groupings particularly characterising, respectively, the classical and the modern times; or it is as stated more aptly here saying, “We find in the novel the opposite of the epic genre. If the theme of the letter is the past, as such, that of the novel is the present as such” (Ortega y Gasset-Rugg et al. 1957: 20).

The novel, according to Benjamin, differs especially from the epic in a great extent since it does not belong to the oral tradition that the epic is naturally a part of. And this specific generic quality of the novel, he asserts, is what truly differentiates the novel not only from the epic but also from the other established literary forms, such as, as he exemplifies, “folktale, saga, proverb, comic tale” (1999: 299). In other words, Benjamin accentuates the idea that the novel is actually an intense pattern of writing instead of being a mode of storytelling which, he believes, decisively characterises the types of narrative fiction. Relevant to this claim, he argues that “The novelist has secluded himself from people and their activities. The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none” (1999: 299); and he adds that “To write a novel is to take that which is incommensurable in the representation of human existence to the extreme” (1999: 299).

Although Benjamin heavily relies on the practical consequences of the classic comparison between the epic and the novel – the comparison which would almost always favour the epic – it would not be misleading to conclude that instead of the novel, it is the epic today that is for the most part an obsolete genre. The following comment, although in a practical sense, highlights the current popularity of the novel:

beginning in the middle of this century novels (including both 'classics' and contemporary works hot off the press) were not only offered for sale in bookstores, railroad and airport bookstalls, but were being merchandised with dogfood and dry cereals in supermarkets. Further, they came more and more, on the one hand, to be assigned in classrooms in highschools, colleges and universities, becoming in the process a part of required culture, a duty and a chore rather than a diversion or an escape; while, on the other hand and for quite another group of readers, incapable of assimilating words on the page with ease or pleasure, they were being translated into images on the screen, made into movies and T.V. series - the watching of which was often regarded as suspect by the guard (Fiedler 1981: 143).

In addition to this, it might be considered that the novel and the epic conclusively differ from each other in the fact that *"Benjamin sees the difference between novel and epic historically and philosophically in the fact that the novelist embodies the social type of the lonely bourgeois individual"* (Paetzoldt-Westphal 1977: 34). While the novel popularises the modern literature since it intends to bring about a deep analysis of the man in society, it is the epic that hardly finds an occasion to appeal to the problems and the questions of the modern world. This is perhaps because of the fact that *"If the epic figures are invented, if they are unique and incomparable natures, which in themselves have a poetic value, the characters of the novel are typical and non-poetic; they are taken, not from the myth, which is already an aesthetic and creative element or atmosphere, but from the street, from the physical world, from the living environment of the author and the reader"*(Ortega y Gasset-Rugg et al. 1957: 12). These remarks almost formulate the perspective of the writer through which the epic has been positioned: *"From the point of view of epic, existence is an ocean. Nothing is more epic than the sea. One can of course react to the sea in different ways-for example, lie on the beach, listen to the surf, and collect the shells that it washes up on the shore. This is what the epic writer does"* (Benjamin 1999:299). Benjamin thus romantically builds an image of the epic which is far superior to the novel as the most recently emerged genre. According to him, *"Epic man is simply resting. In epics, people rest after their day's work; they listen, dream, and collect"* (1999: 299).

The Disappearance of Genres

Instead of continental criticism, it was, immediately after the end of the Second World War, mostly the American addition to the contemporary discussions about the unclear future of the novel. One of these contributions came from Lionel M. Trilling (1905-1975), who was among the leading American literary critics of his time. Trilling published in 1948 his *"Art and Fortune,"* one of the key texts devoted to the theory of the end of the novel. Although he openly announces in this essay that he does not believe that the novel is a dead genre, he who has *"almost exclusive attention to the novel ... consider[ing] it always in terms of conflict between realism and romance, the conditioned and the free self, the mimetic and the didactic. The novel is, he often emphasizes, referential, reportorial"* (Wellek 1979: 37), specifically reminds the reader of the contemporary intellectual mindset. He says that

It is impossible to talk about the novel nowadays without having in our minds the question of whether or not the novel is still a living form. Twenty-five years ago T. S. Eliot said that the novel came to an end with Flaubert and James ... This opinion is now heard on all sides. It is heard in conversation rather than read in formal discourse, for to insist on the death or moribundity of a great genre is an unhappy task which the critic will naturally avoid if he can, yet the opinion is now an established one and has a very considerable authority (1950: 255).

