

**POLYPHONIC IDENTITIES AND CULTURAL
MEMORY: MULTICULTURAL DISCOURSES IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE
(NATIVE AMERICAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, AND
LATINO NARRATIVES)**

Abstract

The article explores the multicultural panorama of contemporary American literature through the prism of Native American, Asian American, and Latino literary traditions. **The relevance** of this study is in the growing scholarly interest in multicultural dynamics within contemporary American literature, where the minority voices play a crucial role in shaping cultural memory and identity. In the context of globalization and the reinterpretation of historical narratives, the analysis of Native American, Asian American, and Latino literary texts as carriers of alternative discourses becomes especially significant.

The aim of this article is to give general overview on polyphonic identities and the cultural memory formation in contemporary American literature through the lens of multicultural writings (Native American, Asian American, and Latino). Thus, the objective of the article is to focus on multicultural discourse in Native American, Asian American, and Latino narratives.

Objectives. To prove that contemporary American literature is characterized by a plurality of voices reflecting complex identity formation processes in a multicultural society.

Results. Drawing on works by authors such as Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, Sherman Alexie, Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Amy Tan and others the article focuses on how literary texts negotiate questions of hybridity, migration, historical trauma, and cultural continuity. Special attention is given to narrative polyphony, mythopoetic reconstruction, and code-switching as tools for redefining American identity.

Conclusions. As a result, the research demonstrates that modern American literature is no longer centered on a singular cultural paradigm but instead represents a dynamic and dialogic space shaped by multiple ethnic voices. Multicultural narratives play a significant role in preserving and transforming cultural memory, facilitating a deeper understanding of identity formation and cultural interaction in a globalized world.

Key words: *multiculturalism, American literature, Native American literature, Asian American literature, Latino literature, cultural identity, postcolonial discourse.*

Н. Баняс, Т. Чонка, К. Лізак. ПОЛІФОНІЧНІ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ ТА КУЛЬТУРНА ПАМ'ЯТЬ: МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРНІ ДИСКУРСИ В СУЧАСНІЙ АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ (НАРАТИВИ КОРИННИХ АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ, АЗІАТСЬКО-АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ ТА ЛАТИНОАМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ АВТОРІВ)

Анотація

У статті досліджується мультикультурна панорама сучасної американської літератури крізь призму творчості

письменників корінного, азійсько-американського та латиноамериканського походження.

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростаючим інтересом до мультикультурних процесів у сучасній американській літературі, де поліфонія голосів етнічних меншин відіграє ключову роль у формуванні культурної пам'яті та ідентичності. В умовах глобалізації та переосмислення історичних наративів особливо важливим є аналіз художніх текстів корінних американців, азійських американців та латиноамериканських авторів як носіїв альтернативних дискурсів.

Метою статті є вивчення поліфонічних ідентичностей та формування культурної пам'яті в сучасній американській літературі крізь призму мультикультурних наративів (Native American, Asian American, Latino).

Завдання наукової розвідки – розглянути мультикультурний дискурс в наративах корінних американців, азійських американців та латиноамериканців.

Результати. У ході дослідження встановлено, що сучасна американська література характеризується багатоголоссям, яке відображає складні процеси формування ідентичності в мультикультурному суспільстві. Наративи етнічних меншин активно переосмислюють історичну пам'ять, створюючи альтернативні версії історії. Поліфонічність виступає важливим інструментом репрезентації культурного досвіду та міжкультурного діалогу. Мультикультурні наративи відіграють важливу роль у збереженні та трансформації культурної пам'яті, сприяючи глибшому розумінню процесів ідентифікації та культурної взаємодії в умовах глобалізованого світу.

Стаття дає загальний огляд ідентичності, історичної пам'яті, культурної спадщини та досвіду міграції. У творах таких авторів, як Скотт Момадей, Луїза Едрік, Шерман Алексі, Максін Хонг Кінгстон, Емі Тан, Леслі Мармон Сілко, Рудольфо Аная, Еріка Йонг та інших простежується переосмислення концептів національної приналежності, асиміляції, прикордонної свідомості та транскультурності.

