

## NEW SINCERITY IN POST-POSTMODERN ART

This article explores an issue of New Sincerity in post-postmodern context, in post-postmodern culture uppermost and in literature in the first instance. The research considers post-postmodern New Sincerity in comparison with postmodern apathy, redundant intellectualization and quotation, etc. In such a case New Sincerity is closely related to post-postmodern genuineness, authenticity, honesty, veracity, earnest and seriousness. Postmodern ironical eclecticism as a kind of deconstruction develops in reconstructive post-postmodern non- and metafiction sincerity. Therefore, New Sincerity as a sensitivity appears both as a general cultural atmosphere and a certain kind of philosophy with its peculiar aesthetics, ethics, ontology, etc. For example, the category of beauty realizes in post-postmodern aesthetics in a connection with a more sincere perception and feeling of art and nature. The article investigates the differences between New Sincerity and postirony and New Sincerity turns out to be not so much ironic as humorous. The exploration of New Sincerity takes place in its main part on the material of post-postmodern literature, which in the best way combines conceptualizing and perceptualizing. However, in its most actual manifestations, New Sincerity in connection with postirony appears at the intersection of theory, literature, movie, rock, network and mem-art, etc. In all cases, an appeal to vernacular culture allows for conveying a private experience. In such a context post-postmodern art become more sincere than postmodern one. Rude jokes or mundane activity, traumatic or banal contribute to the achievement of a greater degree of intimacy and love than overly straightforward tolerance. The reason for this is postironical supposition, that irony ironizes itself and became self-referential and hence therapeutical and joyful. Thus, New Sincerity appeals to the interconnection of seriousness and postironic humor, depth and superficialities. In conclusion, the article stresses the significance of New Sincerity for post-postmodern aesthetics and ethics. With its help a possibility of sappy personal utterance and access to the Real, lost in the postmodern condition, appears again, renewed and enriched.

**Keywords:** *New Sincerity, irony, postirony, postmodern, post-postmodern.*

### Introduction

New Sincerity as a general atmosphere, spreading in all current arts, is caused by the necessity to solve the problematicity of personal utterance. In this regard, the *goal* of this article is to study New Sincerity from the conceptual standpoints to research its traits and features. As a first approximation it seems that if postmodern correlates with a variety of late-ancient philosophical and cultural drifts such as stoicism, cynicism, skepticism, etc. with a high degree of estrangement, post-postmodern is largely a search for the lost sincerity and authenticity.

Especially indicative in this case is the very use of the adjective New. If in an apathetic postmodern context, novelty is questionable, then post-postmodern trends often offer options for *novelty*. For instance, metamodernism can also be referred to as New Romanticism, whose metaphor is no longer a rhizome, but a flower.

It is worth noting that the use of the adjective New is in itself a post-postmodern move. Nevertheless, in a post-postmodern cultural context, designations of trends are often free from adjectives, which in itself can be considered an indicator of sincerity research *relevance*. For example, in the comedy movie by Adam Browne and Brendan Choynet *The Cult of Sincerity* (2008), the character attaches great importance to the form of personal utterance and carefully searches for a slogan for his T-shirt. In his opinion, it is precisely so straightforward and indicative for the expressed convictions that can change the world for the better. Thus, the *tasks*

of this article are studying the reasons for the spread of the concept of New Sincerity as a post-postmodern demeanor of expression, exploring its manifestations in current arts, establishing the correlation between New Sincerity and postirony, humor, etc.

