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## AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

**Summary.** The author considers American literature from a postmodern perspective. Points of view of contemporary scholars on defining the term “postmodernism” are observed in the article. The article contains a general description of the postmodern period, biographic information about famous postmodern American writers, as well as a complex research of peculiarities of literary techniques widely used in the writing of postmodern American authors.

**Key words:** American literature, postmodernism, postmodern literature, literary techniques, postmodern writers, maximalism, minimalism, novel, poetry.

Periodization of literary movements is based on grouping various literary pieces of work written at a certain time. This way it is possible to trace the evolution of the world literature. Although the numbers, dates or the names of these periods are very indeterminate, the following periodized structure, which is acknowledged all over the world, includes the Medieval period, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Enlightenment period, the Romantic period, the Victorian period, the Modern period and the Postmodern period [1; 5].

**Analysis of the latest research studies and publications.**

Postmodern period has always been of great interest to critics and various scholars in study of American literature not only in the USA but also in many countries in the world (I. Hassan, Federico de Onis, Duddley Fitts, Arnold Toynbee, I. Holovanova, T. Denysova, I. Il'yin, Yu. Kostyuk, M. Shapovalova). Although most of them dedicated their investigations to different issues concerning American literature, there is still no complex research dedicated to literary techniques widely used in the writing of postmodern authors, and biographic information about writers who lived and worked during the abovementioned period.

Thus, **the main aim of the research** is to give a brief outline of American literature from a postmodern perspective. The stated aim provides the solution of the following **tasks**, namely:

- to observe different points of view on defining the term “postmodernism” in contemporary scientific literature;
- to offer biographic information about writers of the stated period,
- to conduct a complex research of peculiarities of literary techniques widely used in the writing of American postmodern authors.

**Presentation of basic material of the research.** Even though the term “postmodernism” is widely spread, many contemporary scholars still consider it elusive as it means many things. Moreover, they also admit that as an area of academic study postmodernism was only shaped in the mid-1980s.

The first mentioning of the term “postmodern” can be found in Rudolf Pannwitz's “*The Crisis of European Culture*” (1917), who used it in order to describe the Nietzschean superman. Then, Federico de Onis, a famous Spanish studies scholar, introduced the term “postmodernism” in his “*Anthology of Contemporary Spanish and Latin-American poetry*” (1932). F. Onis defined it as a minor reaction to modernism. A decade later, Arnold Toynbee, a prominent British historian, used it to describe the post WWI era and a new

historical cycle in Western civilization. Another popular point of view on defining this term is that it was “coined in the mid-1970s to describe the reaction against the dogmatic and uncompromisingly purist international style of the Modern Movement in architecture. ...The term Postmodernism has also been extended to other forms of art and literature, describing works that reject the theories and practices of modernism [8, 363]”.

In its turn, the term “postmodernism”, concerning literature, was introduced by a famous American scholar Ihab Hassan in 1977 who strongly believed that postmodernism in literature was of American origin. Ihab Hassan also developed the classification of postmodern literary techniques which then became classic. According to Ihab Hassan literature of any period is characterized by definite characteristics, which distinguish it from literature of any other period, and postmodern literature is not an exception. The following literary techniques are peculiar to postmodern literature, namely:

- irony, playfulness and black humor;
- pastiche;
- intertextuality;
- technoculture and hyperreality;
- metafiction;
- historiographic metafiction;
- temporal distortion;
- faction;
- paranoia;
- maximalism;
- minimalism;
- participation [1; 4; 6]. Let us consider them in more detail.

As it is stated on the website [Postmodernblog.tumblr.com](http://Postmodernblog.tumblr.com), postmodern writers often use *irony, playfulness and black humor* when they want to treat earnest subjects from a distant position. Contemporary scholars call these literary techniques the hallmarks of postmodern style.

*Pastiche* is based on combing various literary genres and styles in order to create something original. For instance, Thomas Pynchon's writing is distinguished by the abovementioned characteristic.

*Intertextuality* is based on the dependence of postmodern literature on different pieces of writing created earlier.

Postmodern writers use *metafiction* in order to make their readers aware of their presence. What is more, they often define it as writing about writing.

*Historical metafiction*, in its turn, is used when writers intent to fictionalize some historical events and people in their pieces of writing.

Next characteristic peculiar to postmodern American literature is *temporal distortion*. It is a literary technique, which allows writers to use some cultural and historical references, which are not consistent with the plot.

To reflect the fact the information age influences all spheres of our lives postmodern, writers use such a literary technique as *technoculture and hyperreality*. It allows writers to create different

situations in which main characters cannot escape modern science and technology.

*Paranoia* reflects the idea that modern society is very chaotic and intimidating. And impossibility to understand it brings to the usage of such a literary technique as paranoia.

Like historical metafiction, *faction* is based on real events which happen in our everyday lives. But unlike it, *faction* helps writers blur the clear line between fact and fiction in a book.

Postmodern American writers use *maximalism* to defend their long, emotionally disconnected and disorganized pieces of writing. As a matter of fact, it was widely used by modernist writers.

*Minimalism*, in its turn, is often used by postmodern writers who tend to depict ordinary characters and everyday situations. However, we have to admit that minimalism is not an exclusively postmodern literary technique.

