

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Zadie Smith's Propositions in the Directions of the Novel and Postmodern Realism

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Abstract

This paper explores Zadie Smith's literary insights and the postmodern realism genre. In "Two Directions for the Novel," Smith appraises lyrical realism (exemplified by *Netherland*) and constructive deconstruction (exemplified by *Remainder*), advocating a hybrid "third path" that merges realist authenticity with postmodern experimental techniques. Postmodern realism, distinct from traditional realism and pure postmodernism, is grounded in mimesis—extending to both material and spiritual realities. It features marginalized protagonists, blurs literature-history boundaries, retains ethical concerns, and integrates diverse narrative methods. As a revitalized form of realism in postmodern contexts, it rebuilds connections between language and reality, fostering communal understanding over solipsism. Smith's own literary stance, aligning with lyrical realism while embracing experimentalism, exemplifies this genre, which responds to contemporary demands for authentic, inclusive, and multidimensional literary representation.

Keywords: Zadie Smith, "Two Directions for the Novel," Postmodern Realism.

1. Introduction

In her essay "Two Directions for the Novel", an essay included in *Changing My Mind* (2009), but initially published as "Two Paths for the Novel", Smith, as a critic and novelist, primarily demonstrates her appraisal of the two traditions in the novel—"lyrical realism" and "constructive deconstruction"—one refers to the 19th-century realism represented by Jane Austen and the other one refers to avant-garde supported by Georges Perec (73, 93-94). Then she asserts points of connection between two sides that are claimed by Melville, Conrad, and Kafka and etc. Thus, Smith's confirmation of the intersection bespeaks the potential direction of the novel, namely, there is a possibility to accommodate realism and postmodernism simultaneously in one certain school. In fact, her acclaimed self-location of "lyrical realism" and her praise of avant-garde sheds light on her preference for two traditions and her tendency to hybridity of two directions.

2. Zadie Smith and "Two Directions for the Novel"

Smith sets an antipodal position between Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2007), expressing her confirmation of the two books' devotions to delineating two kinds of authenticity: physical/objective authenticity and affective/subjective authenticity, based on her criticism of lyrical realism's catering to literary economy and readers' reading expectations after September 11 and her celebration of avant-garde in reflecting authenticity of shaping "feeling" in the inauthentic world (86).

Netherland remains a sensuous form of traditional realism in achieving authenticity but also causes the suspicion of selling anxiety. It typically represents lyrical realism which refers to conservative realism immersed in nostalgia, lyricism, and sadness in the wake of September 11, featuring sensuous form—"a nicely constructed sentence, rich in sound and syntax,

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signifying (almost) nothing” (Smith 81). Such form is beneficial to construct convincing and authentic narrative details but keeps the story in the stony conventions of realism. Besides, Smith identifies “the Anglo-American liberal middle class” as in crisis and fraught with anxiety but its affluence of anxiety incurs Smith’s question about its authenticity (72). For example, Smith calls into question the authenticity of the *Netherland* for its purposely catering to the readers’ taste and sullen emotions of society after September 11, by interrogating the essence of realism: “Do the things of the world really come to us like this, embroidered in the verbal fancy of times past? Is this really realism” (82)?

On the other hand, based on its seeming inappropriate humour, Smith applauds *Remainder* as constructive deconstruction for its antipodal position opposite to *Netherland*’s lyrical sentence in portraying traumatic memory. *Remainder* can be seen as an organism of the constructiveness of materialism and the deconstruction of traditional realism’s form, and both sides work together to pursue an “authenticity fetish” (Smith 76). Smith defines Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder* acts as “Necronautism”¹ because Necronauts, McCarthy as one of the members, are “modern lovers of debris,” which implies his preference for materialism and abandonment of idealism, as well as rejection of postmodern solipsism (89). Most importantly, Smith by no means criticizes the cliché of reenactor’s (protagonist in *Remainder*) reenactments in the inauthentic building, rather, praises its authenticity of “tingling” feeling by repeating actions (Smith 87). *Remainder*, in Smith’s opinion, is one path less taken, as she notes:

It is easy to feel that *Remainder* comes to literature as an assassin to kill the novel stone dead. I think it means rather shake the novel out of its present complacency. It clears away a little of the deadwood, offering a glimpse of an alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward. We could call this constructive deconstruction, a quality that, for me, marks *Remainder* as one of the great English novels of the past ten years. (94)

McCarthy’s avant-garde abandon of realist conventions in perusing authenticity wins high evaluation of Smith, because his inauthentic building, instead, constructs the authenticity of feeling.