The study of New Sincerity of Jim Collins' is going on contrast with the eclectic irony of postmodern and in regard to genre purity, sharp relief and harmony in a movie: «The complicated, conflicted agenda of the New Sincerity genre becomes apparent in the "harmony scene"» [Collins, 1993, p. 258]. Jim Collins pays attention to «the foregrounding not only of the intertextual but of the "Urtextual," in which an original genre text takes on a quasi-sacred function as the guarantee of authenticity» [Ibid., p. 259]. However, the best way to New Sincerity consideration is to combine conceptualizing and perceptualizing as in a non- and meta-fictional literature. For instance, Adam Kelly is carrying out it through appellation to oeuvres of David Foster Wallace. «Wallace's artistic method for dealing with this infinite cycle – this mirror or bind or aporia – involves a complex, contemporary logic; it is at this point, therefore, that I want to re-describe that method as the operation and promotion of a "New Sincerity"» [Kelly, 2010, p. 136]. David Foster Wallace understands irony through the metaphor of pockface and Adam Kelly explains, that sincerity in a traditional meaning is inutile due to the split between self and its performance, intention rather than motivation. He approaches to New Sincerity from deconstructive positions and considers it as an artistic gift, which is considered as a pledge of truth and presence. Adam Kelly also pays attention to sincerity as a kind of secret, breaking with representation because sincerity slips away from identification. The best tactic, in this case, is metafiction as a sincere conversation with a recipient both conditional and unconditional therefore post-postmodern in comparison with both existentialism and deconstruction, assuming rather sincerity than authenticity. Such post-postmodern metafiction Lee Konstantinou entitles credulous metafiction.

These considerations largely explain the influence of straight naivety and direct authenticity in post-postmodern art. It is recognized that in this way not only deconstruction but also reconstruction is possible. Reconstructivism as an important movement in the current context is rethinking deconstruction to a large extent. If in the works of Paulo Freire reconstructivism is rather in opposition, in the works of Christopher Sunani originality and vitality of deconstruction are combined with comforts, pleasures and rewards of classicism. Besides that, it may be considered as a post-postmodern attempt to re-animate a sense of the Real.

### **New Sincerity in post-postmodern non- and metafiction**

Jean Baudrillard, in a postmodern vein, insists that new sincerity is more often a formal one and masks the agony of reality. A writer and philosopher Frédéric Tristan, on the other hand, describes a sincere impulse and also, in the Lacanian vein, does not address reality, but rather the Real, often traumatic. The juxtaposition of Jean Baudrillard's postmodern approach and Frédéric Tristan's post-postmodern approach can be productively continued. Unlike seduction as a charm, in the collection of philosophical essays, *The Seductions*, Frédéric Tristan emphasizes its naturalistic character. Overcoming temptations means finding self-identity for him. In *The Lost Ones* his «character, as if embarrassed and lost on beginning, comes to full self-identification at the end» [Pokalchuk, 1995, p. 160]. Post-postmodern implies, that this is the only possibility of identity as self-happening. Yuri Pokalchuk attracts attention, that such kind of self-identification is a feature of neoclassicism as one of the post-postmodern trends.

In philosophical-anthropological regard, the most important feature of this kind of neoclassicism is an affirmation, that a human being is created for happiness as a meaning of its life. However, for this, it needs to passage from postmodern conditions to post-postmodern eventuality. «Charged like the donkey with relics, I had mutilated myself. In this, I was in no way different from my century, which I now invite to a return to insignificance. We are saturated with significations, and we have lost the senses» [Tristan, 2000]. In *The Lost Ones*, this affirmation is proclaimed by the writer, who for the first time holds on to the real circumstances of his

existence instead of imaginative histories despite they were full of a living sense. Thus, he kept both glory and anonymity as a private living in a double mask: took a pseudonym and assigned his own role to prodigious comedian, seductor and charmer, who has no identity. The character kept this double mask to escape media masks. Because of this, he lost self-identification as self-happening. He holds, that not only a comedian but also an author has no identity, individuality. In a creative act, individuality disseminates in dividuality. However, it looks not like an embodiment of a postmodern conception of the author's death, but like a realization of creative sincere and true autism in digimodernist Alain Kirby's words.

In his other novels, especially *The impostures of the real*, Frédéric Tristan also is developing the issue of sincerity as the expression of the real in opposition to fiction, which may be dangerous. At the same time, he admires self-expression, self-identification, or self-happening as a process of conversion, metanoia.

One more philosophizing author, famous for his postironic conception is David Foster Wallace, whose many characters try to be as sincere and honest as possible. «That fuels the uncertainty about their own reality, which makes it very hard for them to find a real difference between existing and not existing» [Bolaño, 2017]. Such an approach marks a post-postmodern return to a renewed position of essentialism with its truthiness, which turns out to be more actual than postmodern constructivism.

