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**MULTICULTURALISM AND US LITERATURE IN THE
SECOND HALF OF THE XX AND THE BEGINNING OF
THE XXI CENTURIES: LITERARY OVERVIEW**

Abstract

The second half of the XX and the beginning of the XXI centuries in American literature marked a dynamic shift toward multicultural voices and perspectives. This period saw the rise of writers from diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds who challenged traditional literary norms. Authors such as Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sandra Cisneros, and Ralph Ellison brought attention to African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American experiences. Multiculturalism reshaped literary themes, emphasizing identity, displacement, cultural memory, and social justice. Postmodern techniques blended with ethnic storytelling traditions, create unique narrative forms. Literature became a tool for marginalized communities to reclaim their histories and assert their place within the American canon. This era also witnessed increased academic interest in ethnic studies and comparative literature. Overall, the multicultural movement significantly enriched American literature, making it more inclusive, reflective, and representative of the nation's complexity.

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Keywords: *multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, literary paradigm, cultural self-identification, narratives.*

Н.Баняс, В.Баняс, Т.Чонка. МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРАЛІЗМ І ЛІТЕРАТУРА США ДРУГОЇ ПОЛОВИНИ ХХ ТА ПОЧАТКУ ХХІ СТОЛІТЬ: ЛІТЕРАТУРНИЙ ОГЛЯД

Анотація

У другій половині ХХ та початку ХХІ століть література США зазнала суттєвих трансформацій, зумовлених посиленням мультикультурних тенденцій у суспільстві. Актуальність теми зумовлена потребою осмислення впливу культурного розмаїття на формування американської літературної традиції, розширенням літературного канону та зростанням інтересу до творів, які відображають голоси етнічних, расових і культурних меншин.

Метою статті є огляд основних тенденцій розвитку мультикультуралізму в американській літературі зазначеного періоду, а також аналіз внеску представників різних культур у формування нової літературної парадигми.

Завдання дослідження полягають - виявлення провідних авторів і творів, що репрезентують мультикультурну літературу; аналіз тематичних і жанрових особливостей текстів; з'ясування ролі літератури як засобу збереження ідентичності та міжкультурного діалогу.

У результаті проведеного огляду з'ясовано, що такі автори, як Тоні Моррісон, Еліс Вокер, Максін Гонг Кінгстон, Джеймс Болдвін та інші зробили вагомий внесок у розвиток мультикультурної літератури США. Їхні твори розкривають складні питання расової, гендерної, мовної та культурної самоідентифікації, протиставляючи домінуючій культурі альтернативні наративи.

У висновках зазначено, що мультикультуралізм суттєво збагатив американську літературу другої половини ХХ століття, зробивши її більш інклюзивною, різноманітною та відкритою до діалогу між культурами.

Ключові слова: *мультикультуралізм, міжкультурний діалог, літературна парадигма, культурна самоідентифікація, наративи.*

Introduction

“Literature is the expression of society, just as words are the expression of human beings” (T. Huxley, 2011: p. 87). This is a famous quote by Professor Thomas Huxley, a British biologist and anthropologist. Indeed, multiculturalism in American literature is a powerful means for expressing the US society and its various aspects in the second half of the 20th century.

Literature of the United States of America of that period continues to be inspired by the changing concept of the "American dream", in a productive dialogue with which new models of aesthetic relations with the world become clearer. The most noticeable feature of American writing of this period is

radical pluralization – modern US literature reflects the multiplicity of experiences, abandoning the monomyth of previous decades. What exact metamorphoses has the "American dream" undergone during the last half-century?

After World War II the United States of America became the richest and most powerful country in the world. In contrast to exhausted Europe, America, which had a considerable profit from the war, stood against the background of the spoiled Western civilization as a beacon of hope for economic well-being. In the context of the "cold war" with the socialist camp, it finally assumed the role of an outpost of democracy.

