

The Post-postmodern Reconstruction of Human Values in Karen Russell's "Vampire in the Lemon Grove," A. J. Finn's *Woman in the Window*, and Dave Eggers's *The Circle*

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Abstract

In the last decade, many theorists and scholars, such as David Foster, Linda Hutcheon, and Ihab Hassan, announced the death of postmodernism and declared the arrival of post-postmodernism. Post-postmodernism represents a reaction against postmodernism. It does not reject postmodernism but is considered a move beyond it to explore the possibility of representation again. Post-postmodernism focuses on reconstructing humanist values and exploring emotion instead of postmodern irony and self-reflexivity. Therefore, literature plays an essential role in reconstructing these values. Post-postmodern novelists mainly engage in social issues ranging from politics to ecology. This concern about human values

and communication leads post-postmodern novelists to return to realism for different reasons. They do not try to represent reality as modernist novelists, but they criticize social and political issues in their societies. This paper deals with the value of human communication in Karen Russell's short story "Vampires in the Lemon Grove," A.J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window*, and Dave Eggers's *The Circle*. In *The Circle*, for example, Eggers criticizes contemporary social media and data collection not with postmodern fragmentation techniques but by returning to realist aesthetics to create a dystopian novel. He creates a parallel between a fictional digital company and the real Facebook and Google to shed light on the importance of constructing humanist values.

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Introduction: The Death of Postmodernism

At the beginning of the 21st century, postmodernism came to an end. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon mentions that "the postmodern may will be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past" (165). Other theorists and scholars such as Ihab Hassan and David Foster Wallace announced the death of postmodernism and declared the arrival of a new wave of postmodernism. In "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust," Hassan argues that "the world has changed," and so has postmodernism. Like many other historical concepts, it suffers "the tyranny of time" (303). Therefore, post-postmodernism moves beyond postmodernism to introduce criticism into it. Brian McHale notes that postmodernism no longer exists. For him, "There is no postmodernism out there in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or romanticism 'out there'" (4). Contemporary fiction writers become sick of postmodern limitations and seek something else to represent their age.

Contemporary writers believe that postmodernism fails to represent their age because of its uncertain and unstable view of the world. They seek to find an alternative way to embody the social issues of this age beyond postmodern nihilism and irony. Unlike postmodern writers, those contemporary writers have a social agenda. Their primary focus is on how individuals avoid the sense of alienation and solipsism. In this sense, the subjective view of history, the realistic view of the world, and the power of human

connection are the tools those writers use to escape postmodern nihilism. This paper deals with how post-postmodern writers reconstruct human values by focusing on the importance of human connection. By using different contemporary literary texts, namely, Karen Russell's short story "Vampires in the Lemon Grove," (2013) A. J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window* (2018), and Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013), I attempt to examine post-postmodern writers' focus on the re-humanization of individuals by emphasizing sincerity and authenticity instead of irony. Therefore, the character's inner feelings, human emotions, and interpersonal connections play a central role in these texts.

The twenty-first-century writers go beyond the postmodern loss of reference by questioning the relationship between truth, reality, and language. Postmodern theorists question the notion of truth and dispute any system of knowledge. Among them was Fredric Jameson, who examined, for example, the relationship between language and reality, and the ability of language to point outside itself. He states that "reference and reality disappear altogether, and even meaning – the signified – is problematized. We are left with that pure and random play of signified that we call postmodernism" (96). This loss of reference and meaning leads to the main characteristics of postmodernism: fragmentation, skepticism, and decentralization. These characteristics problematize the concept of identity in postmodern fiction. In the postmodern age, or late capitalism as Jameson calls it, media, through consumerism, enhances the sense of

fragmentation. This sense controls people and leads to an identity crisis, representing itself in irony, humor, pastiche, and parody. Therefore, postmodern fiction is characterized by double-coded language, irony, and self-referentiality. According to Robert McLaughlin, postmodern fiction uses these features to defy reader's experiences and expectations about the world; it challenges the concept of how a postmodern novel could work and "more broadly how the world could be known and how a person could situate herself in the world" ("After Revolution" 285). Accordingly, postmodern fiction was occupied with ontological questions about the "world" and the "self."