What is interesting is Smith’s self-location as a member of “lyrical realism” when she appreciates the experimental fiction’s pursuit of authenticity at the expense of realist credos. This in-between position reveals her persistence in realist doctrines and her tendency toward experimental techniques. Thus, the new genre—postmodern realism—can act as a shared accommodation of realist writing and experimental techniques.

All in all, in Smith’s observation, lyrical realism possesses features of nicely constructed sentences, dedicated syntax, authentic details, and a dominant place of time, while she also points out its disadvantage of lacking metaphysical concerns of the world and its pandering to readers’ taste. On the other hand, avant-garde fiction shows its advantage of revealing feeling by repeating actions until makes it feels authentic, although all these actions happened in an inauthentic space. In doing so, space takes a dominant place in experimental practice. Taken together, the antipole of two paths does not distance two sides far away but provides a potential “fork”, a third way, combing two sides work together in order to reveal more smooth and natural authenticity in terms of communal and private, physical and psychological, objective and subjective, material and affective. In fact, postmodern realism takes a available accommodation of realism and postmodernism to express the authenticity in terms of material world and mental world.

3. Postmodern Realism as “The Third Path”

In the last two decades of the 20th century, some works seem different from “straight” realism and experimental postmodernism. They by no means match any already terminology, like romanticism, realism, modernism, and postmodernism, due to blurring the boundaries between experiment and realism. Some critics argue that literature after postmodernism is, in significant ways returning to the realist convention, as this research does. These proofs tend to label this literary tendency in many different ways as well, to name just a few of these various coinages: Winfried Fluck’s Neo-Realism, Madhu Dubey’s post-postmodernism realism, postmodernist realism supported by Albert Borgmann, José David Saldívar, Deborah Bowen, and Mary K. Holland and so on. All these variations of realism in contemporary literature serve as the plural of realism and “revitalization of realism” (Rebein 7).

¹This term is cited from Derrida’s note “We are all Necronauts, always, already.” Its original form in Smith’s essay “Two Directions of the Novel” is “necronauts”, which refers to a group of people who can be defined as “modern lovers of debris”. That is to say, necronauts celebrates the doctrines of Necronautism that emphasizes the importance of material world and its materiality in affecting people.

Among these coinages, neorealism and postmodern realism are the most widely recognized and frequently used. This dissertation refers to the new mode as postmodern realism to set it apart from a bevy of other literary categories rather than postmodern realism due to two reasons: on the one hand, it provides more accommodation for the remainders of realism under the context of postmodernism; on the other, this term echoes the consensus— “a new development of contemporary literature in postmodern context” (Wang Shouren and Tong Qingsheng 50). In fact, American neorealism in She Jun's view, can be seen as “the third way” after the blooming of realism and postmodernism (202).

In order to illustrate underlying rationale of postmodern realism, this section plans to explain the differences between realism and postmodernism, the development of postmodern realism, and the characteristics of this new school.

3.1 Compare and Contrast Realism and Postmodernism

Before analyzing Smith's fiction as realism, some terminological ground-clearing in philosophy and literary genre is in order. To define the genre of postmodern realism better, it is necessary to compare and contrast realism and postmodernism, respectively, as philosophical concepts and literary genres.