However, Charles Reginald Nixon cautions against the postmodern understanding of the radical realism notion in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* as a voiceless and featureless rather than a radical openness and hollowness. He even stresses, that «the post-postmodernist era should be understood through two central and overlapping aspects: intensification and hollowness» [Nixon, 2013, p. xx]. The hollowness at that rate may be correlated with the (w)hole complex from the post-postmodern speculative realism context. In both cases, it rather mean lack, which is, paradoxically, the most important part of a whole, according to Jacques Lacan. Thus, the most significant is that David Foster Wallace's characters are hollow-centered, i. e. post-racial, post-marginal, post-gendered, etc. «The difference in post-postmodernism is that as such figures are already imbued with postmodernism, postmodernism's completion cannot act upon them, as it can for the non-marginal» [Ibid., p. 197].

According to David Foster Wallace, in the first instance, sincerity appears in a moment of «orgasm – that most unguarded and purely neural of expressions, the one so vulnerable that for centuries you basically had to marry a person to get to see it» [Wallace, 2005, p. 16]. This moment is precisely hole center of New Sincerity and that's why Christoforos Diakoulakis in his article, exploring David Foster Wallace's *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, insists «of course, there is no such thing as “real” love; surely, every “I love you” is essentially pornographic» [Diakoulakis, 2010, p. 147]. Such an approach marks the transition from quote love in a postmodern sense, according to Roland Barthes or Umberto Eco, to post-postmodern trying to quote unquote love. During this attempt, a dangerous hollowness and void are discovered in association with the utmost sincerity. At the same time in this case the possibility of sincerity and authenticity itself is questionable due to dangerous fundamental loneliness.

Mark Z. Danielewski in his novel *House of Leaves* also warns that pure truth is lasting and dangerous at the same time because it converts, turns things. To denote a pure truth, he uses such euphemisms as Truth & Truth, TNT (nitrating of toluene), Technological Neural Transmitters and Tits And Tail. The last is paronomasia, pun, the wordplay of a nature, «an attempt to conceal the Hand that never set a word upon this page, or any page, nor ever was for that matter, no Hand at all, though I still know the message, I think, in all those blinks of light upon the ice, inferring something from what is not there or ever was to begin with, otherwise who's left to catch the signs? crack the codes?» [Danielewski, 2000, p. 299]. This description can be considered as a striking case of the existence of pure truth in itself after the death of the author in post-postmodern eventuality. Here truth passes the test of time and during it disseminates in many conflicting voices as variants of the echo of the truth, and then reunites, gains integrity, get resolution in the articulation of its positions.

That's why in the novel one of the main character name is Johnny Truant, a true strike, who waists time and this waste cannot be shared due to its absence. Instead, he explores a space. He discovers, that if a glossiness may lie and isn't ethical because of blinding shine, graining film, useless details, etc. create a reality effect in Roland Barthes' words. In this case, all is in vast dark shimmer as a flicker of the Real, according to Jacques Lacan. It also determines the general approach to art, highlighting only what can be vouched for sincerity. «I do not know anything about Art with a capital A. What I do know about is my art. Because it concerns me. I do not speak for others. So I do not speak for things which profess to speak for others. My art, however, speaks for me. It lights my way» [Ibid., p. 542].

This approach may seem too limited, but it creates the architectonics of space needed to echo as a metaphor for love. If the apathy and fatigue of postmodern determine the cutting off of many new paths, then post-postmodern sincerity implies the acceptance of authentic deviations, which turned out to be successful tracks. These tracks may be dangerous but may give hope at the same time. In addition, in a post-postmodern vein, thus comes the understanding that only from the margin it is possible not only to write but also to live.

According to Nicoline Timmer, sincerity as responsiveness in post-postmodern art means sensitivity as a kind of relational ontology and epistemology, in which irony loses its status as a norm. *House of Leaves* is especially indicative in this sense. «The structure of Mark Danielewski's debut novel alone already defies such easy anchoring of experiences narrated, as we will see. The novel offers a proliferation of interpretative frames and subjective viewpoints, but they are continuously interwoven, resulting into ontological and epistemological 'knots'» [Timmer, 2010, p. 243].

