

UDC 821.135.1

doi: 10.15330/jpnu.3.4.84-89

## THE PLURALISM OF THE ARTIST'S IMAGE AS A SEARCH OF AN AESTHETIC MOTTO IN THE GONCOURT BROTHERS' NOVEL "MANETTE SALOMON"

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**Abstract.** The article studies the aesthetic theories of the French art of the middle of the XIX century through the interaction between literature and painting. In the novel "Manette Salomon" the Goncourt brothers formulate their innovative views of the ways of the development of art through the artists' efforts to express Beauty. The five painters, different in terms of talent and skill, express the writers' pluralism in creating the aesthetic ideal. The writers are on the side of those who constantly strive for self-improvement, who do not approve of imitating reality but invent in constant creative torments new ways and techniques in order to express one's own individual perception.

**Keywords:** the discourse of painting, the character of a painter, innovation, individuality, talent, aesthetics.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of choosing one's own aesthetic motto concerned all artists who wanted to find their way in the art and express their view on the laws of the art as well as their key of achieving the Ideal. E. T. A. Hoffmann, T. Gautier, H. de Balzac, E. Zola, G. Hauptmann, T. Mann, O. Wilde and many others have to be mentioned among those writers who expressed their opinions not only in literary manifestos but in an artistic form as well. They are grouped together also because they introduce to the literature the image of the painter who voices his doubts and searches in the context of contradictory artistic guidelines. The Goncourt brothers' novel "Manette Salomon" occupies a special place in this list, as it portrays not only one painter but the whole group of painters who represent the artistic atmosphere of the middle of the XIX century. Written back in 1867, the novel presents the aesthetic discussions about the development of art through the characters of the painters who see their purpose and understand Beauty differently. A portrayal of the painters, a description of their creative process giving birth to pictures, a vivid ambiance of exhibitions and salons, and the feedbacks of contemporaries bring forth the idea that the novel does not simply tell the artist's story but is aimed at depicting the spiritual and aesthetic atmosphere of the epoch, and provides the basis for identifying the points at which literature and painting meet. The writers' portrayal of the painters and the participation of the latter in literary discussions confirmed their mutual recognition of a need to renovate art and

search for new means of expression which caused different art forms to interpenetrate and synthesise. Valentyna Fesenko, while studying the dialogue between literature and painting, proves its asymmetry, "from the Middle Ages till Romanticism (the end of the XVIII century) literature had been providing inspiration for the painting, which performed a religious and political function and legitimized itself by bringing into focus sacred and mythological texts fundamental at the time. Since the XIX century the painting had been striving to release itself from the pressure of the literary word" [1, p. 4]. That is why the literature and painting of the XIX century are simultaneously looking for ways to renovate art, often inspired by the innovative searches of the related art forms.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the recent studies and publications pertaining to the works of French writers demonstrates that the Goncourt brothers are quite well-known in Ukrainian literary criticism; they are being quoted as the founders of naturalism and impressionism by all literary critics, although their legacy needs yet to be studied properly. The works by Z. Potapova, V. Shor, and B. Reizov have to be mentioned among those who studied the Goncourt brothers' body of works, though the main emphasis in these works is placed on the novel "Germinie Lacerteux" depicting the life of the maid in the society of that time. Physiological determination of the image, naturalistic accuracy of "a person's documents" attracted the attention of literary critics and writers to the innovative way of portraying reality and outlined the focus of studying the Goncourt brothers' works from the perspective of social problems. That is why the other novels, e.g. "Manette Salomon", "Madame Gervaisais", "Chérie", having absorbed the artistic spirit of the middle of the XIX century and depicted the representatives of aristocratic and bohemian circles, did not fit into the paradigm of biased literary criticism and escaped scholars' attention.