Moreover, at this time, according to the expression of **Alfred Kazin** (1915-1998), "Modern American literature was born in protest, born in rebellion, born out of the sense of loss and indirection which was imposed upon the new generations out of the realization that the old formal culture-the "New England idea"-could no longer serve" revealed itself (A.Kazin, 2013: 31). At the same time, the first postwar decade went down in the nation's history as "prosperous but alienated."

The United States of America is known to be a country of immigrants; her face from the beginning was not only white, but also red, black, yellow, and brown. Despite this, for many decades and even centuries, America's multicolorism was ignored. Political, moral, and aesthetic values were accepted as the norm in it, which was professed by only one segment of its population - "white men from the middle class". By tacit consent, it was their tastes that came to be considered universal. It was convenient for those with power and money, and it was

with the bearers of these standards that all Americans were to identify themselves. However, the nature of national self-awareness has changed over the years, its dynamics during the last third of the last century can be succinctly characterized by a change of metaphors: from a "melting pot", implying the mixing of all cultural ingredients into a homogeneous mass, to a "patchwork quilt" ", where the presence of a single whole does not negate the individuality of its components.

Research methods

In the course of the research, historical, structural, psychological, comparative, temporal, compositional-plot methods of investigating the main trends and genres of the literature of the USA of the XX-XXI centuries were used.

Results and discussion

In the second half of the twentieth century, the literary culture of the United States underwent a paradigm shift, a transition from monoculturalism to multiculturalism. The 1960s were marked by tumultuous events in the social and political life of the country, which left their mark on the contemporary American literary culture. These were the years of active the struggle of blacks for their civil rights, the feminist movement for equal rights for women and men, anti-war protests against American military actions in Vietnam (1957-1975), politicization and exacerbation of contradictions in social life. In the light of these events American literary culture appeared as a terrain with the same flaws that many radical and progressive Americans no longer wanted to put up with in the social, structural, political, and economic spheres of society.

They began to realize that racial discrimination, restrictions on women's rights, and dismissive attitudes toward national and ethnic minorities were fixed, strengthened, and sometimes reinforced by the traditional literary culture of the United States. It became obvious to many that the literature of the so-called mainstream was inherently discriminatory. It was created and developed predominantly by white men of Anglo-Saxon descent, of Protestant religion, shaped by the influence of Western European civilization.

The radical democratic public was faced with the task of desegregation of the entire American culture, revising the traditional cultural hierarchy of values.

The shifts that took place in the public consciousness of America in the 1970s were caused by a number of factors. Among them, we should mention the alternation of generations because the first-generation immigrants sought assimilation in the new environment as quickly as possible, while their grandchildren already felt "at home" in American society, and therefore were fondly interested in the traditions and cultural ways of their former homeland. Radical demographic changes in the structure of modern immigration to the USA also play a big role: most of the early new arrivals came from Europe, and now the majority of immigrants are from Asian countries and Latin America. According to census data, the composition of American society in the near future will undergo radical changes in terms of racial and ethnic affiliation of citizens, in particular, the number of white Americans will significantly decrease, while representatives of minorities - Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans - will have a much larger share of

the general population. The social movements of the "tumultuous decade" of the 1960s, especially the struggle of black Americans for civil rights, which served as an example for other minorities, provided a powerful incentive to revise fixed ideas. We should not forget the already mentioned tendency of the post-industrial consumer society to depersonalize its citizens. Therefore, the desire for cultural and ethnic self-determination turned out to be one of the means of resistance to this pressure. Finally, in the academic environment, where the struggle for cultural pluralism was widespread, the influence of the latest philosophical and cultural currents, subversive of the establishment and aimed at deconstructing it from within, was also felt. All these factors led to a radical revision of both America's ideas about its own identity and the "American dream". Now it was postulated not in a single but in multiple dimensions.