Trilling's approach to the novel is that *"The English novels of the nineteenth century Trilling discusses in some of his best and best-known essays are always praised for the balance between the acuteness of social observation and the moral issues they pose"* (Wellek 1979: 40); and he does not share the idea that the novel will have no future; yet he accepts the reality and provides for the reader actual examples from literary history of the genres that have truly disappeared through time. Trilling thus comments, *"I do not believe that the novel is dead. And yet particular forms of the creative imagination may indeed die. English poetic drama stands as the great witness of the possibility and there might at this time be an advantage in accepting the proposition as an hypothesis which will lead us to understand under what conditions the novel may live"* (1950: 255).

Trilling structures his analysis of the situation of the novel on three most possible interpretations. The first interpretation simply acknowledges the novel as an obsolete genre. He asserts that *"the genre has been exhausted, worked out in the way that a lode of ore is worked out it can no longer yield a valuable supply of its natural matter"* (1950: 256). This explanation clearly reminds the reader of the thesis of Ortega y Gasset who articulates the idea that the novel is an exhausted genre. Trilling's argument, however, particularly concentrates on the idea that forms of art, including literary genres, are likely to lose their meanings and significance – or as Trilling specifies, their *"charm and power"* (1950: 256). If art no longer satisfies the audience, if it no longer surprises, according to the same argument, it practically means that it has become worn out. This statement, moreover, echoes the central idea that Ortega y Gasset accentuates in his discussion. It is the idea that the novel no longer is able to discover new subjects for the narrative.

Trilling's observation of the contemporary situation of the novel generates his second interpretation which particularly foregrounds the crucial role of culture. He claims that *"the novel was developed in response to certain cultural circumstances which now no longer exist but have given way to other circumstances which must be met by other"* (1950: 256). The notion of culture in this interpretation includes the ideas as well. Trilling argues, therefore, the great novels of the history of literature are the works that have specially dealt with great ideas. However, the modern literary criticism has withdrawn from figuring out those ideas analysed in the fictional narrative of the novel. Indeed the ideas, Trilling says, are as significant as the characters. The result of this specific situation is pronounced by him as the end of the novel.

Trilling believes that it is mostly a hypothetical conclusion that the novel is an obsolete genre. In contrast to this fact, he suggests the idea that because of the lack of great ideas for literature to recount, the modern man has been no longer the true subject matter of the novel. Therefore, according to him, *"although the circumstances to which the novel was a response do still exist we either lack the power to use the form, or no longer find value in the answers that the novel provides, because the continuing circumstances have entered a phase of increased intensity"* (1950: 256).

The Truth about the Novel

One of the most prominent European figures of the Nouveau Roman movement of the 1960s⁷, the French novelist and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008), principally argues in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* – first published in 1965 as a collection of articles that Robbe-Grillet wrote between 1955 and 1963 – that the modern novelist is under so considerable an influence of the great names of the genre, which, as described by the writer, is “the great novelist, the ‘genius,’ is a kind of unconscious monster, irresponsible and fate ridden, even slightly stupid, who emits ‘messages’ which only the reader may decipher” (1965: 11), that he says, “What most astonished me, in reproaches as in praise, was to encounter in almost every case an implicit—or even explicit—reference to the great novels of the past, which were always held up as the model on which the young writer should keep his eyes fixed” (1965: 8). Because of such a limiting critical approach, the modern novelist must be aware of the fact that, according to Robbe-Grillet, “the novel’s forms must evolve in order to remain alive” (1965: 8), for, as he exemplifies the situation, “Kafka’s heroes have only a faint connection with the characters in Balzac ... socialist realism or Sartrean ‘engagement’ are difficult to reconcile with the problematic exercise of literature, as with that of any art” (1965: 8).