Realism is a term used in literary and artistic philosophy to describe how signals convey a reality. Realists hold the trust of the pairing correspondence between two sides, such as language and reality, concept and entity. As Ruth Ronen notes, in realist philosophy, there exists possibly comprehensible “representation, approximation, accuracy, truth, correspondence, or their likes” between existence and conceptual domain, entities of language and entities in reality, language and reality, as well as the order of language and the order of the real, rather than permanently “mutual exclusion” (191, 186). However, such a pairing relationship between two sides by no means “meet” each other, and their relationship is conceived as “parochial” and arbitrary (Rorty qtd. in Ronen 193). In short, the postmodern or poststructural doctrine argues that “[o]ne could never hope to get at the signified (the concept, the Idea) beyond the material flow of signifiers. One could never arrive at the referent (the thing itself, reality) apart from that reality's employment within this or that genre (Konstantinou 117).

Realist and postmodernist worldviews are based on these two philosophical stances, respectively. Themes and representation in realist fiction are grounded on an ontologically constrained order that is founded on:

... a general recognition of the circumstantial forces that place limits on individual desire or ambition. Such forces are various—they range from the particular nature of the society we live in, the character of our friends and neighbors, and the demands of work and family to larger historical, biological, and genetic factors. To accept the reality of such limits means, in its most benign form, to accept ourselves as we are and to value or believe in the reality of the people, objects, and ideas that are around us, however limiting, mundane, or trivial they may appear. (McGuire xxii)

Examining the specifics of how literary realism does this can help one to understand this term. Most critics identify at least some of the following four characteristics of this realism: “choice of typical subjects in a mimetic mode; authorial objectivity; the doctrine of natural causality contributing to character motivation; and a particular attitude toward the world that is seen as true” (Martin 58-71). Corresponding to Martin's insightful observations, Chinese scholar Wang Shouren likewise puts up forward three explicit characteristics of realism: “authenticity, typicality, historicity” (34). Traditionally, realism has used the famed third-person narrative perspective to assert the objectivity and authenticity of this mode of depiction. The themes of the liberal humanist paradigm, i.e., universal human nature, the notion of consensus or “full knowable truth we all agree upon,” the practical import of the empirical over the theoretical, or “form as subordinate to content” (Holland, *Succeeding* 4), are also usually the “truths” communicated thematically in realist fiction. Realistic stories are generally disclosed in chronological order and direct dialogues.

In Fredric Jameson's definition, postmodernism refers to the cultural logic of late capitalism, describing the post-World War II period's Zeitgeist. He sheds light on postmodernism's “constitutive features” as follows:

[A] new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary ‘theory’ and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private

temporality..., a whole new type of emotional ground tone—what I will call ‘intensities’—which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology. (6)

Jameson points out several essential features characterising postmodernist literature, of which one of the most important one is the collapsing of the difference between inside and outside, or, in Jameson's terms of reference, “a whole metaphysics of the inside and the outside” (11). Jameson begins this discussion by referring to the separation within the human subject, captured by Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. Still, he extends it to a broad set of dichotomies which contemporary theory tends to deconstruct and displace:

(1) the dialectical one of essence and appearance (along with a whole range of concepts of ideology or false consciousness which tend to accompany it); (2) the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression... ; (3) the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity whose heroic or tragic thematics are closely related to that other great opposition between alienation and desalination, itself equally a casualty of the poststructural or postmodern period; and (4) most recently, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified, [...] What replaces these various depth models is for the most part a conception of practices, discourses, and textual play...; [...] depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what if often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth). (12)

The depthlessness appears to be the dominant trait in Jameson's discussion: (1) fragmentation and disappearance of the subject displace the alienation of the subject itself, namely “the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual,” and “the decentering of the formerly centered subject or psyche” (14-5); (2) the waning of affect and such feelings are “now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria” with an attempt to displace the alienation and anxiety in the previous high modernism (16); (3) life is governed by space rather than time because we now “inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic” (16). These characteristics of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon reflect in postmodernist fiction techniques or narrative methods, such as parody,

pastiche, and irony, which correspond to the credo of depthlessness or decentering of this genre.