Jameson, for example, remarks that the sense of isolation and alienation is unacceptable in postmodernism. He remarks that the expression of feelings or emotions in contemporary society of the centered subject may also mean not "merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self presents to do the feeling." He adds that the subject in the world of postmodernism becomes "free-floating" and interpersonal (14-15). Accordingly, postmodernism always refers to the self as a fragmented and not cohesive identity. Such identity becomes, in postmodern fiction, a synonym for nihilism. In postmodern novels, the self appears as a kind of heterogeneity, multiplicity, and not a fixed entity. Rimmon-Kenan states that the self in postmodern fiction is fragmented. This fragmentation leads to a particular framework of interpretation. He explained that such a framework makes the self or subject appears, in a certain way, too limited (13). Therefore, as theorists claim "the death of postmodernism," they ask about the traces of this self. They try to understand the models of human experience that contemporary writers try to portray in their works. In this respect, theorists need something beyond postmodernism that enables them to

interpret such literary texts. Andrew Wells Garner asserts that postmodernism "is now exhausted," so we need other possibilities beyond postmodernism. These possibilities include digimodernism, hypermodernism, metamodernism, performatism, or post-postmodernism (xii). However, if postmodernism is exhausted and comes to its end, the question is, what will come next?

From Postmodernism to Post-postmodernism

David Foster Wallace introduces a new shift in writing fiction. He focuses on subjectivity and giving voice to express human thoughts and feelings. Like many of his contemporaries, Wallace's works offer a space for the subjectivity of human beings to represent their humanity. Unlike television, Wallace believes that social networks, like Facebook, allow human beings to share their ideas with other fragmented individuals. These social networks enable them to be active agents, communicators, and producers of meaning. Because of the effect of social networks, Wallace asserts that we are entering a new wave of postmodernism. It shifts television images from "a literary allusion" to what he calls "metawatching." He explains: "By this I mean certain lit beginning to locate its *raison* in its commentary on, response to, a U.S. culture more and more of and for watching, illusion, and the video image" (169). In this sense, post-postmodernism marks a shift in emphasis from the construction of the text to what it means to be human, even if the world these texts represent is unstable, commercialized, and alienating. Human connections appear as redemption or escape from the unbalanced reality in this world.

Wallace realizes there is a change in writing fiction, which is different from postmodern literature. He argues that some critics call this shift "post-postmodernism," while others name it

"hyper-realism," or "fiction of image." He explains this fiction of image as an "involution of the relations between lit and pop that blossomed in the sixties postmodernists" (171). However, Wallace insists that this new shift is only partially distinguished from postmodern fiction. Instead, it uses many postmodern techniques. However, the genuine difference between them is that contemporary fiction has a socio-artistic agenda. He asserts that "the fiction of image is not just a use or mention of televisual culture but a response to it" (172). Postmodernism lacks an adequate social theory that deals with a creative self because of this televisual culture. So what we need at the beginning of the millennium is a new form of subjectivity that enables us to rediscover what we really are.

Besides this televisual culture, many other factors lead to the exhaustion of postmodernism. McLaughlin lists these factors: first, a universal political and cultural conservatism that challenges the formal experimentation of most postmodern fiction; second, the catastrophic event of 9/11, which enhances "a revival of Grand Narratives about West and East, Christianity and Islam, good and evil." Moreover, globalization is another factor when economics determines all international and intercultural relations ("After Revolution" 285-6). Therefore, contemporary fiction must face all these factors and move beyond postmodern irony and self-referentiality. This fiction also asks about the usefulness of postmodern irony. McLaughlin asserts that postmodernists made good use of irony for "tipping various sacred cows, but at the end of the century, when all sacred cows have been tapped, irony leaves us caught inside a self-referring trap, unable to assert any belief, unable to connect with others, unable to make a new world" (285). Accordingly, post-postmodernist writers defy irony by creating a new cultural wave. This cultural phase also intensifies

the relationship between individuals, values, and technology.

This relationship intensified in the last years of the Twentieth century, which marked a debate about cultural value and technology. Some writers and novelists express concern over the decline of readership for serious fiction. Jeremy Green expresses this concern: "The book and screen are pitted against each other in a zero-sum game. As screen – television, film, computers – comes to dominant, so the book recedes or is pushed to the margins" (5). Therefore, a change within the literary field appears in order to compete with other kinds of media. McLaughlin calls it "aesthetic sea change." He explains that the reconnection between language and the social sphere marks this change. Thus, literature enhances its ability to be part of the social world and affects people's life ("Post-postmodern Discontent" 55). Specifically, this new change in fiction writing lies in the power of literature to occupy a space within the social world.

As a result of these factors, postmodernism can no longer represent contemporary culture; the younger generation of fiction writers emphasizes the social role of literature to question and challenge the ideology of current conditions. McLaughlin asserts that those writers respond to the dead-end of postmodernism by dealing with social issues; instead of the postmodern non-referential language's world (55). Writers, after postmodernism, focus on the meaning of humanity and human connections. Nicoline Timmer remarks that contemporary fiction addresses the idea of re-humanization of the subject (23). Therefore, the issue of self and subjectivity is significant in the post-postmodern era. It leads to the construction of authenticity, in which man seeks to reach subjectivity and freedom of choice.