Robbe-Grillet, whose “argument is that traditional realism has distorted reality by imposing human meanings upon it. That is, in describing the world of things, we are not willing to admit that they are just things, with their own existence, indifferent to ours. We make things reassuring by attributing human meanings, or significations, to them. In this way we create a false sense of solidarity between man and things” (Lodge 1970: 364), makes comparisons between the novelist and some other artists in order to strengthen the idea that the novel as a form of art needs renewal and replenishment. He argues, for example, that “no one would dream of praising a musician for having composed some Beethoven, a painter for having made a Delacroix, or an architect for having conceived a Gothic cathedral” (1965: 10). The logic behind this comparison is valid for the novelist as well. Therefore, it is discussed that “Many novelists, fortunately, know that the same is true of literature, that literature too is alive, and that the novel, ever since it has existed, has always been new” (1965: 10). Therefore the question he asks is that “How could its style have remained motionless, fixed, when everything around it was in evolution—even revolution—during the last hundred and fifty years” (1965: 10)?

The idea of the death of the novel, according to Robbe-Grillet, might be misleading. However, the claim that there are great difficulties that the novel as a genre currently encounters is part of the reality. The only way for the novel to survive, he says, is to renew itself. In other words, it is true that “The art of the novel, however, has fallen into such a state of stagnation—a lassitude acknowledged and discussed by the whole of critical opinion—that it is hard to imagine such an art can survive for long without some radical change” (1965: 17). Robbe-Grillet offers the solution in more detail asserting that “To many, the solution seems simple enough: such a change being impossible, the art of the novel is dying. This is far from certain. History will reveal, in a few decades, whether the various fits and starts which have been recorded are signs of a death agony or of a rebirth” (1965: 17).

The novel is a new genre. As the novel is among the most recently formed literary types – it is in English Literature as well – its ‘newness,’ as it is more properly stated, potentially generates complications. In other words, according to Robbe-Grillet’s perspective, the novel might still be considered unknown in its true sense from the

⁷ This artistic movement of the 1950s France characteristically suggested the rejection of traditional techniques in narrative fiction.

nineteenth-century perspective, which leads to the establishment of opposition to the novel by “*The entire caste system of our literary life*” (1965: 17). This particular situation that the novel encounters is explained by him even in more detail claiming that “*The stammering newborn work will always be regarded as a monster, even by those who find experiment fascinating. There will be some curiosity, of course, some gestures of interest, always some provision for the future. And some praise; though what is sincere will always be addressed to the vestiges of the familiar, to all those bonds from which the new work has not yet broken free and which desperately seek to imprison it in the past*” (1965: 17-18).

The Economics of Publishing

The British poet and literary critic Bernard Bergonzi (1929-2016) contributed to the same discussion through the publication of essays in which he concentrated on especially the economics of publishing the printed novel in the modern times. In his “*The Novel No Longer Novel*,” published in *The Situation of the Novel* in 1970, Bergonzi states the fact that “*In the arena where novels are produced, publicised, reviewed and, presumably, read, there is every indication that the form is in a state of high vitality*” (1979: 12). This is due to the fact that every year a great number of novelists either publish or send their novels for consideration to the publishing houses. In terms of production, therefore, he argues that the novel is in a promising situation. However, when one considers the financial reality of the industry, Bergonzi claims that “*It is well known that the economics of novel-publishing is precarious; that first novels almost always lose money, and very few novels make much; and yet publishers are still remarkably eager to go on publishing them, because the rewards from hitting the jackpot with a best-seller are so prodigious*” (1979: 12). And the problem with the future of the novel is that “*Yet it is conceivable that the economic basis of novel-publishing could change in such a way that bringing out novels would cease to be worthwhile for a publisher who wanted to stay in business*” (Bergonzi 1979: 12). Although Bergonzi considers that the novel is “*human nature and human life itself*” (1958: 355), the result of this conjecture about the future of the novel, as he asserts, is the conclusion that “*In that case, presumably, novels would disappear from the market, and publishers could turn their attention to more profitable kinds of book*” (1979: 12-13).