The comparisons and contrasts between realism and postmodernism roughly portray the features of realism and postmodernism, respectively, regarding philosophy and literary genre, so this dissertation argues that the distinguished “points of contention” between realism and postmodernism reside in the view of language, namely the trust in the power of linguistic referentiality referring to extralinguistic reality. Realist works restore confidence in the referential capabilities of language, while postmodern fiction rejects language's referential relations with the realist world. The two genres seem to stand opposite on the axis of linguistic referentiality. Let's say that realists hold the belief that people can use language to discover the physical world. It is reasonable to say that postmodernists distrust that it is possible to project the material world by language due to its shifting signifiers. Dominated by such oppositional belief, as a result, there are various theories corresponding to each other, namely mimesis and mirror-representation theory of realism, depthlessness, uncertainty, and deconstruction in postmodernism.

It seems like “mutual exclusion” exists and produce a possible and potential “middle space” between two sides. Luckily, MacHale's affirmation of mimesis provides a reasonable and convincing answer to mediate two different genres. In effect, realism and postmodernism do not oppose each other but share the same literary base—mimesis. According to MacHale's assertion, mimesis is not only one privilege of realism but instead, also shared with postmodernism, as he notes,

Mimesis, clearly, is alive and well in postmodernist fiction. Postmodernist texts such as *Impressions d'Afrique* or *Alphabetical Africa* may not reflect objective African realities, but they do faithfully reflect our culture's ontological landscape, which allows a certain space to an unreal zone called “Africa.” (55)

MacHale's affirmation of mimesis extends “realities” to broader terms, not only the physical world but also the imaginary world that can be collectively shared, understood and perceived by our ontological knowledge, which corresponds to Amy J. Elias's account of “mimesis with an ontological dominant” as an overt distinction between postmodern realism from other kinds of postmodern fiction following MacHale's innovative distinguish between traditional realism and postmodernism on the ground of

epistemological dominant and ontological dominant (12). Let's borrow her profound interpretation to understand this definition:

In postmodern Realism (capital originally), the world has become textualized. Postmodern Realism records the multiple worlds/texts within contemporary culture and recognizes the inability to evaluate society's conflicting values; it mimics the multiple selves of characters (or more accurately the self as subject within a textualized culture) and recognizes the problem of articulating an essential Self (capital originally) in this social context. Both of these goals and limitations are realistic; postmodern Realism is true to the new definition of self and society in a postmodern culture. (Elias 12)

Elias admits linguistic referentiality to the world but also endorses its partial representation of the whole society and essential self. Following Elias's view, we can say that this new realism offers more possibility for delineating the material world and the spiritual world in the middle space. Under the academic goal to investigate the essence and connotation of postmodern realism, it is necessary to give patient attention to the term's intellectual development. In other words, postmodern realism grounds the "paring possibility" of correspondence between words and the world, signifier and signified, and reference and self-reference.

Comparison and contrast between realism and postmodernism not only discover differences between two sides but also locates their shared grounding, namely, mimesis. Thus, postmodern realism as a middle space between realism and postmodernism, certainly acts as a significant player in the contemporary literary field with the grounding of realism's core principle—mimesis. postmodern realism eschews the confusing aspects of experimental referentiality and attempts to set its foot on the ground of reality, bespeaking the energetic longevity of mimesis in contemporary literature due to its inclusion, constructiveness, and ontological essence. Thus, it is easy to understand the blooming of new realism following traditional realism, as Jiang Chengyong contends, which can be seen as "a variety of new forms, new combinations," presenting a "plural" state (167).

3.2 Literature Review of Postmodern Realism

Postmodern realism, as a literary term, was primarily coined by José David Saldívar in 1991 in his article entitled "Postmodern Realism", collected in *The*

Columbia History of the American Novel. Saldívar, an expert in Chicano literature and culture, defines postmodern realism as "a space of affinities and alliances among diverse histories" (522). He raises the question of the believability and truth of postmodern realism, whose origin lies in magic realism, stating that magical realism entered the "fourth phase" or "crack", with the representatives of Morrison, Arturo Islas, and Maxine Hong Kingston, among others, which can "expand the magic realism tradition in postmodernist and often 'signifyin[g]' ways" (Saldívar 523).