From the point of view of the literary development of the United States, these changes had multifaceted and far-reaching consequences, which also do not remain unchanged with the passage of time. In the early stages of the "revolution of differences", it was of fundamental importance to highlight individual branches in the general stream of a national literature, the literature of ethnic and other minorities, and to create a corresponding literary corpus around them. The most significant achievement of that era was the realization of the importance of the contribution of ethnically marked writers to American literature and the attempt to theoretically understand the thematic and artistic specificity of their texts. The aesthetic value

of what representatives of different cultural groups do in literature is determined, among other things, by the fruitful combination of heterogeneous artistic traditions in their work. One of the richest ethnic kinds of literature in the United States in terms of volume, scope, aesthetic achievement, and social influence is **African American literature**.

It encompasses a vast array of texts, both written and spoken, produced by black Americans over the more than 250-year period of their presence on the North American continent. Over the centuries, Negro literature developed in extremely unfavorable conditions (slavery, discrimination), which significantly emphasizes its current striking achievements. Its origin dates back to the third quarter of the 18th century, although blacks had already been on American soil for more than a hundred years before that. However, access to writing was closed to them for a long time due to the rightful fears of slave owners about giving slaves such a powerful tool of knowledge as writing. Since then, the connection between the ability to read/write and freedom has become one of the common topics of African-American literature. Among the characteristic features inherent in black literature, we note its reliance on oral (folkloric) modes of expression and the development of the unique slave narrative genre, which became a model and a source of inspiration for many generations of African-Americans. One cannot ignore such a feature as the inseparable and organic connection of Negro literature with various musical genres and trends (blues, jazz, rap, hip-hop). Music performs several functions in literature, acting as a theme, a source of motifs, characters, tropes, and structural principles. Not to

mention external obstacles, every black writer has always had to solve the difficult question of the ratio of political/social issues and purely artistic tasks, racially specific and universally human, in his own work. All these features are inherent in modern modifications of Negro literature.

Its most prominent representatives in the 1940s-1960s are **Richard Wright (1908-1960), Ralph Ellison (1914-1994), and James Baldwin (1924-1987)**. Wright was the first black writer to become widely known outside the black community. In different periods, his work was influenced by social criticism, naturalism, and existentialism. Wright's novel "Son of America" (1940) received the most publicity. The main character, Bigger Thomas, an uneducated black youth, accidentally becomes a murderer and must be executed. The piece sounded like a harsh but necessary commentary on the state of racial inequality in the United States. Ellison's literary fame is based on a single novel "Invisible" (1952) and several collections of short prose. Unlike Wright, Ellison rejects traditional realism, preferring modernist techniques of grotesque, hyperbole, and symbolism to brand a society incapable of providing its citizens, both white and black, with decent ideals and living conditions. Its nameless protagonist leads a ghostly existence in a dungeon, where he hides after a negative social experience destroys all the illusions of his youth. The title of the novel embodies one of the constant themes of Negro literature – the "invisibility" of blacks as individuals in a society affected by racial prejudice. A representative of the next generation, Baldwin took issue with Wright, arguing that in order to achieve greater effectiveness in

their art, African-American writers must move from racial protest and outspoken social criticism to deeper themes such as the search for one's own identity and universal issues of concern for all people. A number of novels belong to this subtle and perceptive artist ("Go and Tell from the Mountain", 1953; "Another Country", 1962; "Tell me when the train left", 1968; "If Beale Street could talk", 1974, etc.), as well as collections of essays on racism, the role of the artist, and literature.

During the social upheaval of the 1960s, there was also a powerful surge of African-American culture, which is called the "second Negro revival" (the first dates from the 1910s-1930s). All forms of art, including literature, were significantly politicized and acquired a militant and aggressive character. Black artists set out to change the ways in which American Negroes were represented in US culture. Representatives of the movement "black art" advocated "functional, collective and engaged" art, which would connect its creators with black communities. They were also characterized by Afrocentricity, i.e. turning to the foremother Africa in search of inspiration, wisdom, and different from Western aesthetic principles. In this "revolutionary" period, poetry (Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez) and drama developed most actively. In particular, theater and drama, with their direct impact on the audience, became the "public voice of the Negro revolution" (plays by A. Baraka, E. Bullins, A. Kennedy, etc.).