The subject matter of the novel "Manette Salomon" determines its genre and composition as well. E. Zola calls it "a free sketch on art and contemporary painters" [5, p. 540], the composition of which is based upon "a portrayal of facts picked at random. A true journal of many painters' lives... But this is a journal perfected by masters of painting who animate everything they touch" [5, p. 541]. The reason why the writers introduce a fragmentary composition and slacken the intrigue lies in the fact that they are trying to deviate from the traditional form, to depict the lives of painters in small parts just like on pictures, and to create a series of scenes which would represent the creative searches of different artists and their manner of bringing them into being. Therefore, the central problem – of the artist and art – is unfolding in the novel through the interaction between art, reality, and beauty, which the characters are trying to solve by resorting to their personal experience, talent, skills, and self-improvement. The characters of the novel – the painters who choose their aesthetic guidelines differently, commit themselves to art, or use it to their own advantage – demonstrate the search for a balance between talent and skill, inspiration and persistence, formulate topics for discussion, and provoke a plurality of thoughts. Thus we agree with the French scholar M. Crouzet who says that the novel "Manette Salomon" is, first and foremost, "a narrative of the aesthetic thought of the middle of the XIX century" that allowed the Goncourt brothers to create a pseudo-history of art; "mixing reality and fiction the novel represents fictional artists fitted into the framework of veracity, fictional characters who have real prototypes bringing into focus the main problems of the XIX century painting; they also create inventors, represent the future of painting perceived by painters as possible and original at the same time and as combining the present and the future" [3, p. 26-27]. As opposed to their predecessors and successors, the Goncourt brothers create a novel not about the life of the painter but about a painful creative process where aesthetic searches become the major intrigue. The structure of the novel is guided by the same aim, as the painter lives in order to create and embodies his views of art in his works. The pluralism of the painter's character consists in the fact that the Goncourt brothers want to depict different ways of structuring reality through the discourse of painting and reveal artists' creative intentions, which take shape in the characters of the five painters who serve an apprenticeship in the

atelier of their talented mentor Langibout. Each of them gains a foothold as a certain type of a painter under the influence of the aesthetic searches of the epoch as well as due to their own skills and talents. The novel "Manette Salomon" is not only a novel about artists and contemporary art but also a novel that theorizes about the ways of the development of art in the future. In his works R. Ricatte [4, p. 367] demonstrated how Coriolis's fictional paintings resonated with the classic painting of that time; the Goncourt brothers noticed flaws in them and tried to correct them by suggesting how it might have been using their motto "History is a novel of something that happened, a novel is a history of something that might happen" [2, p. 328] as a guide. For instance, the ekphrastic description of Coriolis's painting "Le conseil de Révision", which became a masterpiece and brought the painter recognition he had not expected, resembles E. Manet's painting "The Luncheon on the Grass", the 1863 exhibition of which caused a scandal and public rejection. Open to innovative searches and new techniques in painting, the Goncourt brothers emphasize in their work those artistic achievements that will lead to a revolution in art, such as a special use of light and a combination of contrasts (black attire and the whiteness of a naked body).

Coriolis is the Goncourt brothers' ideal who voices doubts and creative torments whilst trying to achieve perfection. Coriolis is not just a modern artist; he is constantly searching for modernity, struggling to catch and convey the movement of life in all the entirety of form, colour, sensuality, and express the truthfulness of a moment. His career reminds of the search for beauty characteristic of such artists as C. Corot, G. Courbet, E. Degas, P. Gavarni, as well as the Barbizon School representatives – T. Rousseau and J. Dupré who resorted to a direct portrayal of nature, light, air. Coriolis's stay in the East changed his perception of beauty; in search of a model he is trying to "express light by means of colours... the sun, warmth, evaporation... make the sun pose" [3, p. 88]. Coriolis – a talented painter, a noble, rich, independent, high-society dandy – resembles the Goncourt brothers and expresses their mutual desire to create something new which sets them apart from the common people who are unable to appreciate at once those tremendous efforts and sufferings necessary to create a new technique, an original style, a unique angle of a painting. Nevertheless, the Goncourt brothers also mock themselves in the role of the painter describing his expectation of success and disappointment over the failure and revealing that specific nervous sensitivity which is helpful in a creative process but brings exhaustion, sudden mood swings and attacks on literary critics, depression, and a desire to avenge. As though justifying their solitude, the Goncourt brothers blame the collapse of Coriolis's career on his passion for a sitter. The idea of the artist's celibacy, previously expressed in the novel "Charles Demailly", acquires a new meaning in Coriolis's character. The young man is gradually being captivated by Manetta Salomon; she restricts his freedom, imposes on him the daily grind of family life and philistine values that ruin his talent. Once an inventor and innovator, Coriolis downgrades to a decorator who works to earn money and keep a family, in the meantime losing his originality and talent.

Crescent, a gifted landscape artist, is another true painter in the Goncourt brothers' novel who wanted to reestablish direct contacts with nature, to feel its fullness and poeticity, mundane and divine at the same time. Crescent is a spontaneous creator, happy to live and to paint; he is content with his quiet, slow-moving village life; he manages the household with his wife, an illiterate but sincere, straightforward, and industrious peasant, who does not understand her husband's work but does not either object to it or force her demands upon him. Crescent's prototypes were J-F. Millet and T. Rousseau – the painters who contrasted salon academic art with landscapes from nature and tried to convey on canvas the movement of nature, light, air. The Goncourt brothers call Crescent a luminarist, a painter of light and illumination, pointing out that "something he was looking for, something he was longing to portray was an impression, a vivid and penetrating impression of places, moments, seasons, time... he seemed to express on canvas his fickle soul embracing a rigid frozen motive and humanizing trees, grass, atmosphere" [3, p. 367]. The artistic movement calling for a return to nature and a revival of the simplicity of life doubted the progress of civilization, reproached it for its artificiality, mechanicalness, prescriptive aesthetic, incapability to express the fullness of life. Instead, Crescent found subjects for his paintings by "examining the air and the ground in a naïve and reverent fashion" and, consequently, "any piece of nature, any theme filled him with inspiration." Therefore, his painting