In sum, Saldívar's closer attention to the critical nexus between truth/fiction paradox is well presented by historical fragments and postmodern narratives of the working class, which approaches the obsolescence of grand narrative and the rise of little narrative advocated by Jean-François Lyotard:

The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements— narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valences specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. (25)

In this sense, Saldívar's postmodern realism sets its grounding on little narratives and ordinary people's lives, speaking out of heterogeneous voices of marginal subjects and responding to Lyotard's pragmatic evaluation of little narratives. In a nutshell, Saldívar's realistic representation of marginalized historical persons echoes the crucial credo of 19th-century realism— "the pursuit of verisimilitude" through magical devices (Watt 27).

As a literary term, neorealism was primarily coined by Malcolm Bradbury, who speaks in his chapter on "Neorealist Fiction" of a "recovery of realism" after World War II, collected in *The Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988) (1126). Four years later, Bradbury again, in his article "Writing Fiction in the 90s," collected in *Neo-realism in Contemporary American Fiction*, an authoritative source if there ever was one, points out that the origin of neorealism resides in Italy film and then spreads its influence on literary field and notes the crucial principle of neorealism is to "deal with the poverty and crisis of the damaged cities" (17). Bradbury's contentions no doubt reveal the realistic depth of this new genre and its "resistant discourse" (Zhou Bojia 31). Moreover, neorealism in Italy film bears "the hallmark of neo-realism in its

depiction of the everyday reality, of poverty among the disadvantaged classes" (253-254).

As for Italian neorealist film, it emphasis on spiritual reality should be noted. As the Italian film director says: neorealism should embrace "not just social reality, but spiritual reality, metaphysical reality, all that there is within man.... In a certain sense, everything is realistic. I see no dividing line between imagination and reality" (qtd. in Marcus 146).

William H. Thornton and Songok Han Thornton, in "Toward a Cultural Prosaics: Postmodern Realism in the New Literary Historiography", have attempted to define postmodern realism as "a more capacious and socially accountable postmodernism" (123). The Thorntons together confirm the obsolescence of traditional literary realism due to the calls for a "postdisciplinary fusion of objectives" (122). The such assertion makes it reasonable that a viable realism refers to a cogent convergence of postmodern in form and postdisciplinary in scope, namely, "de-bounding of literature and history" or concretely "cultural prosaics" (122). In doing so, it bespeaks that postmodern realism plays the role of bridge between "the conflicting demands of esthetic and historiography" and between "fact and fiction" (138).

Deborah Bowen wittily points out that postmodern realism acts as "are constituted realism as a mode of moral inquiry" by expounding Brookner's use of photography in novels that possesses the unacknowledged nature of politics and constructing in Hutcheon's celebration of the politics of postmodernism (125). In short, Brookner's postmodern worldview is not at odds with a realist ethic but a revised realism involving ethics. In Dr Bowen's monograph in 2010, she states that postmodern realism is a term used "at this stage in literary-critical history allows for reintroducing the referent into theoretical discourse, pointing again to the importance of specific instantiation over abstract system" (52). She adds that postmodern realism implies an interaction between text and context, sign and referent, epistemology, and ontology: these texts exist in "the middle space where epistemological limit meets the intransigent 'givenness' of the real" (53). Further, when delineating the four modes of postmodern realism, she attributes the main reason to their self-consciousness and constructiveness, noting that "they are all self-consciously aware of both their constructed-ness and the intransigence of the worldly realities with which they have to do" (53). The confirmation of "self-awareness and constructive awareness" of realism de facto likewise wins the

celebration of Chinese scholars Lin Yi and Wang Shouren (153).