Post-postmodernism is a reaction to the postmodern lack of representation.

The post-postmodernism emphasizes the connection with others constructively to go beyond destructive postmodern elements of self. Many postmodern writers emphasize the impossibility of representing social life because they ignore human tendency; therefore, post-postmodernists attempt to find something real to connect. McLaughlin asserts that post-postmodern authors seek to reconnect with something beyond representation, something extralinguistic, something real. He asserts that post-postmodernists find it impossible to "return to a naïve use of language;" they also recognize the exhaustion of irony. According to McLaughlin, post-postmodernists "try to imagine a way to speak or write through that irony and come out with a new language that can make connections among people and build an improved society" ("After Revolution" 288). In other words, post-postmodernism aims to concern itself with human emotion to give meaning to life. It deals with values again and reconstructs them as a response to postmodern relativism.

For Timmer, postmodernism is no longer a suitable way to formulate and understand the present. She adds that "the idea of the postmodern no longer function dialectically to envision something 'new' against what is or was" (17). Therefore, the new direction of fiction writing allows writers to focus on the aspect of subjectivity that followers of postmodernism have neglected for a long time. In narratology, for example, they become more interested in human beings in fiction. They refuse postmodern irony because they see it as useless and destructive. Wallace asserts that "irony tyrannizes us." He thinks:

Even gifted ironists work best in sound bites. I find them sort of wickedly fun to listen to at parties, but I always walk away feeling like I've had several radical surgical procedures. And as for actually

driving cross-country with a gifted ironist, or sitting through 300-page novel full of nothing but trendy sardonic exhaustion, one ends up feeling not empty but somehow ... oppressed (183).

Like Wallace, 21st-century writers attempt to avoid postmodern irony by replacing it with sincerity and authenticity. In this way, they create a new path toward post-postmodern literature. This new path allows the readers to connect their loneliness to the social world. Thus, post-postmodern writers attempt to avoid solipsism by representing real feelings.

In postmodern literature after 9/11, irony loses its function. It is no longer used to criticize or challenge authority. It becomes the authority that forces us to communicate through it. The problem is that long-term exposure to irony prevents the readers from connecting emotionally to anything beyond themselves. It demonstrates the dehumanization of the reader. The irony, according to Wallace, "can train viewers to laugh at characters' unending putdowns of one another, to view ridicule as both the mode of social intercourse and the ultimate art form" (180-1). However, the possible way to escape this dilemma is through sincerity and authenticity, which act as irony's opposing force. Stephen Burn remarks that post-postmodernists pay more attention to "the production of personhood;" they carefully represent the neuropsychological core of the self (25). They incite readers to accept themselves as uncertain and possibly mistaken. Such invitation leads to true self-acceptance, becoming a path to a real human connection.

Avoiding Solipsism by Love in Karen Russell's "Vampire in the Lemon Grove"

Unlike postmodern writers, contemporary writers focus on the experience of feeling and how the subject escapes the sense of postmodern solipsism

by connecting with others. In her short story "Vampires in the Lemon Grove," Karen Russell tells the story of Clyde, an old vampire who represents Italy's most isolated and alienated identity. Clyde, as a vampire, represents the isolated postmodern identity. For a long time, he lived alone, sucking blood and sleeping in a coffin. Russell, in her story, stresses the importance of connection to escape solipsism and solitude. When he met his wife, Magreb, he stopped feeling alone. He tells the reader about their first date when they met in a graveyard. They bared their fangs to identify each other. Then, he declares: "There is a loneliness that must be particular to monsters, I think, the feeling that each is the only child of a species. And now that loneliness was over" (9). Because of the power of connection, Clyde's loneliness is over. Being with Magreb helps Clyde to turn nearly human. He stops drinking blood: "*The blood does nothing! I don't have to drink blood*" (emphasize is original 10); he also realizes that he does not have to sleep in a coffin or sleep through the day. For Russell, love becomes a way of escaping solitude and lacking social interaction. As a post-postmodern writer, she deals with the value of love and emotional connection to advocate for us to know ourselves and therefore know others.

In Russell's short story, she focuses on the interpersonal connection by using a first-person narrator. Post-postmodern writers face the ambiguity of this world and the self by focusing on storytelling and characterization. Gerhard Hoffmann asserts that they use a clear-cut description and situation to cope with "the unknowable" and to interpret the world (625). In other words, they focus on the protagonist of the story. Paul Dawson mentions that the new fiction focuses on literary "omniscience." It refers to the narrator who addresses the reader directly to provide commentary on the events and other characters (143). In "Vampire in the Lemon Grove," Clyde narrates the story,

describing his situation, especially when his wife left him. He describes the importance of connecting with his wife: "But then Magreb came along, and eternity ceased to frighten me. Suddenly each moment followed its antecedent in a neat chain, moments we filled with each other" (7). However, when Magreb leaves him, he returns to suck blood again and declares: "I am a monster again" (18).