Writers use *participation* in order to involve their readers over the course of a book they are reading. As a rule, participation allows readers to take decisions concerning the plot. This literary technique often takes the form of asking readers questions.

Contemporary scholars define *magical realism* as a postmodern technique, which helps writers introduce fantastic elements into a piece of writing [1; 4; 6].

While it is impossible to rank the most important postmodern American writers, here is a list of authors (with some biographical notes) you have to know about as they made an indisputable contribution to the development of literature of the USA.

Thus, America's most celebrated postmodern novelist is Toni Morrison who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Most literary critics regard her as an author who vividly depicts different aspects of life in contemporary American society.

"*The Bluest Eye*" (1970), "*Sula*", "*Song of Solomon*" (1977), "*Jazz*", "*Beloved*" (1988) and many others, which are characterized by her unique narrative technique and based on her great sense of equity, are among the most prominent novels by this outstanding American woman-writer.

In addition to her breathtaking novels, Toni Morrison is the author of short stories, a children's book and non-fiction, which includes stories, various reviews, essays, social and literary criticism [2; 3; 10].

Another American writer whose works contain various fresh ideas and culture resonance is Sandra Cisneros.

She is one of the first American women-writers of Mexican origin whose works are dedicated not only to different conflicts among city residents but also to social problems, which the common Mexican-American women face in their everyday lives [2; 3; 10].

Sandra Cisneros is the author of several poetry collections, novels and essays.

Most literary critics admit that her writing is full of different emotions and feelings among which alienation and degradation take an important place.

"*The House on Mango Street*" published in 1984 is one of the most prominent novellas written by Sandra Cisneros [9].

American literature of postmodern period is represented by various poets who deserve recognition as their literary work is inspirational and powerful. Even though the question of influence is a tricky one in the literary realm, the name of Claudia Emerson, is among the names of the most important postmodern poets.

She was honored the Pulitzer Prize in 2006 and later served as Virginia's poet laureate from 2008 to 2010. Claudia also won the

Association of Writers and Writing Programs Intro Award (1991), Academy of American Poets Prize (1991) and Erskine J. Poetry Prize (2004), etc.

Claudia Emerson's best collections of poems included *Pinion: An Elegy* (2002), *The Late Wife* (2006), *Figure Studies* (2008), *Secure the Shadow* (2012) and *The Opposite House* (2015).

In addition to these collections, her poems were also included in such anthologies as *Yellow Shoe Poets*, *The Made Thing*, *Strongly Spent: 50 Years of Shenandoah Poetry*, *Commonwealth: Contemporary Poets of Virginia*, etc.

Claudia Emerson is one of the finest American poets of her generation whose poems echo with remarkable insight into the true nature of life. Her poetry, which points out at the heart of life, includes such themes as the nature of faith, relationships between women and men, person's identity, death, love, memory, etc.

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr. is one of the most prolific American novelist and a short story writer. Contemporary scholars claim that his writing is distinguished by various genres and themes and call him a postmodern literary genius. Numerous readers admire him for his compelling novels including *"V."* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Bleeding Edge* (2013), etc.

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow was an American postmodern writer with standing reputation. He is acknowledged as one of the most restless experimenters of contemporary fiction.

Both numerous readers and literary critics admire his breathtaking novels such as *"Ragtime"*, *"Billy Bathgate"*, *"The March"*, *"The Book of Daniel"* etc.

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow's contributions to postmodern American literature countries are manifold. Confirmation of this view comes from the fact that most of his novels have been translated and published in more than 30 countries.

#### Conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Thus, the provided overview allows us to give a general description of American literature from a postmodern perspective, to observe different points of view on defining the term "postmodernism" in contemporary scientific literature, to offer biographic information about writers of the stated period, and to conduct a complex research of peculiarities of literary techniques widely used in the writing of postmodern authors.

However, the undertaken study is not at the end of all aspects of investigation of American literature of postmodern period. Challenging directions of further scientific research can be as follows: the investigation of Ukrainian and American postmodernist fiction from a comparative perspective.

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**Арістова Н. О. Американська література в ракурсі постмодернізму**

**Анотація.** У статті автор розглядає американську літературу в ракурсі постмодернізму. Обговорюються точки зору сучасних науковців щодо трактування сутності поняття «постмодернізм». Містяться загальна характеристика періоду постмодернізму, біографічні відомості про відомих американських письменників-постмодерністів, а також комплексне дослідження особливостей літератур-

них прийомів, широко вживаних у творах американських письменників-постмодерністів.

**Ключові слова:** американська література англомовних країн, постмодернізм, література постмодернізму, літературний прийом, письменник-постмодерніст, максималізм, мінімалізм, роман, поезія.

**Арістова Н. А. Американская литература в ракурсе постмодернизма**

**Аннотация.** В статье автор рассматривает американскую литературу в ракурсе постмодернизма. Обсуждаются точки зрения современных ученых на определение сущности понятия «постмодернизм». Содержатся общая характеристика периода постмодернизма, библиографические сведения об известных американских писателях-модернистах, а также комплексное исследование особенностей литературных приемов, широко используемых в произведениях американских писателей-постмодернистов.

**Ключевые слова:** американская литература, постмодернизм, литература постмодернизма, литературный прием, писатель-постмодернист, максимализм, минимализм, роман, поэзия.