



مجلة كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة تصدرها كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية جامعة ذي قار

المجلد الثالث عشر العدد الرابع 2023

ISSN:2707-5672

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Montage in Modern Novels: Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* as a Sample

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Key words:- Montage , Modern Iraqi Novel , *The Book of Collateral Damage*

Abstract

This research argues that the modern literary techniques enormously used in the modern literary Arts, are apparently substituted among each other. Montage, the cinematic technique, has this multiple usage in variable fields, especially modern literature. This technique turns to be a literary device used in modern novel, in particular where the writer attempts to put different parts of unrelated settings of a certain text together to furnish a kind of a collage meant to shorten time and details of a certain purpose of the writer.

The research tackles the background, the use of this technique in literature and in modern novel, in particular. Then, the sample used, in here, is for Sinan Antoon entitled *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019). The text consumes the catastrophic effect done by the invasion on Iraq in 2003, not only on people, but rather on objects and how do these objects feel and react towards such a damage as if they were human beings.

The research concludes that montage in modern novel helps making a kind of a harmonized abbreviation of detailed plots in a short evocative passage or paragraph to convey a definite intent or idea. It is a technique that makes the readers picture a general concept of different yet unified short scenes or events. It, effectively, forms a panoramic view like scene.

المونتاج في الروايات الحديثة: رواية "فهرس" لسان أنطون كأنموذج

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الكلمات المفتاحية: المونتاج ، الرواية العراقية الحديثة ، "فهرس

الملخص

يناقش هذا البحث بأن الأساليب البلاغية الأدبية الحديثة والمستخدمة في الفنون الأدبية الحديثة يتم تبادل بوضوح فيما بين هذه الفنون بشكل واسع. المونتاج، هذا الأسلوب السينمائي، لديه هذا التوظيف المتعدد في مختلف المجالات الفنية وبالأخص في الأدب الحديث. فلقد تحول المونتاج الى احد الأساليب البلاغية المستخدمة في الرواية الحديثة بالتحديد، حيث يحاول الكاتب من خلاله وضع عدة مقاطع من روايته ذات سير الأحداث المختلف لرواية معينة سوية ليصوغ نوع من الكولاج يقصد من خلاله اختصار الوقت والتفاصيل لغرض معين لدى الكاتب.

يتناول البحث خلفية تاريخية عن المونتاج، واستخدامه في الأدب والرواية الحديثة بوجه الخصوص. ومن ثم ، فان الأنموذج المستعمل هنا في هذا البحث هو رواية "فهرس" للكاتب سنان انطون عام 2019. وتتناول هذه الرواية الأحداث الكارثية التي وقعت اثناء الاحتلال الأمريكي للعراق في 2003 ومدى تأثيرها على الأشياء وليس فقط على الأشخاص، وكيف كان لهذه الأشياء شعور هي الأخرى و ردة فعل اتجاه مثل هكذا دمار، وكأنها من البشر.

استنتج البحث افاد الى ان وجود الأسلوب البلاغي "المونتاج" في الرواية الحديثة يساعد في تكوين نوع من الاختزال والتناغم في تفاصيل سير الأحداث في فقرة غنية صوريا لنقل غاية او فكرة محددة. انه اسلوب بلاغي يساعد القارئ على تصور مفهوم عام لأحداث مختلفة ولكن موحدة. المونتاج، وبشكل فاعل، يكون منظرا بانوراميا وكأنه مشهد سينمائي.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The interchanging relation of modern arts becomes a vital influential feature of the resultant modern works. The modern novel implements a variety of techniques that mark its newness. Out of the rapidity and conciseness, modern cinematic devices, like montage, are used in literature, specially novel, to help convey more than one action of different settings within a few lines for certain purposes.

In the 20th century, the relationship between the visual culture and literature that witnessed significant changes going on in fine arts like sculpture, painting, and music have been the acquaintances for the literature although they come to be even more noteworthy aspects of influence at the beginning of 20th century and then. As some academics assert, fine arts still have a vast impact on a written word today when visual culture has become the fragment of our everyday life (Brēmere 2013, p.4) (in Dibovska, 2015).

Originally, montage is initiated from the French verb "monter", which is interpreted as "to assemble." It becomes the term in French that signifies the procedure of film editing with the origination of film technology (Aumont 1987, p.146) (In Joshua & others, 2016). On the whole, a montage is described as a sequence of unrelated images, moving or unmoving, that are edited together to create a constant succession. This device, firstly, permits filmmakers to allocate a great amount of information to an audience in a shorter duration of time by putting together diverse shots, decreasing time through editing, or interweaving numerous storylines of a narrative (Deguzman, 2020).