The fact that the possibility of New Sincerity is revealed in the intertwining of art and life correlates with the close attention of its conceptualizers also to the problem of beauty and in the current eventuality. An actual example of this is a conception of Elaine Scarry, from whose standpoint «beauty is sometimes disparaged on the ground that it causes a contagion of imitation, as when a legion of people begin to style themselves after a particular movie starlet, but this is just an imperfect version of a deeply beneficent momentum toward replication. Again beauty is sometimes disparaged because it gives rise to material cupidity and possessiveness; but here, too, we may come to feel we are simply encountering an imperfect instance of an otherwise positive outcome» [Scarry, 1999, p. 6–7]. In such a case beauty, attracting the attention of the percipient outward, provides not only sincerity and aliveness but also justice. Thus, the postmodern craving for a game, play and imitation, associated with the problematic of personal utterance, is transformed into post-postmodern sincerity, sometimes reaching the point of primitive or naive.

### **New Sincerity and postirony**

Despite the fact that New Sincerity and postirony are often identified, they only partially intersect and researchers of postirony have different views on it. Postirony may appear as a synonym of postmodern, the line between irony and seriousness, lack or, on the contrary, excess of irony, and so forth. In current arts, including network arts, postirony is usually understood as a smarter form of irony, «“authentic” person <...> doing something decidedly “inauthentic”» [Collins, 2010]. Lee Konstantinou contraposes New Sincerity and postirony. This is especially revealing in a case of such a face of postirony as motivated postmodernism. In its context an ethos with transcending irony's limitations is replaced by New Sincerity in postmodern ironic form or content separately, i. e. by postirony. This is a part of the post-postmodern structure of feeling as in, for instance, credulous metafiction. «After your precarious alliance dissolves, whether in success or failure, you must exhibit the flexibility, openness to contingency and self-ironizing capacities to move on to the next endeavour. Such is the condition of postirony» [Konstantinou, 2017, p. 102].

Lukas Hoffman also notes, that activity is a characteristic of postirony in comparison with the passivity of entertainment, which provides a truthful and sincere view on the real world, even in confrontation with it in creative non-fiction. «I hope to have convincingly argued that

postironic literature, especially in its nonfiction form, addresses its reader in a particular way intended to establish some form of sincere communication and by using an engaging narrator, at best, transports an intradiegetic *feeling* into the reader's extratextual world. That is, moving beyond existing realms in literature and establishing nothing less than a new real world movement» [Hoffmann, 2016, p. 35]. For Lukas Hoffman New Sincerity is in close connection with various aspects of post-postmodern such as truthfulness, autocriticism, narrativity, etc. He supports the view, that post-postmodern includes postmodern, but postmodern artifices in this case lead to sincere ends.

According to Lukas Hoffman, Jonathan Lethem, Jeffrey Eugenides, Nick Flynn, etc., belonging to actual trend, the postirony is even more sincere and even vernacular, using a concept of Florence Dore. A collection of Jonathan Lethem's essays has the title *The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism*. He asserts, that it need plagiarize to be original. Thus, he appears more honest postmodernist, i. e. post-postmodernist than Harold Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. Particularly influential are especially marginalized people of various kinds – blacks and migrants in general, persons with mental diseases, etc., who turn out too sincere and serious even with their anxiety to lose an irony. Let's say in a *Dissident Garden* black affirms, that blacks don't cheat and seat in their place during an event even if there are free and more comfortable places. The songs of the black singer from *The Fortress of Solitude* also don't give a feeling of flight, a «summer within a summer», but return to their neighborhood, where «bothered blue» is found.

In addition, autistic «funkywhiteboy geekdom» as becoming of the «bothered blue» means post-postmodern step to sincere post-racial construing as a private experience. During this experience it seems to him he loses his skin, secrets, face as signs of identity. Florence Dore considers that this is an experience of micropsia and at the same time this including rock's elements to the novel re-animate it in posthuman, upgrade form, less anthropocentric and more private and sincere although and postironic: «novel after novel takes some feature of rock and roll as basic to its project» [Dore]. So far as the rock's elements create a combination of both mundane and hyperbolic, micropsia is supplemented by macropsia, when the private world becomes compatible with a multiplicity of worlds.