Brain Richardson, in 1997, focuses on the history of British fiction in the twentieth century and points out that poetics is not in stasis but continues to move forward or backwards in modern literary history by combination, transition, and fusion. In doing so, a ready example is the so-called "postmodern realism", that has attempted to "conjoin the otherwise opposed poetics of realism and postmodernism" (Brian 299).

A serious and sincere desire for realism reaches a consensus among some scholars' critics. Even more clearly expressed in Lee Konstantinou's essay, "Neorealist Fiction," is how contemporary fiction eschews postmodernism in favour of a steadier understanding of truth and the real. He separates storytelling neorealism and affective neorealism, two forms of neorealism that each confronts postmodernism differently (111). Finally, Doug Battersby contends that "contemporary novelists, rather than simply rejecting postmodernism, are writing fiction which complicates and indeed develops postmodernist concerns and techniques through a more recognizably realist mode" (2). Mary K. Holland concisely explains the significance of this development in literature in *The Moral Worlds of Contemporary Realism*:

The proliferation of "realisms" proposed since the transition out of postmodernism began in the 1990s further speaks to a widespread desire by critics and writers to connect their acts of creating and theorizing literature to the realism that preceded modernism, while retaining postmodernism's undermining of the connection between literature and reality, and structuralism's and poststructuralism's alienation of signification from the real. That these decades have seen a multiplying of "realisms" rather than, say, proliferating varieties of "anti-realism," "anti-novels," or "irrealism," likewise implies a desire to see these literary modes, so technically distinct from Realism, as new methods of making language reflect the real world and real human experience. It also provides strong evidence that "realism" has finally broken free from nineteenth-century claims to ownership. (252)

Likewise, critical inheritance and innovative development of new realism in contemporary literature win the celebration of Chinese scholars Wang Shouren and Tong Qingsheng:

Postmodern realistic novels maintain the documentary tradition of realistic books in the 19th century. They combine the characteristics of self-consciousness common in modern fiction and the reflection of avant-garde stories on their creation. (50)

Besides, other Chinese scholars also admits that postmodern realism has preserved some features of 19th-century realism, including Cheng Xilin, Guo Jide, and Yin Qiping. Cheng Xilin, in his 1992's essay, points out that new realism in post-war American novels combines "fact and fiction, history and imagination" and underscores its "continuing development and profound progression" (38). Guo Jide notes that this neorealism "inherits the old tradition of realism and continuously draws new nourishment from the creative techniques of modernism and postmodernism has formed a new way of creation" ("The Neorealist Tendency" 150). Three years later, when Professor Guo portrays the characteristics of postwar American literature, he again emphasizes "the regression of realism" ("A Review of Post-War" 134). Yin Qiping primarily puts his positive spin on Raymond William's insight into the novel's "deadlock" that finds its solution by connecting individuals and society in the new realism (64).

Moreover, some scholars also point out the hybridity of postmodern realism techniques, such as Jiang Tao, Tong Xueming, and She Jun and Zhu Xinfu. Jiang Tao asserts that "neorealist novels are the organic integration of the creative principles of realism and the methods of modernism and postmodernism" (118). Tong Xueming admits the "the result of an organic fusion of postmodernism and traditional realism" in this new genre and defines its characteristics: "paying attention to social, moral orientation, focusing on narrative, plain style, with profound educational connotation. Among them, realism and postmodernism are relatively prominent, which is the resultful unity of two poles" (66, 69). She Jun and Zhu Xinfu explore characters and characterisations in American neorealist fiction and conclude that neorealist writers adopt blended techniques to portray fictional characters called "HUMAN BEINGS" (127). In his doctoral dissertation, She Jun concludes the characteristics of neorealist writers who "pay close attention to societal reality and return to the mode of realistic fiction writing" and by no means "copy the writing techniques of traditional realist writers," instead, combine "the realist style and postmodern writing skills" ("Introduction" 4).