Using a first-person narrator enhances the sense of subjectivity and the significance of human feelings in creating a connection with other human beings. As Russell narrates the short story using the first-person narrator, she creates a connection between her protagonist and the reader. This kind of focus on characterization and storytelling helps post-postmodern writers to go back to the field of human experience and to human life to build a connection between human beings. Although her protagonist is a monster, her narrative technique helps the reader feel sympathy for him and becomes familiar with his suffering from loneliness. For post-postmodernists, this kind of narrative familiarizes the world and creates models to understand it. Therefore, fiction can fix the lack of communication in society (Hoffmann 627). Hence, post-postmodernists highlight "returning to the human" as a reaction against the postmodern practice by conceptualizing the self.

Build a Human Connection in A. J. Finn's *The Woman in the Window*

Moreover, contemporary novelists emphasize the need for "we." In their novels, characters discover themselves through others. The renewed sense of the self occurs through establishing a bond with other individuals to defeat alienation and isolation. As Russell represents an alienated and isolated entity to emphasize the importance of human connection, A. J. Finn, in *The Woman in the Window*,

describes an alienated and isolated woman who suffers agoraphobia. Anna Fox, the protagonist, narrates her story, explaining her situation of being entrapped inside her house. Suffering depression and agoraphobia makes Anna isolated from her community. She describes her situation: "I'm an empty house, rotten rafters and howling air" (51). She lives alone in her house after the death of her husband and daughter in an accident. Her inability to communicate with the outer world leaves her "feeling dead myself. Dead but not gone, watching life surge forward around me, powerless to intervene" (55). Anna represents the postmodern solipsistic identity who spends most of her time alone watching television and old movies. Finn emphasizes the inner feelings of his protagonist, so he chooses to use a first-person narrator to narrate the story of Anna; moreover, he writes the novel in the form of a diary to enhance the sense of subjectivity. Finn and other contemporary writers realize that post-postmodern fiction intends to reactivate the human connection through the reclamation of emotion and sentimentality.

Finn writes his novel as a diary to shed light on the suffering of his protagonist as a solipsistic postmodern entity. The diary form personalizes the protagonist's feelings and makes it more accessible for the readers. Therefore, his main focus is to introduce the importance of human connection to avoid this sense of loneliness. Wallace remarks that the best fiction is one where "I feel unalone – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually – I feel human and unalone and that I'm in a deep, significant conversation with other consciousness" (Miller 62). For Wallace and other post-postmodern writers, technology plays an essential role in their fiction. Anna needs to connect with others as a human being, but she cannot do this physically. So technology plays an essential role in her life, especially her journey toward recovery. Finn enhances this role of technology, especially the

internet, in Anna's life. She is a member of a website called Agora, which helps people with agoraphobia. Ironically, as a psychologist, she uses her experience to help other members of this website. Grannylizzie – a woman from Agora who lost her husband – tells Anna that Internet "is sort of your ... window to the world" (78). Anna listens to Grannylizzie's story and sympathizes with her fear, which helps both of them to understand their situation. By helping others, especially Grannylizzie, Anna feels human again because she feels connected to others. She explains: "I feel my veins rushing. I've helped someone. I've connected. *Only connect*. Where have I heard that" (emphasize is original 61)? By talking with Grannylizzie, Anna becomes more open and tells her about her family. Suddenly, Anna feels relaxed and useful; "Almost like I'm back on East Eighty-Eight, in my office, helping a patient. *Only connect*" (emphasis is original 190).

Sharing stories between Anna and Grannylizzie helps Anna to construct a meaningful sense of self, especially when she knows that Grannylizzie manages to leave the house with her sons. According to Timmer, post-postmodern novels focus on "sharing" stories as a way to "identify with others" (and to allow others to identify themselves with you)" (359). After connecting with Grannylizzie through the internet, Anna realizes that she needs other people, which leads her to spy on her neighbors through her window. She is passively involved in their lives, especially The Russells, who recently moved to the neighborhood. Anna feels empty and isolated; she mentions, "I look like a ghost. I feel like a ghost" (216). Her solipsism reflects the postmodern identity crisis, which post-postmodern novels attempt to identify to find a solution by enhancing the importance of human connection and sharing inner feelings. Anna experiences this through connecting with Katie, a woman she believes that she is Jane, Russell's wife. They share stories

about their families, which helps Anna feel alive again. Anna also attempts to befriend Ethan Russell, a sixteen-year-old son of the Russells. She becomes interested in his complex relationship with his father. By the existence of the Russells in Anna's life, she stops the imagined conversation with her dead husband and daughter and becomes more interested in real life.