Even its are worlds of vernacular culture with its slang and obscene expressions, hip and strange behavior. The character of Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn* ponders over his Tourette's syndrome, realizes «thinking thinking» as a conspiracy theorist and, at the same time, freak of nature, «unique as a snowflake». He has a hard time controlling his experience as a character of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Marriage Plot* and philosophy doesn't help to live out it. Theorizing seems insincere even if it presupposes recognition of lying, but at the same time is an attempt to find out something true and meaningful. Researching Nick Flynn's works Lukas Hoffman stresses «In Flynn's books the occupation with the act of writing the memoir almost overshadows the actual memoir. Even though Flynn is the least experimental writer in terms of style, my reading will show how Flynn's narrator puts the reader at the center of the narrative, always aiming at a sincere communication» [Hoffmann, 2016, p. 34]. Nick Flynn as a character in his own novel breaks the mirror with his face affirming reality through traumatic extremes. In this case, the postironic New Sincerity returns to cinema through the film *Being Flynn* by Paul Weitz based on a book.

However, New Sincerity in its actual appearances implies a comprehension of a mundanity to a greater extent. Current postirony is characteristic primarily of network culture and art, meme-art in particular. This provides for a special degree of sincerity. However, postirony also implies a certain estrangement. As Jacques Lacan stressed, the ironic Subject rejects or, precisely speaking, ironizes the Other and replaces the Real by the Symbolic. From this standpoint, Alasdair Duncan attracts attention to the next understanding of postirony, «in which the irony is folded back on itself and what is said in a seemingly ironic manner is simply what is believed, and its absurdity enjoyed too – an irony in which its irony is ironized – it is often not clear to the recipient of this irony whether it is meant or not» [Duncan, 2018]. Thus, postirony may be marked as veracious and sincere ironical humor.

To many researchers, this kind of postirony seems meaningless and even imbecile. However, draws attention to the fact that (im)becile subject is a subject both with and without baculum (*Latin* stick, walking stick, staff) of language. This feature provides her a possibility to joke as to be postironic because, as Slavoj Žižek insists, it needs to be more one to become less one, nothingness. In this way, a principal redundancy of postmodern became a field to make a minimal personal sincere utterance. In this regard, Slavoj Žižek gives as an example the most tolerant and politiccorrect joke *What happens when a triangle meets a circle?...: «what if it is the purely formal aspect of a joke which makes it funny much more than its content <...>? The problem, of course, is whether this form can work alone, or whether it needs “a little piece of reality” added to it, in the sense of some contingent positive content related to “dirty” topics (sex, violence, etc.)» [Žižek, 2012, p. 599]. However, along with this, he considers also that jokes must hurt, humiliates, make trauma to achieve closeness to a significant one. Tolerance and sincere love are opposed from his point of view.*

Alenka Zupančič softens Slavoj Žižek approach, developing Jacques Lacan's statement that the one thing, which allows jouissance to condescend to desire is love-sublimation. According to her, love is comic, ridiculous feeling. Such kind of sublimation provides a conversion of the sublime to the mundane one and thereby opens access to the Real. If as usual sublimation ascends a partner to inhuman, makes a kind of trauma and to a tragedy, sublimation of love is a comic one. In different words, it is a phantasm traversing, love hypnos getting out. «The miracle of love is a *funny* miracle. Real love, if we can risk this expression, is not the love that is called sublime, the love in which we let ourselves be completely dazzled or 'blinded' by the object so that we no longer see (or can't bear to see) its ridiculous, banal aspect» [Zupancic, 2003, p. 71]. Realizing the significant other can be joked about, but still beloved and even more beloved. This partly explains the popularity of the genre of romantic comedy in current art. Humanizing of significant other again through a comedy looks quite post-postmodern and postironic. With many similarities with Slavoj Žižek's approach, the approach of Alenka Zupančič is close also to Gilles Deleuze one, when she appeals to minimal difference, a difference that is a mere nothing, a difference of significant other from herself. Such a difference may be correlated with Gilles Deleuze's difference as a process of differentiating. Thus, love is comedy as an event of seriousness and irony is too critical in this case.