Basically, montage is used for certain effects to speed up things as it mainly works to communicate a lot of information to the audience over a short period of time. It also aims at character montage to develop characters for it communicates the transformation and growth of a character over a short amount of time. Besides, it builds a gestalt, "an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts". In addition to that, montage functions to combine multiple storylines. Films that run with numerous plots often need to intertwine the different narratives within the same scene. It can also be used to intensify the concentration of a foremost plot theme and affect every character in each storyline. As a final

point, juxtaposition is a touch that has been used in montage from the time when it was made renowned through Soviet montage theory (Deguzman, 2020).

As a result, the shaping of an image evolved through associational logic, whereby one sense image chased after another; but the development of the inner rhythm of the work became an increasingly complex system of unity in diversity. Eisenstein, the Russian theorist, believed that truth was always new and, moreover, could and should be attained through imagistic means. This truth is made to 'rise' out of the material, so that the choice of the material and the calculation of the mindset of the observer are equally part of the estimating of the 'affect' of the work (Dunne & Gauley, 2004).

Furthermore, to differentiate between montage and "Montage-collage," the latter is obviously a form of narrative, which, through de-montage of the 'real life,' is capable of articulating a morphing or mutuating of bodies and their symbolic potentials (Strajn, 2014).

Regarding expressing cinematic impact on literature, there are no literary works in the 20th and the 21st century that have not been inclined by the cinema. Generally, cinematic elements are allocated into structural and functional ones. The structural elements can be those of cinematic narrative; whether it is a camera-like vision or directors-like vision, a conventional montage of different short "cuts". Functional cinematic elements are the most noteworthy in a literary work; they function as cinematic allusions, images, symbols, motifs and themes, and even cinematic rhetoric or ekphrasis (Dibovska, 2015).

Predominantly, it is said that "Real montage is based on the document" (Benjamin, n.d., p.232). This proclamation comes as an intersection between literature and film, and it arose in the framework of a specific encounter between Walter Benjamin as a theoretician and Alfred Döblin as a writer. Benjamin's statement was articulated as part of his criticism of Döblin's novel, which was quite over determinedly titled "The Crisis of the Novel.". The word document (which originated in thirteenth-century France) is defined in several dictionaries more or less regularly relate writing to terms such as proof, evidence, and reality.

The term document as it is used by Benjamin should be considered as a semantic connection to the concept of reality within Neue Sachlichkeit (the New Objectivity) movement and to the implications of film as an art that has a strong

effect on reality. Therefore, film is a “document” that has a distinct power to signify or transform objective reality. Recalling the attitude to daily life and art expressed in the Dada movement and in the New Objectivity is essential, separating them from Expressionism and contradicting the notions of intellectual artwork. So, Doblin’s novel ought to be taken as a perfect expression of a mutual relationship between literature and film, which was certainly assured to happen. Benjamin’s highlighting on the montage aspect extends beyond the simple straight and non-reflexive concept of a novel as a narration reflecting cinema. The montage principle explodes the novel, its form and its style, and it releases new, very heroic possibilities, mostly with regard to form (Strajn, 2014, p.232).

2. Montage in Literature

Modern studies have revealed the observable interrelation between montage in the motion pictures and the literary modernism of some writers like Virginia Woolf (1912-1941), James Joyce (1882-1941), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), John Dos Passos (1896-1970), and others (Joshua & others, 2016). As a literary device, montage refers to "the conjoining of heterogeneous discourses in a given text". It is experienced in modern movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. Within the structure of the literary artwork, montage intensifies no facilitated clashes between genres and styles, often highlighting non-narrative fragments from numerous bases such as newspaper clippings, slogans (whether marketable, political, or religious), or popular songs. Disembodied discourses are favored by literary montage linked to the impact of modernity: the languages on which it appeals are those of bureaucratization, commercialization, and serialization, amid others. Contrasted with more character driven narrative strands, these informal conversational montage elements question the instrumentation of the modern subject. Montage literature inclines to separate language itself, breaking down customary syntax and semantics in the course. It promotes ambiguity, irony, and paradox over narrative unity or totality (Barndt, 2016).