Сучасна американська література функціонує як динамічний простір міжкультурного діалогу, у якому множинність голосів формує нову модель американської ідентичності. Мультикультурний дискурс виступає не лише художнім явищем, а й інструментом перегляду літературного канону та переосмислення поняття «американськість» у літературі XX–XXI століть.

Висновки. Отже, поліфонічні ідентичності у сучасній американській літературі формуються через взаємодію різних культурних голосів, що відображають багатовимірність соціального досвіду. Мультикультурні наративи відіграють важливу роль у збереженні та трансформації культурної пам'яті, сприяючи глибшому розумінню процесів ідентифікації та культурної взаємодії в умовах глобалізованого світу.

Ключові слова: мультикультуралізм, американська література, література корінних народів США, азійсько-американська література, латиноамериканська література США, культурна ідентичність, постколоніальний дискурс.

Introduction

Statement of the problem. Native American written literature is relatively young. The features typical to Indian culture, a feeling of deep kinship with nature, the predominantly

oral nature of the transmission of the narrative tradition, developed mythology, artistic syncretism continue to live in it. Contemporary American literature has increasingly evolved into a dynamic space of multicultural expression, where diverse ethnic voices challenge, reinterpret, and expand traditionally dominant narratives. Within this literary landscape, the concepts of polyphony, identity, and cultural memory have become central to understanding how marginalized communities articulate their experiences and negotiate their place in society. The growing prominence of Native American, Asian American, and Latino writers reflects a broader cultural shift toward recognizing the plurality of perspectives that constitute the American experience.

The notion of polyphony, originally theorized within literary studies as the coexistence of multiple independent voices within a text, offers a productive framework for examining how contemporary authors construct complex, layered identities. In multicultural narratives, polyphony transcends formal aesthetics and becomes a means of representing hybrid identities shaped by historical displacement, migration, colonization, and cultural interaction.

Cultural memory plays a crucial role in this process, serving both as a repository of collective experience and as a site of contestation. For Native American, Asian American, and Latino communities, literature becomes a medium through which suppressed histories are recovered and reimagined. Through storytelling, authors not only preserve cultural heritage but also actively engage in redefining identity in relation to both ancestral traditions and contemporary realities. As a result, literary texts function as spaces where memory and identity intersect, producing new forms of cultural meaning.

Polyphonic identities are constructed and cultural memory is negotiated within contemporary American multicultural literature. By focusing on Native American, Asian American, and Latino narratives, the study highlights the ways in which multiple voices interact, overlap, and sometimes conflict, creating a rich and nuanced discourse. Ultimately, the analysis aims to demonstrate that polyphony is a fundamental mechanism through which multicultural identities and memories are articulated in the modern literary context.

The relevance of this study is in the growing scholarly interest in multicultural dynamics within contemporary American literature, where the minority voices play a crucial role in shaping cultural memory and identity. In the context of globalization and the reinterpretation of historical narratives, the analysis of Native American, Asian American, and Latino literary texts as carriers of alternative discourses becomes especially significant.

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Objectives. To prove that contemporary American literature is characterized by a plurality of voices reflecting complex identity formation processes in a multicultural society.

A growing body of literature is devoted to the study of the phenomena of identity being constructed through history, culture, and power relations (Stuart Hall, 2019); understanding Asian American and Latino narratives, where identity is constantly negotiated between heritage culture and mainstream

American society (Homi K. Bhabha, 1994); the role of oral traditions and memory in shaping cultural identity and resilience (Scott Momaday, 1999); multiculturalism and cultural pluralism in American literature, voices and identity negotiation in late XX–early XXI centuries U.S. literature ((Nataliia Vysotska, N. O., 2010, 2012), evolution of multicultural narratives and literary memory (Tamara Denysova, 2012).

Reaserch methods

The methodological basis of our research is the thematology and philosophy of literature. We also used a comparative method of investigation to identify common and distinctive thematic and stylistic features across Native American, Asian American, and Latino texts. Cultural-historical method enables to contextualize literary works within socio-political processes, including migration, colonization, and civil rights movements.