According to Gilles Deleuze irony and humor locates at the upper and lower of the law, primarily, moral law. For instance, the comedian in *The Lost Ones* by Frédéric Tristan «was a prince of thought better qualified than me to ascend to the heights of Milton or to descend into the Shakespearean chasms» [Tristan, 2000]. It corresponds to Gilles Deleuze's view: «in modern thought irony and humor take on a new form: they are now directed at a subversion of the law» [Deleuze, 1991, p. 86]. This does not allow to conclude that humor is the embodiment of both New Sincerity and postirony. «It might seem that a disavowal is, generally speaking, much more superficial than a negation or even partial destruction. But this is not so, for it represents an entirely different operation. Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it» [Ibid., p. 31]. If for Gilles Deleuze multifolded surface, superficialities is the most actual it may be asserted that postirony corresponds to such a surface. In comparison with postmodern, post-postmodern multifolded surface isn't an oscillation between the sublime and the depth, irony and humor, but an oscillation between depth and superficialities, seriousness and humor, even if it is ironic humor, i. e. postirony. In this relation, postirony corresponds to New Sincerity.

### Conclusion

The new sincerity can be considered one of the most revealing appearances of post-postmodern aesthetics and ethics in their intertwining. According to Robert L. McLaughlin, «self-referential irony, which for the postmodernists was revolutionary, has become reactionary as it

makes impossible a sincere assertion about the world» [McLaughlin, 2012, p. 214]. Non- and metafiction and even language itself create not so an estranged position, but rather the possibility for viable and sappy personal utterance although and with semantical parenthesis and other elements of articulative playing. This is what distinguishes New Sincerity as opposed to overly straightforward sincerity in the traditional sense. The new sincerity partly intersects with postirony as a playful irony, but not losing its sharpness. The possible trauma of this kind of irony is caused not by an exception, but perhaps even by an overly close acceptance of the other as post-postmodern eventuality provides. New Sincerity as an art and cultural trend in this case becomes an attempt to get access to the Real.

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Article arrived: 12.04.2022

Accepted: 20.07.2022

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**АНОТАЦІЯ**

В статті досліджується питання Нової Щирості в пост-постмодерному контексті, насамперед в пост-постмодерній культурі, в першу чергу літературі. В дослідженні розглядається пост-постмодерна Нова Щирість у порівнянні з постмодерною апатією, надлишковою інтелектуалізацією та цитацією тощо. В такому випадку Нова Щирість тісно пов'язана з пост-постмодерними оригінальністю, автентичністю, чесністю, правдивістю, відвертістю та серйозністю. Постмодерний іронічний еkleктизм як різновид деконструкції розвивається в реконструктивну пост-постмодерну не- та метафікційну щирість. Отже, Нова Щирість як чутливість постає як загальною культурною атмосферою, так і певним різновидом філософії з її особливими естетикою, етикою, онтологією, тощо. Приміром, категорія краси реалізується в пост-постмодерній естетиці у зв'язку з більш щирими чутливістю та чуйністю до мистецтва та природи. В статті вивчаються відмінності між Новою Щирістю та постіронією й Нова Щирість опиняється не стільки іронічною, скільки юморною. Дослідження Новою Щирості відбувається головним чином на матеріалі пост-постмодерної літератури, яка найкращим чином сполучує концептуалізацію та перцептуалізацію. Однак, в її найбільш актуальних проявах, Нова Щирість постає на перетині теорії, літератури, кіно, року, мережевого та мем-арту тощо. В усіх випадках тяжіння до просторічної культури дає змогу передати приватний досвід. В такому контексті пост-постмодерне мистецтво стає більш щирим ніж постмодерне. Грубі жарти та буденна діяльність, травматичні або банальні вносять вклад у досягнення більшого ступеню інтимності та любові ніж надто прямолінійна толерантність. Чинником цього є постіронічне припущення, що іронія іронізує над самою собою й стає самореференційною та в наслідок терапевтичною й радісною. Таким чином, Нова Щирість тяжіє до взаємозв'язку серйозності та постіронічних гумору, глибини та поверхні. У висновках статті підкреслюється значення Нової Щирості для постмодерної естетики та етики. З її допомогою можливість насиченого персонального висловлювання та доступу до Реального, втрачена в постмодерних умовах, з'являється знову, оновлена та збагачена.

**Ключові слова:** *Нова Щирість, іронія, постіронія, постмодерн, пост-постмодерн.*

Стаття надійшла до редакції: 12.04.2022

Схвалено до друку: 20.07.2022