With the start of the twentieth century, the term montage desist the domain of manufacturing production and was upheld to a method of cultural production, and even, to a means of theoretical reflection on the concluding. Montage elements are thus attributed not only to film, but also to literature, music, graphic design,

and fine art. In the 1930s, other avant-garde artists, mainly from the Soviet Union and Germany, obviously related their work in the fields of collage and photomontage to film montage. Thus film montage developed to a symbol of the modern age, and not only for artists but rather for art theoreticians and the broader public. Cinematic effects (narrative ‘cuts’, temporal discontinuities) appeared in the novels of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, in unconventional visual art and somewhere else (Pospiszyl, 2017).

Having montage theories in silent cinema got motivation from literature, modernist literary montage originates from the visual montages of Futurism and Dadaism. Out of these artistic movements, montage literature assumes formal liberties like syntactic contractions and breaks, or visualizations over a focus on typography and the exhibition of words as images and sound. Montage literature is definitively multilingual, coordinating literary and vernacular voices and promoting clashes among sociolects, dialects, citations from popular culture, and the playful adoption of non-native languages. (Barndt, 2016).

2.1 Montage in Modern Novel

Montage is considered an essential device in the modernist city novel’s endeavor to apprehend the multi-layered life-worlds of the 20th-century metropolis in Europe and the USA. Thus, to break up their storylines with unrelated documents of public life, these authors derive from modern news media. While fiction and documentation seem to interfere, these authors also incline to picture the precise temporality of the document into illusory and mythologizing narratives. The city novels’ montages thus undermine the severe difference between the two realms, fiction and document, and exposed an epistemological space for the assessment of language and ideology (Barndt, 2016).

The so-called cinematic novel is a rising modern fiction in which the montage technique was made possible by the cinema. Inna Drach, in her article, proposes to disengage this “hybrid” notion by signifying, with reference to the writings of Sergej Ejzenstejn and other Russian theoreticians, that while montage in the cinema is a means of relating fragments, montage in literature serves to disconnect fragments, interpreting their relations illogical. Remarkably, Ejzenstejn found it

difficult to reproduce novelistic use of montage by the American novelist Dos Passos (1896-1970) on the screen, retelling us that the allocation of techniques from one medium to another is not supplemented by the same influences. The montage novel is dissimilar not only to cinematic literature but also to modernist novels according to the montage techniques it employs (John Pier, 2014).

By contrast, literary montage can be a means of forming both narrativity and non-narrativity. The first case is signified by the montage novel, where literary montage can construct narrative effects that differentiate it from other modernist novels using the montage technique. This kind of montage displays the author's hidden will to arrange the material and to express his/her own point of view through structure (through regularities in the arrangement of episodes, for example, as in John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* or in Boris Pil'nyak's *The Naked Year*). In the second case, the spirit of the beginning of the twentieth century is expressed, with its highlighting on the illogicality of life and lost faith in customary values, which distinguishes modernist literature, including the montage novel, from literature of the pre-World War I era. Thus, the montage novel puzzles the reader with its fragmentary construction, but at the same time the author conveys his/her understanding of the logic of events and characters, presenting a certain system of values which shows that the montage novel is connected with the customs of the classic nineteenth-century novel (Tamarchenko, 1991).

Realistically, cinema functions to motivate the writer, but when writers use the montage technique in literature, it would function differently. Montage, as a main narrative principle in cinema, becomes one of the ways to make the novel or fiction fragmentary and even disjointed, strongly shifting the narrative material of literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, montage in literature can be a narrative means that resembles cinematic montage. This is the main reason for differentiating, in particular, between cinematic novels and montage novels. The montage novel uses both specifically literary montage and cinematic-like montage, while the cinematic novel deals only with the second type (John Pier, 2014).

Generally, scholars find it difficult to describe the cinematic novel as a genre. This is why one of the investigators of the problem, Steven Kellman (1987), says that "cinematic novel" has become such a broad notion that it has practically lost its

meaning. The cinematic novel is a novel whose parts and chapters are organized in a “non-linear” way. Though, Kellman points out that literary forms cannot be identified with cinematic ones in terms of both technique and style (Ibid.).

Relatively, polyphonic narration meant the various viewpoints presented in the novel are not subordinated to a single viewpoint, but rather “presented as essentially equal ideological voices” (Uspensky, 1983, p. 10).

