**Literary and Visual Art Movements: How they Overlap**

BH: Welcome back to New Moon! My name is Brandon Hysell, a designer at Luna Negra and a senior Visual Communication Design major,

OW: And I’m Olivia Wachtel, the editor in chief,

BH: And this week we’re going to talk about how literary and visual art movements such as Romanticism and Modernism overlap in many regards. These movements challenged writers and artists to create something new and different for the time period. So, Ollie, how did you come up with the idea for this podcast?

OW: Right, so, the idea for this episode actually came out of a conversation I had with my friend recently. We were in this small public art museum in Youngstown, and I asked her what her favorite artistic period/movement was. She was telling me how, because of her Art History minor, her favorite period changed depending on what period she was studying. She really liked seeing how artists were affected by intersecting things like politics, economics, and literary trends. That really interested me because whenever I study intersectionality in a class, I usually learn about how constructs like class or gender or race intersect, not necessarily how visual art and literary art trends influence one another. So that all got me thinking about the literary and visual arts movements I’d studied in separate classes but never compared. When Brandon and I decided to do this podcast, the first movement that came to mind was Romanticism.

Movement 1 - Romanticism

BH: The Romanticism period brought us lots of new art with a wide range of emotion and imagination as well as spirit. It started near the end of the 1700s and reached its peak in the 1800s and was followed by the Realism movement. The best examples of Romanticism paintings are The Wanderer Above the Sea and Fog by Caspar David Friedrich and The Third of May 1808 by Francisco Goya. These paintings challenged artists to create something more and push the creative limits that were around them, the same can be said of literature with writers such as Edgar Allen Poe who was a major player in the literary part of romanticism.

OW: For sure! So, Romanticism as a literary movement was largely a response to the rational thought that was such a big part of the Enlightenment. Romantics thought that the emotional and spiritual were way more important than logic and reason. For literature, that meant a lot of poems about the spirituality in nature and all the emotions that were created in the poet. If you know Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” the poem about the daffodils, that’s pretty much the epitome of Romantic poetry.

Brandon, does that overlap at all with the Romanticism movement in visual art?

BH: Absolutely, in fact the Romanticism movement brought a lot of freedom and creativity to artists in addition to connecting spiritually along with nature and religion. It was during this period that landscapes became a popular subject among painters and showed the power of nature and overall impact.

Movement 2 - Modernism

OW: Alright, so now we’re moving on to one of my favorite literary periods, modernism! For literature, modernism typically refers to the period after World War One. If you’ve ever learned about the Lost Generation, that’s the time period we’re talking about.

So, before we talk about how modernist literary and visual artists influenced one another, let’s kind of explain where both groups were coming from. For writers, there was a lot of disillusionment after WWI, especially in Europe where there were just awful casualties. I mean, in France alone, there were about 4 million casualties, which is insane because their population in 1914 (the first year of the war) was about 40 million. That’s 10% of their population killed in battle. In total, there were about 33 million casualties from the war. On top of all the death, WWI marked the beginning of biological weapons, like mustard gas. Plus, the trenches were breeding grounds for infection and serious illness. All in all, it was a very traumatic time, especially because there wasn’t really a good reason for the war. So, that was the backdrop for the Modernist movement.

BH: Not only is modernism an important literary period, but it is also a very important art period. Modernism brought us immense forms of art and helped change the way we create and perceive art. Since modernism is considered a broad term and not a singular movement, many of the artistic styles including Cubism, Dadaism, and Expressionism were also included. Modernists were influenced by the Impressionist movement that was considered radical by high society. Both artists and writers wanted to make extraordinary changes in the world.

OW: Interesting! So, if I went into a museum today, would I be able to see the difference between a Dadaist painting from the modernist period and a painting from the Romantic period? Like, what might the differences be?

BH: Dadaist paintings included a lot of humor and clever turns and questioned art’s role in the modern era. Dadaists experimented more with form with works such as Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain which was a urinal and was quite controversial and sparked lots of questions asking what makes art, art. Romanticism focused more on natural and spiritual aspects compared to dadaism. You will also notice that Dadaist paintings have more of a hand crafted look and mocking of other pieces such Duchamp’s L.H.O.O.Q which is a spoof of da Vicini’s famous Mona Lisa painting.

OW: Oh, wow, cool! And what was the philosophy behind those different styles?

BH: Dadaism strived to experiment with new forms of art and many were highly controversial and changed the way we perceive art. These artists pushed the boundaries of art and explored new avenues of expression and challenged the traditional artist. This is different from how Romantisicism was, they focused more on emotion and nature rather than the mocking tones and humor injected into Dadaism.

OW: Interesting!

For writers, much like artists, the Modernist movement was a disillusionment with society and nature and the universe in general. That disillusion shows up in writing that tries to break free of the typical western styles we’ve seen in past eras. Authors like Virginia Woolf pioneered stream of consciousness writing, which tries to represent how one thought or sense can lead to another thought/memory, which then leads to more thoughts. It was a total break from the traditional novel of the past where we have a third person narrator that’s kinda distanced from the characters and more plot driven.