Results and discussion

A value system based on harmony with nature allowed Native Americans to develop quite complex ideas about justice, equality, survival, sovereignty and shared responsibility for life, as well as the concept of the individual as a link in a chain connecting the past and the future.

In the works of contemporary Native American writers, these traditional points of reference are often incorporated into Eurocentric narrative structures. Their focus is on the social problems of reservations (poverty, alcoholism, lack of a future) and broader issues of cultural identity and relationships with nature.

One of the most vivid representatives of contemporary Indian literature in the USA is Scott Momaday. Writer and artist Scott Momaday is considered the founder of modern Indian

literature, the Native American Renaissance and its most significant representative. He declared himself with the multi-genre book *House made of Dawn* (1968), followed by the poetic "*The Way to Rainy Mountain*" (1969). In approaching the central problem of the Native American search for himself, Momaday combines the history and mythology of his tribe, personal observations, and creative imagination in an innovative conglomerate where the word coexists with the visual image. The book *House made of Dawn begins*: "There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain. And the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hill, and the plain was bright with different-colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. the land was still and strong." (Momaday, N. Scott, 1999: 8). Hana Konečná admitted in her BC thesis "Apart from the storytelling aspect, there are tribal beliefs and rituals described in the novel. Describing them suggests with the theme of the book, as it inevitably did prior to Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (e.g. Mourning Dove who intended to record the way of tribal life she led). This aspect was not, without doubt, the breath of fresh air into Native American Literature of the 70s but natural novel context".(Konečná H., 2007: 49)

The growth of Native American self-awareness in the writer's prose is largely conveyed through the unexpected and creative use of language. Among other authors, Leslie Marmon

Silko and Louise Erdrich received special approval from critics and the readership. Silko's very popular work *Ceremony* (1977) has the features of a "song novel", the structure of which reproduces the structural elements of healing rituals used by the Laguna Pueblo tribe (it deals with the return to a full life of a

young Indian, psychologically traumatized by participation in ethnic war and the unenlightened existence in the reservation).

Although some works of Asian Americans written in the 19th century have survived to our time, Asian-American literature as a whole body of texts was formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In recent decades it became not only a worthy stream of the pluralistic culture of the modern USA but also an object of serious interest of researchers. Asian American writers explore the experiences of racial and cultural minorities who have long been considered outsiders in America.

The term "Asian-American" itself covers people from various regions of Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.), with cultural differences no less significant than between them and white Americans. For more than a century, people with Asian roots in America were either denied representation at all or were depicted with the help of derogatory stereotypes. These people are said to have "dropped out of the textbooks" because their history was not recorded in written sources.

That is why the restoration of history - personal, family, ethnic - plays such a large role in Asian American literature. The neglected pages dealing with Asia in America fit into the national historical paradigm today. The genre of autobiography is popular, where the formation of a personality is traced in the context of a double identity. Modern writers, turning to this ancient genre variety, give it complex and inventive forms.

The most famous work of this type is Maxine Hong Kingston's book *Warrior Woman: Memories of Childhood Among Ghosts* (1976), which was included in school and university programs and translated into many languages of the world. This largely autobiographical work attempts to

synthesize two cultural models—the inherited Chinese and the acquired American—in a way that enriches both. For this purpose, Kingston resorts to a creative reinterpretation of Chinese mythology, in particular, the legend of the famous female warrior Fa Mulan, whose exploits and fate the protagonist, living in America in the middle of the 20th century, seems to try on herself. According to her, it is precisely by telling old myths "in a new, American way" that she provides them with further life. It comes true. "I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks." (M.H.Kingston, 1989: 136) Although the author was declared a feminist on the basis of this book, in subsequent novels (*The Chinese* (1980), *The Monkey Traveler: His Fake Book* (1989) she also explores male versions of the Asian-American experience.