Anna attempts to connect by taking photos for her neighbors until Russell's wife looks at her across the park. During this time, Anna feels "I'm not invisible, I'm not dead. I'm alive, and on display, and ashamed" (75). She becomes able to feel because she has a bond with others. Post-postmodern novels construct mainly around a feeling more than around a centered and stable self-concept (Timmer 304). Representing the inner feeling of the character is the main focus of contemporary fiction. However, When Anna sees the murder of Katie; she feels responsible and wants to reveal the truth about this crime. Nobody believes Anna, and they accuse her of imagining the incident. The murder of Katie helps Anna to connect with herself and be part of society again because she wants to prove that she is not imagining. For example, the incident forces her to go outside after a year of being trapped in her house to face Jane Russell to know the truth. Anna feels human through connecting with others.

Post-postmodernism is occupied with the notion of character. Therefore, the self-destruction in their novels becomes a space for regeneration, allowing life to be renewable. Throughout the novel, Finn represents Anna's anxiety by describing her self-destruction. After the accident, Anna isolates herself and tries self-medicate by taking drugs, drinking wine all day, and watching old movies. She escapes from the feeling of guilt and loneliness. Yet, this self-destruction does not help Anna avoid her feelings. Until she decides to face her fears and go outside, she becomes able to connect with herself.

Being outside is a kind of self-destruction for Anna, but it also represents a self-regeneration. She states

I falter forward – a tiny steps, but a step. I watch my feet, the grass springing up around my slippers. *I will promote healing and well-being.* Now the night has my heart in its claws. It's squeezing. I will burst. I'm going to burst.

And I will place others' interests above my own.

Jane I'm coming. I drag my other foot ahead, my body sinking, sinking. One, two, three four (emphasize is original 135)

She becomes again interested in the real world and wants to connect with others to know the truth about Katie, Jane, and the Russells.

Furthermore, the police officers, Little and Norelli, believe that Anna imagined the murder and try to convince her that the incident did not happen. They know about Anna's husband's and daughter's death, which Anna denies. However, the passionate connection between Anna and Detective Little helps her face her family's death. He later realizes that Anna is telling the truth about the murder. At the end of the novel, Anna can go outside and face the world. She becomes able to connect with the outer world. Anna is not mentally stable, but the connection with others helps her feel stable again and enables her to face the world. In this sense, Finn and other contemporary novelists attempt to tell stories to spread hope among their readers instead of postmodern nihilism. Therefore, at the end of a post-postmodern novel, the character feels connected, human, and visible. The means to do this is through the value of communication.

Like Karen Russell, Finn's protagonist narrates her story using the first-person technique. The novel's

extraordinary details and images challenge the postmodern view of the self, in which the self is absent, and its presence is vague and undefined. Moreover, Finn's novel centers around the inner feelings of his protagonist so he does not follow a chronological order in narrating the story. Timmer states that there is difficulty in representing these feelings in texts. She argues, "to make sense of 'feelings,' the self of these texts needs others." These feelings are not private, inner, and personal but interpersonal (original emphasis 45). Therefore, to approach the self in contemporary fiction, the writers need to find the meaning of being human. Ihab Hassan states that we need something beyond postmodernism and poststructuralism. He adds, "we need to discover new relations between selves and others, margins and centers, fragments and whole." Moreover, he remarks that we also need new relations "between selves and selves, margins and margins, centers and centers" (307). Therefore, contemporary fiction requires going beyond the traditional view of self by focusing on the character's inner feelings. In this sense, Finn's novel ends with an optimistic impulse when Anna bravely goes outside sober and healthy. By connecting with others, Anna chooses to engage with the reality of her present day.

Sincerity and Authenticity in Dave Eggers's *The Circle*

Like Anna Fox and Clyde, Mae Holland in Dave Eggers's *The Circle* is a solipsistic identity for a different reason. Mae is separated from her family, friends, and reality because of the power of social media. In *The Circle*, Eggers represents Mae Holland, the protagonist, as a blind and naïve person. He sees Mae as not "an empty vessel, but a pair of eyes that did not view things with too baggage or skepticism" (Interview 552). Mae's blindness prevents her from seeing the danger of The Circle. She knows that the company violates human values but wants

to fit in, so she ignores them and their importance in her life. Thus, throughout the novel, Eggers aims to defend constructing humanist values, especially authentic human communication. For example, Baily, Mae's supervisor, blames her that she spends time with her sick father. He informs her that the online connection with her colleagues is more important than spending time with her parents. He tells her: "We see this work as a community, and every person who works here is part of that community. And to make it all work it requires a certain level of participation" (179). Gradually, Mae loses connection with the outer world.