Apart from styles like stream of consciousness, you’ve also got themes of disappointment in modernist literature. Think the *Great Gatsby* or *The Sun Also Rises*. Modernists wanted to find some permanent truth about life, and their characters get so close to finding the truth, but inevitably are disappointed, much like the authors.

And, of course, the Harlem Renaissance was going on during this period. So, not only do we have a world that is generally disillusioned, we’ve also got Black artists in the U.S. challenging stereotypes, white suppremicists, and social inequity. Some great Harlem Renaissance writers were poets like Gwendolyn Brooks writing about Chicago and economic instability and colorism. We’ve also got Langston Hughes whose poetry was often inspired by jazz music and Jean Toomer whose novel *Cane* is a collection of vignettes that play around with narration, point of view, and story structure.

Movement 3 - Postmodernism (literary) //

BH: Postmodernism came around between the 1960s/70s and changed everything about art at the time. They created new styles with open guidelines and an extreme form of self expression. These pieces were heavily influenced by their environment by political and social factors. Postmodernists were heavily inspired by the dadaist movement and had a open realm to their work and had free reign. This movement also had several sub movements with Neo-Dada and pop art, the postmodern movement stretched over two decades until the 1990s when other artistic styles began to copy characteristics of postmodern art and develop their own movements. An artist that comes to mind is Andy Warhol, his art challenged the way we think and the way that he used color was certainly remarkable for its time and he continued to push the boundaries of art for decades to come!

OW: Postmodernism is probably my all-time favorite literary period. Postmodern writers believed that there is no objective Reality or Truth. They would say that the reality we experience is molded by things like language and logical arguments. Based on this rejection of singular reality or truth, writers like Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller start playing around with language and how it shapes reality. For example, in Heller’s Catch-22, there’s this whole conflict where the protagonist (Yosarian) wants to go home because he thinks the war is madness, but the doctor can’t send him home unless Yosarian is insane. If Yosarian tries to prove he’s insane to get away from the insane violence, then the doctor can’t send him home for insanity because an insane person doesn’t know they’re insane. The whole meaning of insanity gets manipulated to control Yosarian’s reality and keep him on this base. That’s how Heller expressed the idea that reality isn’t objective–it’s controlled by constructs.

That postmodern focus on constructs also shows up in Angela Carter’s writing. She focuses a lot on dismantling narratives about gender, and she’s one of the early people to say that gender is socially conditioned into people. Instead of seeing gender as a binary thing that is an innate part of people’s reality, she talks about how gender is a construct.

Brandon, does this thinking behind postmodern literature sound anything like the philosophy behind postmodern art?

BH: Oh for sure! Postmodernist artists did not have a clear truth or reality and they had an open agenda which was so refreshing because lots of new forms of art and creativity were being expelled quite rapidly and the multiple micro movements that took place during this time period was certainly incredible!

OW: Interesting! To give an example of those micro movements you mentioned, I read somewhere that movements like cubism, which involved showing one object from multiple perspectives and on multiple planes at once, paralleled the chaotic style of postmodern writers.

So, now that we’ve seen how the styles and ideologies of literature and the arts overlap, I want to close with talking about what that overlap does. Why does it even matter?

BH: These overlaps matter because artists and writers are almost trying to achieve the same thing. We want our viewers to feel a ceratin way after viewing our work and I feel that artists/designers are responsible for showing emotion/creativity visually while a writer would probably use imagery and satire to achieve a similar result. I know for my class I have to take a poem and create symbols and infographics from it which is another way that literary and art connects. Finally, I think of books you have a illustrator that is responsible for creating the cover which is the first impression that you get before reading the book. If you do not have a convincing book cover, people will most likely not read it. Since Ollie and I decided to do this podcast, I knew how much literature meant to me and of course art means a lot to me as well and we wanted to strike a common ground between these two concepts and I believe that this podcast serves as evidence thereof.

OW: Yeah, for sure! I think it’s also important because a lot of people kind of feel strongly about art but don’t read as much, or vice versa–they’ll read a ton and not care about art. The fact that both visual art and literature kind of bounce ideas off of each other and pull from similar ideologies is one incentive to study both things, if that makes sense. Like, writing and art are often in a dialogue and unless people are looking at both art and literature, we might miss some of that conversation. On the other hand, artistic and literary philosophies are often really complicated and only accessible to people with a lot of education. So, in some ways, the overlap between art and literature might speak to the kind of elitism that we still need to break out of as a society? Idk lol

Thank you for listening to this episode of New Moon. Just to recap, New Moon is a project made possible by Black Squirrel Radio and hosted by Luna Negra staff. If you want to keep up with new episodes and other Luna projects, be sure to follow us on Instagram @lunanegramagazine or visit our website to sign up for our newsletter.

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