Kingston paved the way in literature for her compatriots, such as Amy Tan, whose novel about two generations of Chinese-American women, mothers and daughters, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) held a high position on the national bestseller list for almost a year. The greatest success among Asian-American playwrights fell to David Henry Hwang (born in 1957), the author of the technically sophisticated play *M. Butterfly* (1986), aimed at destroying the stereotypes of the mass consciousness regarding East-West and male-female relations.

The creativity of Spanish-American writers (who are also called "Latino") is a relatively new phenomenon on the country's literary horizon; it covers different groups: Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and people from Central and South America. Nowadays, they are all sometimes combined under the

name "Chicanos", which originally applied only to people of Mexican origin. Today, they make up one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States with the highest rates of demographic growth. At the same time, it is one of the most problematic minorities due to a significant percentage of uneducated and unqualified people who often do not speak English.

The spiritual and cultural rise of Chicanos occurs in the 1960s-1980s, when, along with other achievements, their own literature is formed. Bilingualism became one of its defining features. Chicano writers widely use Spanish along with English, which creates a special artistic effect. The multiplicity of origins of Chicano literature causes the involvement of a number of powerful traditions in it. Among them are ancient Mexican ones, containing both the mythology and worldview of pre-Columbian civilizations (Aztecs and Mayans), as well as the influence of the Spanish conquests, in particular, the Catholic religion. At the same time, there is also a later Anglo-American component in this literature.

The leading Chicano writer is Rudolfo Anaya, author of the famous novel *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). In the center of the story is the story of the narrator, a teenager who dreams of serving his people by becoming a priest in the southwestern United States. An important place is occupied by the image of the old healer Ultima, which symbolizes the life-giving forces and ethnic folk roots of Mexican Americans. The protagonist faces a difficult moral dilemma how to reconcile the prescriptions of the Catholic faith with ancient magic? Other Spanish-American authors include the Pulitzer Prize-winning Cuban-born writer Oscar Hijuelos (the novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989), the novelist Sandra Cisneros (the

collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), poet, novelist, and essayist Gloria Anzaldúa, who proposed her own theory of Chicano literature, in which the leading role belongs to the concept of "border".

Usually, in the modern literary palette of the USA, other colors can be distinguished, since writers with different cultural "baggage" work in it - for example, in recent years, writers of Greek origins, such as radio journalist David Sedaris, the author of witty and shocking books, have been actively asserting themselves are based on his family history (e.g. *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2004).

The American component (that is, the English-language literary creativity of the descendants of Ukrainian immigrants) is also developing in the country. Its worthy spokesman is, in particular, Askold Melnyczuk. His first novel *What Is Told* (1994) combines an artistic and figurative commentary on the historical fate of Ukraine in a universal context with the violation of the problem of self-identification, urgent for the entire American culture of the second half of the last century. "The memorial practices of Melnyczuk's characters are typical of other immigrant groups and ethnic literatures: we deal with another new voice that at a certain point became part of the American literary landscape." (M. Koval, 2020: 128) *What Is Told* is a masterful novel that sprints across generations, centuries and continents. In a spirited narrative that travels from old Ukraine to New Jersey. "Indeed, Melnyczuk's breakout novel, *What Is Told*, was widely praised for the way it integrates the story of the Ukrainian past with the American present of its immigrant characters." (O. Poliukhovych, H. Fielding, 2019: 92).

At the level of poetics, the mythological layer, which owes its specific content to Ukrainian folklore, is mediated by a generally ironic postmodern tonality. So, the strength of the so-

called ethnic works of literature lies in their multi-rootedness, in their combination of cultural traditions of different regions, nations, and ethnic groups.