"communicated the breathing of trees, of wet grass, of the soil of fields" [3, p. 361]. Coriolis admired "the artist's temperament, him being so deeply immersed in his artwork, indifferent to any rewards, happy to have the opportunity to apply paint in fine dabs on canvas every day without worrying about material possessions, reputation, fame, money, success, public sentiment and acclaim" [3, p. 371-372]. Crescent's character is the embodiment of the beautiful dream of the ideal conditions for creation and the harmony of nature and human beings.

Coriolis and Crescent's antagonists are Anatole and Garnotelle whom we can arbitrarily call painters. The former is talented but lazy, the latter lacks talent but is industrious and success-oriented; they complement each other to create the image of the contemporary bohemian who uses art to his own advantage.

Anatole is the embodiment of the artist's animal nature; this explains why he is always compared to animals (this animal, an ugly monkey, a piggy, a grass snake). Even the monkey that Coriolis had brought from the East chose Anatole as its best friend. He is endowed with a special talent: it is easy for him to imitate both human behaviour and animal habits as well as to reproduce painters' techniques. His ability to imitate helps him adapt to any society, easily gain someone else's trust, and adopt their qualities to such an extent that "he represented a bizarre psychological phenomenon of a person who does not possess any individuality, does not feel the need to have personal life, and likes to force oneself on others in a parasitic form" [3, p. 467]. His actions and behaviour are characterized by writers as "copycatting", as he spread himself too thin, lacked persistence and willingness; his temperament resembled the temperament of monkeys "that express quick and uncontrolled wishes; their irritated movements are aimed at grabbing an object in which they immediately lose interest as soon as they want to rub their backs; their trembling with a desire to have something, excessive greediness, the sounds and movements of their tongues, sudden mood swings changing from liveliness to apathy, from arrogance to madness... – all this linked the temperaments of different generations, combined older people's vulnerability with children's wishes, violent passion with indifference" [3, p. 228-229]. Such a description raises a question: whom did the writers have in mind – the monkey or her friend Anatole? Sudden mood swings can be characteristic of both the animal and the painter; as to the latter, they are expressed in his work, in his "promising talent that could be seen in learning" which, however, had not developed despite "his sense of composition, theoretical education, imagination, instinctive knowledge how to group things, the ability to portray a theme, an understanding of colour" [3, p. 121]. All Anatole's skills did not help him to achieve success in art as he did not work and was not persistent; he did not have "that desire and bravery to work with the help of which talent is crystallized in long torments of birth" [3, p. 127].

Anatole's character represents a type of the bohemian artist who combines life and art in one; who wants to live by means of art, replacing true artistic virtuosity with an utter sham. The best example to cite here is the episode when Anatole was working as a painter in a mortuary and had "to paint over corpses to make them look as if they were alive" [3, p. 184]. Like Garnotelle, Anatole wanted more from art than it could give; he perceived it as a lifestyle, a carefree form of entertainment, an anarchic existence in an atmosphere of "beauty, joy, immorality", an escape from reality. Imitation, simulation, and nonchalance ruined the painter's talent who finished his career by producing cheap forgeries and creating clichés instead of original works; he wasted his talent in pursuit of his desire to live well but not to create beauty. His love of animals and his animal nature allowed him to settle down quite comfortably in a botanical garden "among wooden sheds resembling the first primitive huts, within this world of tamed and trustful animals; as if on the holy land, the former bohemian dreamt of Paradise, and his soul raised to the highest bliss of the first man before virgin Nature" [3, p. 547].

Garnotelle's character embodies the typical representative of an academic environment – a successful, rich, influential pseudo-painter deprived of talent and originality. Garnotelle is the only one who makes a good living as a painter, but not because his paintings are original and outstanding, but because he had devised a formula for success. As opposed to lazy and talented Anatole, Garnotelle is hard-working, opportunistic, clever, and crafty. At art school he understood the role of patronage for achieving success, therefore, he tried to establish contact with influential people, knew how to make

them like him and how to convince the judges of his perseverance and dignity. A winner of the prestigious Rome Prize, Garnotelle managed to take advantage of his position to approach influential people. Developing the theme introduced for the first time in the novel "Charles Demailly", the Goncourt brothers raise the problem of a real talent and its recognition, the role of public opinion formed by official academic institutions and the press, fair criticism and tacky populism. Thus Garnotelle, a mediocre painter, achieves success due to his ability to manipulate public opinion and create such a cultural and artistic atmosphere into which he fits perfectly with his artificial, clichéd, impersonal painting depicting reality that is adjusted to the philistine tastes of the public.