In *The Circle*, Dave Eggers explains the importance of reconstructing human values by representing the effect of social media in dehumanizing and subjugating individuals in contemporary society. He represents an accurate image of reality, especially the popularity of social media and its danger in present society. The Circle is an internet company specializing in social media. It symbolizes actual companies such as Google and Facebook. Eggers describes The Circle as subsumed "Facebook, Twitter, Google, and finally Alacrity, Zoopa, Jefe, and Quan" (23). In an interview with Sean Bex and Stef Graps, Eggers states that after the publication of the novel, he keeps hearing from employees in internet companies saying: "it is like you were in the room with us; this is exactly my life!" not necessarily the evil side of it, but the day-to-day things" (553). Eggers aims to share the realization of the danger of social media in people's lives and how these companies become totalitarian because they steal people's freedom. Huber states that the return to the realist aesthetic paves the way to "the ultimate possibility of communication, established in intersubjective relations and based on a shared awareness of its own conventions and limitations" (28). Such awareness helps post-postmodern writers to move beyond the postmodern disillusionment.

Returning to realism effectively allows post-postmodern writers to reconstruct human values beyond the postmodern nihilistic view of self and values. Thus, post-postmodern realism is not a return to the previous kind of realism that believed in representation. It, instead, focuses on communication values. According to Robert Rebein, contemporary writers absorb postmodern contributions to forge a new realism. He describes this new kind of realism as "more or less traditional in its handling of character, reportorial in its depiction of milieu and time, but is at the same time self-conscious about language and the limits of mimesis" (20). Therefore, this kind of realism represents the difficulties of inter-subjective relations and communications.

In *The Circle*, Eggers represents realistic characters and real events about the role of social media in destroying our humanity. Before working in the Circle, Mae was interested in her family and her sick father; later, when she becomes part of the company, she loses the connection with reality. She does not see the dangerous part of the company, which leads to her boyfriend's death and causes a coma for Annie, her best friend. Eggers portrays Mae as someone who loses touch with feelings and a sense of humanity. For post-postmodern novelists, literature plays an important role that helps readers to gain their human empathetic abilities. Therefore, feelings are a tool writers use to represent human issues and try to find solutions to these problems. In this sense, love has a space in the post-postmodern argument because, as Hassan states, it brings us to "a fiduciary realism, a realism that defines the relation between subject and object, self and other, in terms of profound trust" (314). Such realism helps readers to be more empathetic toward others and themselves too. Consequently, writers need to go back to the human field of experience to explore this empathetic connection. According to Gerhard

Hoffmann, this kind of realism is different in that it has different strategies of representation that focus on both the outer world and inner self experiences (624). This new form of realism sets a new historical timeframe derived from re-humanizing needs.

Post-postmodern fiction deals with a lack of communication as the core problem. It assumes that the intersubjective relation is essential in reconstructing human values in the present day. Therefore, Timmer states that we should look carefully at how the self is conceptualized in contemporary fiction to "see how we *can* think of ourselves" (original emphasis 28). In *The Circle*, Eggers criticizes the dehumanization effect of social media. The idea of being watched all the time leads to a lack of privacy, freedom, empathy, and communication. The company's main slogan was "all that happens should be known" (67). Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, demonstrates that surveillance is effective in the subjugation of individuals. He adds: "The fact of being constantly seen ... that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (187). At the beginning of the novel, Mae decides to go transparent. It is one of the company's systems, which means always wearing a camera. As a result, the company can watch people, and they assume that this will prevent crimes. By doing this, Mae loses her privacy and loved ones as well. Despite the death of her boyfriend, Mae keeps supporting the company's surveillance system. Mae's choice to be watched all the time turns out to be a complete deprivation of freedom. She loses the capability to think of herself. She believes that she is doing this willingly, but in fact, the company manipulates her. Accordingly, Mae's life becomes available to the Circle, which is a violation of her privacy.