As a result of such a complicating outlook for the novel, Bergonzi believes that the modern novelist has actually little to do. He thus says “*There is little that the prospective novelist could do, apart from circulating his work in manuscript, since the printing and distribution of a novel is a complex and expensive business ... and few novelists could meet it out of their own pockets*” (1979: 13). This situation eventually will lead to the end of the novel in its conventional form for “*Presumably for a few years the flood of unprinted novels would mount higher and higher in ever-increasing frustration, but I imagine that within a generation novels would have ceased to be written, and that some other vehicle would have been found for the ‘one bright book of life’*” (Bergonzi 1979:13). Such a condition, according to Bergonzi, is a paradox for the novel whose most typical quality is its endless depiction of man in all socio-economic aspects of life. In its more proper sense, this situation is described as “*the novel, which seems so open to life, and to give, as Lawrence saw, a total picture of man in all his variety and fullness, is intimately connected with a particular technology and form of commercial development, neither of which may be permanently protected from obsolescence*” (Bergonzi 1979: 13).

Bergonzi reminds the reader of the history of the conjectures about the future of the novel. As it has been discussed here in this study, he exemplifies the discussions of the literary critics, such as Trilling, Ortega y Gasset, and, of course, Watt, about the contemporary situation and the future of the genre. This situation, according to him, “*is a*

further paradox in the fact that despite the commitment of novelists to the power and authority of the fictional form, critics have for a long time been predicting the end of the novel, in tones ranging from cool indifference to apocalyptic gloom" (1979: 13). The notion of obsolescence has been remarked as one of the central characteristics of the novel as a genre. Bergonzi explains this peculiar character of the novel in terms of its close analysis of the human experience. Therefore, he says, "The apocalypticism may, indeed, be inherent in the form. The novel is concerned, above all, with carving shapes out of history, with imposing a beginning, a middle and an end on the flux of experience, and there might be obscure connections between the need for a novelist to find an end for his novel, and the preoccupation of critics with seeing an end for all novels" (1979: 13). Especially referring to the meaning inherent in the term, Bergonzi draws the attention to the idea of newness that the novel connotes. However, according to him, the novel has stopped offering what is considered to be the new. Instead of an end of the novel as a printed material, he suggests the notion that "the novel, while continuing to be a popular cultural form, no longer possesses the essential 'novelty' that traditionally characterised it" (1979: 15).

Another problem with the novel today, according to Bergonzi, is the generic classification that the novel is conventionally characterised with. Although the novel is principally about man in life, the generic patterns pose a limiting approach to this literary genre. In other words, as Bergonzi claims, "Recent fiction is, indeed, about life, but scarcely about life in a wholly unconditioned way; the movement towards the genre means that experience is mediated through existing literary patterns and types" (1979: 20). Bergonzi provides the details of this situation through a comparison between the English and other – French and American – novelists claiming that "This movement is particularly strong in English fiction; the French and many Americans may still feel impelled to strive for novelty, but the English, including the most talented among them, seem to have settled for the predictable pleasures of generic fiction" (1979: 20). In addition to all the discussion detailed above, Bergonzi highlights the problematic relationship between a referential work of art and reality itself. When it comes to the novel as a (traditionally) realistic work of art, the reliability of the correspondence between the reality and the representation has been put into question. He accordingly asserts that "A fictional genre may- and probably will- arise out of some new configuration of contemporary experience, but once it has become established it will in turn condition further attempts to reproduce such new experience in fiction: the relation between 'reality' and its literary representation is never a simple one-way process" (1979: 21).

Exhaustion of the Novel

Particularly "after the breakdown of the idea of modernity, scepticism toward two terms, 'advancement' and 'civilization' have shaped a self-conscious sensibility based upon uncertainty rather than stability" (Okuroğlu Özün 2012: 75). The American writer John Barth (1930-), who is described in an interview as the novelist "hailed as prime mover in no fewer than four literary movements ... discuss[ing] his place in the constantly evolving world of postmodernism" (Reilly 2000: 589), published in *The Atlantic* in 1967 one of his theoretically most controversial essays, "The Literature of Exhaustion," in which he specially accentuates, in its special terminology, the "used-upness" of the forms of traditional realistic literature and its genres, including the novel (1984: 64). This essay, therefore, has widely been considered by literary critics as another statement of the death of the novel as a genre even though Barth openly states in the essay that what he intends to create in this particular work has nothing to do with "anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities -- by no means necessarily a cause

for despair" (1984: 64). However, what Barth particularly displays is "his concern with novels as images of exhaustion" (Kennard 1970: 117). He notably argues that literature, as a form of representative arts, has always been subject to certain patterns of change. Literary genres might likely to develop into new forms which have perhaps no similarities to the earlier patterns. Thus, especially "the rejection of the traditional forms of realism is a kind of liberation for the novelists since this rejection frees the writers from the imposed limitations of realism such as the verisimilitude principle, true-to-life characterization, and plausibility in constructing the plot structure" (Okuroğlu Özün 2012: 87) Therefore, any counter-argument against this notion would mean the opposite, the disappearance of history.