Chassagnol, the fifth main character of the novel, is an art critic rather than a painter. He is of odd character; a passionate public speaker, he delivers his paradoxical pathetic speeches with passion but never tells anything about himself; he is the living embodiment of a contradictory clown and parasite. He appears in the novel every now and then to create confusion in critical moments of the characters' lives when they have to choose between aesthetic and ethical priorities; to discuss with them the development of art, to compare the art schools of the past and predict the future, to direct attention to such difficult problems as tradition, talent, the artist's individuality and freedom, social status, and public opinion. This grotesque character in terms of appearance and behaviour is, in fact, the mouthpiece of the Goncourt brothers' thoughts on art. For instance, Anatole's intention to go through a selection procedure and be short-listed for the Rome Prize makes him react with frenzied exclamations about the madness of the former. Chassagnol understands madness as a desire "to choose winners among all sorts of the most contradictory artists in terms of temperament, vocation, skills, and personal ways to feel, see, and express; to choose the most original and inimitable artist among those endowed with this uniqueness by nature and by God in order to save art from monotony and boredom" [3, p. 140]. What is Beauty? Could any institution file a patent on Beauty? Define it? The same goes for talent. The Goncourt brothers express their understanding of talent through Chassagnol's words as "a talented person's capacity for innovation; as the ability to put into what you are doing a part of yourself, your individual understanding and perception; as being brave enough to raise a problem which you have noticed with your short-sighted or long-sighted, brown or blue eyes of a XIX century Parisian; the problem which is to be addressed by eye specialists who might formulate the law of colouristics... In short, talent – is the ability to be yourself and different from others" [3, p. 141].

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The Goncourt brothers' aesthetical motto in the novel "Manetta Salomon" is represented through the characters of the five painters. Each of them is striving for originality and recognition; each of them is looking for and trying to express their understanding of Beauty. In their landscape drawings Coriolis and Crescent invent a new painting technique, catch an elusive moment with the help of a variety of colour shades and light, try to paint the air. Long before the impressionism was officially recognized, the French writers had characterized it in their works in the form of the descriptions of the painters' works having real prototypes among artists as well as among paintings. The Goncourt brothers did not simply present some examples of impressionism; they formulated the theory of a new artistic movement. As they write in their "Journal" (1865), "To see, to feel, and to express – this is art" [2, p. 489]. As Chassagnol says, "To be modern means to intuitively perceive reality that surrounds the present "you" where you feel to the full, where you feel that you belong..." [3, p. 420]. For all his life Coriolis has been looking for new ways "to see, feel, and express beauty" [3, p. 413]; at first, he discovers the luminarist technique in the East, then studies Crescent's technique of applying paint in dabs, and then roams the streets of Paris for hours waiting for the moment when the beauty of the city opens before him in all its fullness. Gifted Anatole wastes his talent because of lack of motivation; but his taste for imitation, especially of animal and bird sounds, his imaginary paintings of an urbanized city of the future, and his propensity to portray apocalyptic horrors resemble a futuristic revolution. Garnotelle's success is the success of a pragmatist who is guided by the philistine morality of a

consumer society and makes good use of the established contacts in order to achieve his goals; such an artist, however, is useless for art, he is a relic of academic art that specifies rules and despises individuality. The pluralism of the artists' aesthetic motto expresses the pluralism of art which always tries to depict Beauty but does not claim to depict the Truth.

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**Received:** 01.10.2016; **revised:** 05.12.2016.

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Яцків Н.Я. Плюралізм образу художника як пошук естетичного кредо у романі братів Гонкурів "Манетта Саломон". *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 3 (4) (2016), 84–89.

У статті досліджуються естетичні теорії французького мистецтва середини XIX століття крізь взаємодію літератури та живопису. У романі "Манетта Саломон" брати Гонкури формулюють свої новаторські погляди на шляхи розвитку мистецтва через пошуки художників у вираженні Краси. П'ять різних за співвідношенням таланту та майстерності художників виражають плюралізм письменників у формуванні естетичного ідеалу. Симпатія авторів на стороні тих, хто постійно прагне до удосконалення, хто не задовольняється копіюванням дійсності, а у постійних творчих муках винаходить нові способи та техніки для вираження власного індивідуального світосприйняття.

**Ключові слова:** живописний дискурс, образ художника, новаторство, індивідуальність, талант, естетика.