Eggers, in the novel, creates reality not as a postmodern fragmentation but as a dystopia to criticize technological

surveillance and defend humanist values. He explains that the rise of the internet turns power and wealth into few hands. He adds, "In exchange for 'freedom,' in exchange for 'free things,' we allow ourselves to be spied on" (Interview 554). In *The Circle*, the company appears as a utopian space for Mae. She thinks the company aims to prevent crime and corruption, so it invents the idea of transparency: "you wouldn't have stolen if you know you were being watched" (*The Circle* 288). It is, in other words, complete surveillance. Therefore, the utopian impulse of the Circle becomes a dystopia and a nightmare. Ty, one of the three wise men and the founder of the company, explains to Mae how this kind of surveillance is dangerous: "once it's mandatory to have an account, and once all government services are channeled through the Circle, you'll have helped create the world's first tyrannical monopoly" (401). It means the end of freedom and privacy; therefore, Eggers attempts to warn his readers of the danger of digital surveillance and its effect on democratic and social life.

Mae also dehumanizes herself and the others around her. In the Circle, employees are reduced to numbers and scores. The company also takes over all the means of communication, so real communication is lost. Mae becomes keen on her score on social media; thus, she loses human communication and empathy even when her boyfriend dies because of one of the company's services called "Soul-Search." Such lack of empathy and communication demonstrates Mae's lack of resistance at the end of the novel. Before his death, her boyfriend attempts to warn her: "we'll be too far to communicate" (367), and they need a new path for communication, but she does not listen to him. Throughout the novel, Eggers enhances the primary purpose of post-postmodern fiction, which is the importance of communication in

reconstructing humanist values to avoid postmodern relativism.

Communication is crucial because it facilitates empathy and confirms people's humanity. At the end of the novel, Eggers encourages what he calls "The Rights of Humans in Digital Age," which includes "the right to anonymity," the barrier between public and private must remain untouchable," and most important, according to Eggers, "we must all have the right to disappear" (485). In other words, Eggers advocates the values of privacy and freedom in the digital age to re-establish human values again. Unlike Wallace, Eggers believes that social media destroys our humanity; therefore, we must react against it to regain our sense of humanity through sincerity, authenticity, empathy, and privacy. At the end of the novel, Mae fails to achieve this because of her lack of human communication.

Reconstructing Human Values by Returning to Realism

These three texts explain the problem of postmodern solipsistic discourse that leads to the protagonists' alienation and fragmentation. The texts also represent the main focus of post-postmodernism, which is the importance of love and communication in reconstructing human values instead of postmodern nihilism. The writers do not entirely reject postmodernism. As Burn asserts, post-postmodern writers do not explicitly reject postmodernism; instead, they look back toward it and situate their roots within the postmodern experience. They demonstrate much skepticism toward postmodern culture. They produce "hybrid novelistic forms," which use fewer metafictional devices than postmodernism (20-1). For example, Russell's short story is a kind of magical realism, but she uses it to assert her idea about the importance of love and communication. Eggers employs realistic element to warn his readers about the dangers of social media. Also, Finn's

protagonist suffers a psychological disorder that can somehow relate to postmodern disillusion and nihilism.

Therefore, post-postmodern novelists address the idea of reality beyond postmodern self-referential discourse. The most important effect of post-postmodern fiction is that it begs the reader to participate in its narrative framework. Therefore, reading becomes a method of experiencing feelings and reality. In other words, post-postmodern works mark a return to realism. This kind of realism is still affected by the postmodern legacy, but post-postmodernists use it differently. Both Eggers and Finn introduce a realistic narrative within this framework. Their protagonists are real characters who suffer solipsism but are not fragmented in the same way as postmodern novels' characters. They are more connected to reality by their inner feelings and emotions. Finn's protagonist becomes able to reconstruct her humanity through connecting and feeling sympathy with others. In contrast, Eggers's protagonist fails to do this because she denies her inner feelings and unable to feel sympathy with others. Finn attempts to spread hope for the possibility of reconstructing our humanity despite postmodern fragmentation, while Eggers, like Russell, chooses to warn us about the consequences of denying our feelings and values.

They represent the increasing desire to escape from postmodernism. Huber asserts that postmodernist skepticism and irony no longer serve a liberating purpose. Instead, they "gradually come to look like paint with which we adorn the walls of prison" (5). In this sense, the possible escape for post-postmodern writers is to turn to social realism. This kind of realism is different concerning the postmodern discourse of reality, the fragmentation of the subject, and the impossibility of truth. Alan Kirby states that while postmodernism puts reality into question, post-postmodernism

defines reality as "interacting with its texts." He adds that this new view of reality creates a different intellectual framework (4). This new kind of realism is a shift to sincerity and authenticity. It describes, as Huber remarks, a change of interest, so literature looks beyond postmodernism's aspiration to alienate and subvert. Literature, in other words, seeks to construct (6-7). Whereas postmodern writers withdraw from social and political life, post-postmodern literature moves beyond postmodernism to represent the world constructively and connect with others.