In the following decades, the works of African-American writers of all genres occupy an increasingly prominent place in the literary panorama of the United States. In contrast to the previous era, the new flourishing of Negro literature ("the third

revival") is not so much connected with the theme of protest as with the in-depth study of the personality of the African-American, his/her relations with the community, ways of assimilating his/her heterogeneous cultural heritage (African, European, American) and accepting one's own past. Therefore, this period is characterized by a heightened interest in history. Modern black writers use all the complex and sophisticated ("Western") techniques of writing, which under their pens enter into "chemical reactions" with African and African-American artistic models.

Along with active male authors (Ernest Gaines, Leon Forrest, Ishmael Reed), the modern era is marked by the emergence of a large group of gifted female writers who quickly gained creative maturity (Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Naylor, and others) on the literary scene. Black women authors combine criticism of racist practices with condemnation of sexism; the theme of black women's sisterhood resonates loudly in their works. The most famous of them is undoubtedly **Toni Morrison** (b. 1931), laureate of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In her unique creative manner, her fearless depiction of the cruelest reality is combined with philosophical scale, bright metaphoricality, originality of symbolism, colorfulness, and musicality of language. In one of the interviews, Morrison said: "I only have 26 letters of the alphabet; I don't have color or music. I must use my craft to make the reader see the colors and hear the sounds." (T.Morrison, 2023)

"Language, when it finally comes, has the vigor of a felon pardoned after twenty-one years on hold. Sudden, raw,

stripped to its underwear.” (T.Morrison, 2023) The first novel, *The Bluest Eyes* (1970), shows the detrimental effect of internalizing societal standards of beauty on the development of the African-American child's personality. “Her color is a cross she will always carry.”(T.Morrison, 2015:2) The following works ("*Sula*", 1973; "*Song of Solomon*", 1977; "*The Resin Scarecrow*", 1981) reflect the process of changing landmarks in the Negro consciousness, which focuses on the individual struggle for self-affirmation and self-realization. The tragic novel of 1987 "*Beloved*" can be called a true masterpiece. The plot, in which ruthless truth is intertwined with mythological and mystical elements, tells about the slave woman Seti - convinced that her escape with her children was unsuccessful, she kills her young daughter in order to "save" her from the fate of slavery. Twenty years later, an unknown young woman appears in Seti's life as a ghostly reproach. Deep immersion in painful African-American history is not intended to open up national wounds, but to look into the eyes of the past in order to overcome its horror and burden - otherwise, neither black nor white Americans can move on. Conflicts within the black community itself, as well as the unnaturalness of stereotypical "racial" definitions, interest the writer in the novels "*Paradise*" (1997) and "*Love*" (2003).

Conclusions

“Today’s multiculturalism mirrors the appreciation of the folk cultures, from Appalachia to Cajun Louisiana and New Mexico Indo-Hispano, brought to light by the New Deal; bioregionalism is little different from the regionalism that rose up as the socio-political facet of that awareness” [Alfred Kazin’s

America]. Today, due to the concern of many researchers about the division of American literature into separate racial, ethnic, and tender branches, it is proposed to revise the concept of cultural pluralism, built on the principle of a rainbow, where colors coexist, but do not mix. In contrast to it, the culture of the USA is positioned as fundamentally hybrid, or "creole". The change in perspective requires new research strategies, which include demonstrating the social construction of the categories of "blackness" and "whiteness", substantiating the "mixedness" of the American nation from its beginnings, as well as - in the field of literary studies - focusing attention on the interpenetration and interaction of heterogeneous cultural elements on levels of texts. Inter-racial, inter-national, and inter-ethnic cultural exchange becomes an important source of national literature.

In terms of poetics, the literature of the analyzed era is marked by the interaction of multidirectional philosophical and artistic vectors, the synthesis of elements of different directions, genres, and styles. Realistic writing of recent decades, being in the postmodern field, borrows some techniques and techniques of conventional currents. With the passage of time, American literature increasingly acquires a cross-cultural, multi-genre, and multi-discursive character, the most suitable for verbalizing the modern situation of globalization and hybridization.

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