This literature review undoubtedly shows that realism has made a strong comeback in the literary world. This dissertation here tries to draw some pieces of brief conclusions in order to outline the connotations of postmodern realism: (1) postmodern realists turn their attention to the marginalised people or working class in daily life; (2) it embraces not only the social reality but also spiritual reality; (3) this new genre converges literature and history and blurs the boundaries between two disciplines; (4) this new realism still inherits realist concerns of ethics and human nature; (5) as a new literary genre in the postmodernist context, it integrates various narrative techniques of realism, modernism, and postmodernism in order to reflect authenticity from different angles.

3.3 Characteristics of Postmodern Realism and its Dynamic

More precisely, taking five features of postmodern realism summarized through its literature review together, this project primarily summarizes five crude constitutive traits of postmodern realism in contemporary literature: (1) the marginalized people and working class take dominant places in the postmodern realist cast covering women, those of colour, and different sexualities; (2) its mimic objects do not only limited in the material reality but also expand to spiritual reality, which means that it modifies mimesis to strike a better balance between "the common phenomenal world" and the perceptible world in "the individual minds" (Lodge 58); (3) postmodern realists try their endeavors to "record" the real history, attempting to keep its authenticity via blurring the borders between reality and fiction; (4) ethical interhuman communication can be responsibly achieved in the postmodern realist context, rather than alienation and desalination caused by postmodernity; (5) because of its genealogical nexus with realism, postmodern realism inherits realistic doctrines and simultaneously embraces narrative techniques of modernism and postmodernism. This dissertation, therefore, tries to offer a primary definition of this new genre: postmodern realism serves as a new development of mimesis in the postmodern context, and it accommodate modern and postmodern narrative strategies through a more recognizably realism-associated form, techniques, and thematic concerns.

Postmodern realism in the literary genre can be positioned as a further development of mimesis in the postmodern context. In Lin Yi and Wang Shouren's words, this new realism "in its new development insists on referring to the real world, and it always

retains mimetic poetics; however, it is mingled with postmodernism" (152). This study summarizes four points of contentions regarding its genealogical relationship with realism and postmodernism in terms of philosophy and literary theory following Ruth Ronen's definition of realism: (1) postmodern realism is metaphysically a doctrine stating the existence of a nonconceptual and conceptual domain; (2) postmodern realism is ontologically a belief in the independent existence of two separate orders: the order of the real and the order of the linguistic; entities of language partially designate entities in reality; (3) postmodern realism is epistemically the view that there is possible access from language to reality; (4) postmodern realism is semantically the assumption that access from the order of language to the order of the real is based on a relation of approximation, convergence, and correspondence.

As a new genre in contemporary literature, postmodern realism acts as a remarkable dynamic in the framework of "after postmodernism" and "postmodernist, then" narrative based on its philosophical, aesthetic, and pragmatic commitment to the new development of realism. More precisely, there are three points should be clarified: (1) postmodern realist works accommodate a literary shelter for the dichotomy of reference/self-reference, language/world, mimesis/anti-mimesis, and truth/fiction, so the connection of ideology and material world has rebuilt and readers tend to choose "trust" in place of solipsism; (2) the boundaries between two seeming paradox genres— realism and postmodernism— are dismantled, and limits of two sides are modified in the new scenario; (3) realist conventions, once again, "present[ing] the individual in relation to society and social change" stands at the forefront of performing building "relationship and community" in the turn of humanism (Lodge 49; Holland *Succeeding* 6).

4. Conclusion

On the whole, however, as represented by Smith, postmodern realism retains perhaps one of the most prominent realist tenets: it is possible to represent shared real reality and human experiences in a fictional world, connecting people together rather than isolation, alienation, and desalination in the pitfalls of solipsism and nihilism. The resurgence of realism in literature proves human's need to trust that we can "work and think and write from the position of what matters, and, better, that there are things that do matter, things we can know and agree on" (Holland, *Succeeding* 5). Since Smith's realist concerns and

literary inheritance of realism presented in her post-millennial fiction, it is reasonable to categorize her fiction as postmodern realism.

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