Barth traces the notion of the death of the novel especially to the underlying theory behind the works of Jorge Luis Borges, one of the most significant figures of the twentieth-century Spanish-Language literature. As Borges has frequently advocated in his stories the idea of the end of the possibility of composing a truly original work of literature, Barth argues pointing to one of the writer's short stories that "the important thing to observe is that Borges doesn't attribute the *Quixote* to himself, much less recompose it like *Pierre Menard*; instead, he writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessary, of writing original works of literature" (1984: 69). This can be read, according to Barth, as the description of the novelist's sense of frustration which effectively spoils the future of the novel. If original works of literature – especially the novel – are no longer meaningful, the future of the genre then is considered to be under threat.

Barth occasionally relies on the almost archetypal example of the disappearance of, in its practical sense, the epic as a genre. It was the German philosopher Walter Benjamin who highlighted the subject earlier than Barth does as part of the discussions about the end of the novel. The idea here is that if a literary genre has already ceased to be popular, the novel might perhaps share the same situation. Related to this issue, Barth claims that "Literary forms certainly have histories and historical contingencies, and it may well be that the novel's time as a major art form is up, as the 'times' of classical tragedy, Italian and German grand opera, or the sonnet-sequence came to be" (1984: 71). However, Barth examines this incident mostly as a cultural question and asserts that there is

No necessary cause for alarm in this at all, except perhaps to certain novelists, and one way to handle such a feeling might be to write a novel about it. Whether historically the novel expires or persists as a major art form seems immaterial to me; if enough writers and critics feel apocalyptic about it, their feeling becomes a considerable cultural fact, like the feeling that Western civilization, or the world, is going to end rather soon (1984: 71-72).

In addition to the references to Benjamin's discussion, Barth reminds his reader of Alain Robbe-Grillet's notion of the new novel. As Robbe-Grillet reverses the Aristotelian tradition of representative arts, the novel do not have to necessarily refers to man in action; instead the work of art might imitate other works of art. Therefore, the idea here is that

Alain Robbe-Grillet's essays For a New Novel come to mind. There are replies to these objections, not to the point here, but one can see that in any case they're obviated by imitations-of-novels, for instance, which attempt to represent not life directly but a representation of life. In fact such works are no more removed from 'life' than Richardson's or Goethe's epistolary novels are; both imitate 'real' documents, and the subject of both, ultimately, is life, not the documents (Barth 1984:72).

The imitation might replace the original, which forcefully modifies the meaning of all literary genres including the novel. Barth reminds the reader of the fact that the existence of such an issue establishes an unconventional notion of the novel which is characterised with not its imitation of the social reality but its imitation of the representation of the social reality.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is quite surprising to the modern reader that the novel, not only despite its present popularity but also despite its present status as a form of narrative art, has been seriously considered as a genre that will most probably be an absolute type in the near future. Such a discouraging critical perspective on the contemporary situation but especially on the future of the novel considerably accelerated during the first decades after the end of the Second World War. Although the discussions started earlier, the feeling of physical and psychological devastation felt after the war in the Western World heavily contributed to this phenomenon. The novel was depicting man for the man. As a critical representative of the liberal humanist art, the principal direction of the novel was, as it had been underlined by liberal humanist critics, to provide for the reader the essential clue to creating the necessary illustration of what one needs to improve. The war created for the intellectual the idea that the novel, as well as all other forms of art and literature, had failed to offer the opportunities of having a better life. They failed, including the novel, to create the promise to build the future. It cannot be asserted today that this was not true. However, the novel has survived even in its original form – traditional realism – all those challenges of a number of European and American writers and theorists some of whose discussions about the rise and the decline of the novel as a form, as exemplified in this study, concentrate on the social, the political, the historical and especially the economic sensibilities of the time.

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