3. Montage in Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*

Antoon’s novel *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019) is the story of a book that cannot be written. The protagonist is an Iraqi expatriate who returns to Baghdad as a translator. Nameer is hired by a pair of Americans filming a documentary. It is his first time back since his family emigrated to the United States when he was a child. While in Iraq, he decides to visit the bookshops on al-Mutanabbi Street. There, he encounters a bookseller named Wadood who is working on an unusual project: a kind of catalog of the objects destroyed in the bombings during the invasion in 2003. In Wadood’s “Fihris” or “Index”, things, rather than Iraqi people, speak and narrate their own lives and deaths. Nameer, fascinated, tries to persuade Wadood to let him translate the writings into English. And Wadood, considering the offer, leaves a copy of his manuscript at Nameer’s hotel in an envelope. Nameer takes it back to America with him. Finally, the bookseller dies lonely in an aggressive bombing at the same street (Post, 2019).

Regularly, such a kind of passages take the form of a charade, where the reader discovers the nature of the object only towards the end of the passage. As even objects are attributed emotions, the reader gets a strong sense of the true implication of loss. *The Book of Collateral Damage* is a story about the fragmentation of a homeland and the hopelessness of comprehending it. Antoon’s fourth novel depicts the chaos that reigns in Iraq and the fragmented and ambiguous socio-political and cultural reality that prevails in this country, and in so many others all through the world. It also grants the crisis of Iraqi individuals, whether they are living abroad as outcasts or persisting in their homeland in the face of danger and death all around them on a daily base (Elimelekh, 2019).

Throughout the novel, the exchanging ideas and comments continue as they centre on the most important possessions for Nameer, Iraq and the Index manuscript

(Fihris). The writer pictures this work of Wadood as: “Those are private papers. A sort of project, ... A documentation project.” Then Ali, one of the characters, seeks clarification, asking, “Research?” Nameer says, “No, a different kind of text. Not traditional.” Ali goes on trying to clarify what Nameer means, “Meaning what?” Nameer generally describes it as:

Meaning everything. History, but circular history. ... This is the project of a lifetime, an archive of the losses from war and destruction. But not soldiers or equipment. The losses that are never mentioned or seen. Not just people. Animals and plants and inanimate things and anything that can be destroyed. Minute by minute. This is the file for the first minute. (Antoon, 2019, pp. 86–87)

The setting or technique of dream vision is used in this novel, as well. It helps in picturing the innate needs and wonders of the intended persona. Nameer relates his dream in the passage below:

I saw myself living in a faraway country, where everything was clean and tidy. A quiet life without wars, sects, or religions. Immigrants and refugee had all the rights and freedoms humans could dream of. Even animals were respected and had rights. Science and technology were so developed that human beings could travel to the future or to the past, to visit or to stay, provided of course that they were adults and in good health and didn't have a criminal record. Even as I dreamed I knew I was dreaming, because I had lied on the application form. I wrote that I had never been in prison and that I didn't have any health problems. I signed the form without hesitation. I also knew I was dreaming because I was speaking their language fluently... They would let me travel only in one direction, into either the future or the past... I think that people are divided into two types: those who escape from the past and those who escape to the past (Antoon, 2019, pp. 232–233).

The technique of metanarrative, a story about a story encircling and explaining other 'little stories' within totalizing a schema (Metanarrative, 2022), is also used by Antoon to shed light on the duality between Nameer and Wadood. The exchanging selves and viewpoints of life in post-2003 are quite analogous and

inseparable. They have the same memory, the same voice, and the same body. It is a dreamlike thought, and he cannot define it or define his identity in it. He puts it as follows:

I don't know how to classify it—a dream or a nightmare? I thought that we were one person. A single "I" united us. I saw him when I looked in the mirror and he saw me. We had the same memory, the same voice, and the same body. Our name was neither Wadood nor Nameer. I don't know the name. Then, I left that "I," or was taken out of it. I broke away from it. I left Baghdad and traveled far away. When I came back to Baghdad I didn't recognize Wadood because he too had become detached from "I" and had become another person."

The juxtaposition of different conditions of the character works on the montage level by having mutual cases of the same person with different feelings and impressions at the same time. This shortening of a whole story and being given about another story depicts montage technique efficaciously.

Conclusion

This research about montage as a modern literary technique in modern novels concludes that the literary devices exchanged among different fields of Arts can still have the same role or a shifting one. Nevertheless, montage in modern novel helps moderate the details of many plots in a short suggestive passage or paragraph made, intentionally, by the writer to express an inclusive idea. It is a technique that creates a unified picture to maintain a general perception of unified short scenes or events or plots. It, successfully, helps control the widen scope of ideas that could be given by modern writers who try their best to reflect the multi-layered modern life.

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