As post-postmodernists, Russell, Eggers, and Finn react against postmodern deconstruction; therefore, they attempt to reconstruct values, truth, and means of communication. They prefer to strive to find common ground for connecting people again. By doing so, they concern themselves with the emphasis on human emotion. Timmer states that a return to the human "stems from a desire to attend to aspects of subjectivity that were repressed in postmodern literature and theory" (51). This re-humanization, especially in the contemporary narrative, helps post-postmodernist novelists conceptualize the self. However, this narrative is not structured about the stable self; instead, it evolves mainly around feelings and emotions. For Timmer, "it forces (if only by an awkward leap of faith) into being a 'you and me,' a 'we' – a structure activated only by a form of responsiveness" (46). Thus, such a narrative searches for the reader's subjective understanding of fiction.

Clyde, Anna, and Mae suffer from being emotionally unconnected in the postmodern world. They lose love and connection due to postmodern fragmentation and alienation. In other words, their solipsism is the source of their suffering and pain. In his interview with McCaffery, Wallace asserts that suffering is an inescapable part of the human self.

He states that in the contemporary world, we suffer alone because "empathy is impossible." However, he adds, fiction helps readers "imaginatively to identify with a character's pain," and by doing this, it becomes easier to identify such pain with ours (127). Thus, post-postmodern fiction aims to reconstruct social relationships, make readers aware of themselves as subjects, and reconnect emotionally with others. Wallace explains that writers can offer their readers a "sort of escape self" by making them identify with another human psyche. This human psyche could be the writer or a character. He adds that those writers also attempt to "antagonize the reader's intuition that she is a self, that she is alone and going to die alone" (136-7). Therefore, the social purpose of the literary text is to increase the reader's empathy by giving him a chance to experience other's subjectivity. In other words, the post-postmodern novel attempts to re-examine real relationships in the social world through literary texts. For post-postmodern writers, fiction can affect actual change by reacting against postmodern alienation and valuing human life and emotion.

Throughout exploring the values and emotions of their characters, Russell, Finn, and Eggers move beyond postmodern relativism and self-referentiality and reconstruct values as a kind of resistance. Russell emphasizes the power of love, Finn focuses on the importance of sympathy, and Eggers asserts the significance of human communication. For them, to return to love, empathy, and communication means to be human. Timmer describes post-postmodern texts as expressing feelings and sentiments that are "a drive towards intersubjective connection and communication" (11). In this sense, empathy and communication are crucial elements of post-postmodern literature. The role of this literature is to reconstruct communicating values; the feeling is a medium to communicate.

Conclusion

To conclude, as philosophers and scholars declare the death of postmodernism at the end of the twentieth century, they declare the arrival of post-postmodernism. The new wave moves beyond postmodernism to introduce criticism into it. Postmodernism always refers to the self as a fragmented and not cohesive nihilistic identity. Therefore, contemporary writers attempt to portray human experience to understand the self beyond postmodern self-referentiality. David Foster Wallace, among other writers, offers a space for the subjectivity of human beings to represent their humanity. For those writers, post-postmodernism marks a shift in emphasis from the construction of the text to what it means to be human. This new change in fiction writing lies in the ability of literature to engage with the social world. Post-postmodernism, in this sense, focuses on the meaning of humanity and human connection. It addresses the idea of re-humanization of the subject. Focusing on re-humanizing individuals in contemporary fiction leads writers to emphasize sincerity and authenticity instead of irony. Therefore, the character's inner feelings are essential in post-postmodern fiction. In other words, post-postmodernism aims to concern itself with human emotions to give meaning to life. It deals with values and attempts to reconstruct them as a response to postmodern relativism.

Contemporary writers seek to represent their age beyond postmodern nihilism. To do this, they focus on the inner feelings of their characters to avoid alienation and solipsism. For example, in "Vampires in the Lemon Grove," Karen Russell emphasizes the importance of love and empathy to overcome loneliness. Love and emotional connection help us know ourselves and others. In *The Woman in the Window*, Finn also advocates the importance of human sympathy and

communication. His protagonist can overcome her personal disaster by connecting with others emotionally. In *The Circle*, Eggers warns his readers of the dangerous effect of social media. Throughout the novel, he emphasizes the importance of real human connection to reconstruct fundamental human values such as freedom, privacy, and sympathy. Generally, post-postmodern writers have a socio-artistic agenda, which aims to reconstruct human values again.

Therefore, they return to realism to escape from postmodernism. Post-postmodernism, in this sense, marks a shift in literature in which literature intervenes the social world to influence people's understanding of themselves and the world. Thus, re-humanization and reconstruction of human values are the main characteristics of post-postmodernism, and they are the main elements that challenge postmodern relativism and self-referentiality.

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