However, the modern multicultural panorama of American literature is not limited to them. There is also a feminist note in it, which was initiated by the program work of "social feminism" of the 1960s, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963), in which a woman's right to self-realization in professional activity was substantiated in a journalistic form. "For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity." (B. Friedan, 1963: 3) One of the most notable writers of this direction is Erika Jong and her novel *Fear of Flying* (1973) caused a wide resonance, because its heroine, the alter ego of the author Isadora Wing, seeks to "happen" primarily in the sexual sphere. The title of the work metaphorically embodies everything that prevents her from feeling free - inner stiffness, guilt, awareness of social conventions, etc. At the end of the work, after a series of journeys - both in the "real" time of the novel and in the depths of her own memory - Isadora gets rid of her "fear of flying" and comes to terms with her physicality: "I looked down at my body. The same. The pink V of my thighs, the triangle of curly hair, the Tampax string fishing the water like a Hemingway hero, the white belly, the breasts half floating, the nipples flushed and rosy from the steamy water. A nice body. Mine. I decided to keep it." (E. Jong, 2010: 73)

In addition to the time-marked writing of the heroine's thoughts about the always relevant problems of human relations, the novel attracts with its natural intonation - ironic and trusting at the same time. In recent decades, writers of non-traditional sexual orientation have come to the forefront of American literature (playwright Tony Kushner with the famous dramatic diptych *Angels in America*, poet Adrienne Rich and others), in the works of which this theme organically fits into the motif of the search for identity.

Culticultural discourses in contemporary American literature reveal the dynamic interplay between identity, memory, history, and cultural hybridity. Native American, Asian American, and Latino narratives challenge the traditional canon by foregrounding marginalized voices and reinterpreting national myths. Through themes of displacement, resistance, assimilation, and cultural preservation, these literatures reshape the understanding of what constitutes American identity. Ultimately, contemporary multicultural writing does not merely add diversity to American literature; it redefines it, presenting the United States as a complex, polyphonic space where multiple histories and perspectives coexist and continually transform one another. It is worth admitting that among other literary consequences of the "multiplicity revolution" in the USA, we should note the contribution of American authors to the development of postcolonial theory. A real "canon explosion" took place in the field of teaching and research of literature. It means revising the list of "must read" works, aimed at increasing the percentage of texts in it belonging to authors from previously marginalized groups (non-white, non-male, non-middle class). This process was accompanied (and continues to be accompanied) by fierce discussions, which were called "culture wars", because it is about fundamental changes in the approach

to the criteria for evaluating literature, which cannot but cause a clash of opinions.

Conclusion

The exploration of Native American, Asian American, and Latino writers in contemporary American literature reveals the profound complexity and plurality of cultural identities in the United States. Across their texts, the concept of polyphonic identity emerges as a central mechanism through which authors negotiate the tensions between personal, cultural, and national histories. Characters navigate layered identities that are simultaneously shaped by historical trauma, diasporic experiences, and the ongoing negotiation of social and political belonging.

Through the lens of cultural memory, these literary works illustrate how marginalized communities preserve and transmit their histories, values, and collective experiences across generations. For instance, Native American authors such as N. Scott Momaday emphasize the enduring impact of displacement and cultural survival, while Asian American authors like Maxine Hong Kingston grapple with intergenerational memory, gendered identity, and the negotiation of “home” within a diasporic context. Latino authors similarly engage with memory and identity, highlighting migration, hybridity, and the interplay of multiple cultural frameworks.

Their literary works not only reflect the lived realities of multicultural communities but also serve as acts of cultural preservation and resistance. By incorporating memory, oral traditions, authors foreground the value of plural perspectives, bridging historical consciousness with contemporary social critique.

Moreover, they demonstrate that cultural identity is not static but dynamically shaped through dialogue, memory, and the negotiation of difference. Literature thus functions as a vital medium for understanding the ongoing evolution of American society and the intersections of ethnicity, history, and identity. The study of these works highlights the necessity of embracing polyphony and cultural memory in literary scholarship, as it opens pathways to more inclusive interpretations of American literature.

To sum up, contemporary American literature, through its engagement with multiple voices, histories, and memories, offers a compelling reflection of the nation's multicultural fabric. The insights gained from Native American, Asian American, and Latino writings underscore the importance of literary polyphony fostering understanding, empathy, and critical reflection in the context of an increasingly diverse society.

Конфлікт інтересів. Автори декларують, що не мають конфлікту інтересів.

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