

*Viediarnikova T. V.,**Candidate of Philological Sciences,**Associate Professor at the Professor M. Hetmanets Department**of Theory and Practice of the English Language and Foreign Literature**H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University*

## CURRENT LITERARY TRENDS AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**Summary.** The English literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a multifaceted and dynamically developing phenomenon that reflects rapid changes in society, politics, and human consciousness. Under the influence of globalization, digital technology, social and political changes, the literature of Great Britain and the English-speaking world is transforming, preserving classical traditions while simultaneously mastering new forms of storytelling. This article examines the key features of the development of modern English literature, main trends, leading writers and promising directions for the future. This period is characterized by the intersection of tradition and innovation, the destruction of genre boundaries and active interaction with other forms of art. Investigation of English literary trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is crucial for understanding contemporary society, culture, and human experiences.

Modern English literature has gained significant attention from international scientists, who have analyzed its evolution, themes, and global impact. Foreign literary critics have observed that modern English literature increasingly reflects global perspectives, moving beyond traditional national boundaries. This shift is attributed to the rise of globalization and postcolonial studies, which encourage a more inclusive approach to literary analysis. Scholars emphasize the importance of considering diverse cultural contexts and the interconnection of global narratives in contemporary works.

Nowadays English literature is evaluated not just for its aesthetic value but for its relevance to contemporary issues, diverse voices, and innovative narration techniques. As literature continues to evolve, criticism adapts to new forms, technologies, and perspectives, making English literature a dynamic and ever-expanding field. The author presents the results of an analysis of traditional and innovative trends that can be traced in the works of leading contemporary writers.

**Key words:** modern English literature, literary trend, aesthetic tendency, genre, postcolonial writers, literary criticism, storytelling, 21<sup>st</sup> century novel, postmodernism.

**Statement of the problem in a general form and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.** The English literature is one of the richest and most interesting literatures in the world whose tradition has deep roots. There is hardly a person who has not heard anything about Shakespeare or Dickens. But it is obvious that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century English, or rather British, literature remains one of the leaders of the world literary process and books by Martin Amis, John Fowles, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan, Peter Ackroyd, Kazuo Ishiguro, perhaps, are the most published and read nowadays. English writers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and their works still stand apart from other English-language authors and texts. Subtle

humor, passion for history and social issues significantly distinguish English literary texts from the literature of other countries.

Modern English literature is topical because it provides insight into contemporary life, engages with global challenges, and continuously evolves with cultural and technological progress. It serves as both a reflection of and a response to the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, making its study significant for understanding today's world. It remains a vital field that reflects and criticizes the modern world, making it an essential subject in literary and cultural studies. The difficulty is that the literature of any country of contemporary period is still poorly studied. However, it is even more interesting and challenging to observe trends that have already clearly manifested themselves.

Contemporary English literature refers to literary works produced from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The evaluation of English literature has evolved over time as literary critics explore new trends, movements, and interpretations. Modern critics assess literature based on its engagement with contemporary issues, innovation in style, and its ability to represent cultural, political, and social transformations.

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have witnessed a significant transformation in literary criticism, with a notable increase in critical discourse. This period, often referred to as "The Age of Criticism", has seen scholars like T. S. Eliot contribute extensively to both poetry and criticism, highlighting the growing importance of analytical approaches in understanding literature. The emergence of ethical literary criticism has provided international scholars with frameworks to evaluate modern English literature through moral and ethical lenses. This approach examines the ethical dimensions of literary works, considering how narratives engage with moral questions and societal values. Such perspectives enrich the understanding of literature's role in reflecting and shaping ethical discourses.

**Analysis of the latest research and publications on this topic, selection of previously unresolved parts of the general problem.** Recent trends in comparative literature emphasize moving beyond nation-centric analyses, focusing instead on global and postcolonial perspectives. This approach allows to explore the transnational influences and themes present in modern English literature, acknowledging its evolution in a globalized world. Postcolonial English literature refers to literary works produced in formerly colonized countries, often addressing themes of colonialism, identity, resistance, and the impact of imperial rule.

There is an important contradiction in the understanding of the term "postcolonial" as applied to literature. The authors of the monograph "The Empire Writes Back" B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin characterize the culture of colonized peoples with this

term from the beginning of colonization to the present. It is notable that researchers call the literatures of African countries, Australia, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand and even the USA and other countries postcolonial. [1, p. 118].

P. Childs and P. Williams give a different definition of the time of formation and the essence of postcolonialism. For these scholars, “postcolonial” means “relating to a certain stage of imperialism”, represents the “globalization of capitalism” [2, p. 65]. At the same time, a theory is suggested that is alternative to the simple understanding of postcolonialism – as an exclusively modern state (Now) – and the complex – as an excursion into the past (Then and now). Researchers offer the formulation “anticipatory discourse” (Not quite yet), the paradox of which lies in the fact that the term containing the prefix “post” – means not yet an existing, but only becoming phenomenon [2, p. 68]. Issues and problems of postcolonialism are studied interdisciplinary direction, called “postcolonial theory” (or postcolonial studies). Its prominent representatives are Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha.

**The purpose of the article.** Modern English literature is marked by a rich tapestry of themes and critical approaches, reflecting the complexities of contemporary society. The relevance of the chosen topic is related to the increased interest to actual literary trends in the English literature from scientific foundations and is determined by the need to study the peculiarities of the English literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the context of its transformation. The purpose of the article is to analyze recent developments in literary studies since the early 2000s and to examine literature's role in reflecting and challenging societal shifts and evolving cultural perspectives of the century. Analyzing English literary trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is crucial for understanding contemporary society, culture, and human experiences.

**Presentation of the main material of the study with a full justification of the obtained scientific results.** Contemporary English literature has evolved through major historical shifts, from Victorian realism to Modernist experimentation, then to postcolonial and contemporary global narratives. Each period was influenced by historical, cultural, and social changes. Today, it continues to expand, reflecting new challenges in an interconnected world.

The Victorian era (1837–1901) emphasized moral values, realism, and industrial progress. However, by the late 19th century, increasing skepticism about religion, empire, and industrialization led to literary shifts. World War I (1914–1918) shattered traditional beliefs, leading to disillusionment, fragmentation, and experimentation in literature. Writers rejected linear storytelling and embraced stream of consciousness and psychological depth. After World War II (1939–1945), English literature reflected the war trauma exploring themes of existential crisis, absurdity and moral ambiguity. As Britain's empire declined, writers from former colonies “redefined English literature, focusing on themes of colonialism, identity, and cultural hybridity” [3, p. 224].

Modernism (c. 1900–1945) was a reaction to industrialization, World War I, and changing perceptions of reality. It featured experimental techniques, fragmented narratives, and a focus on subjectivity and introspection.

Late 20th century witnessed that English literature became global, incorporating diverse voices from different ethnic backgrounds. Themes of migration, diaspora, and race gained prominence. Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century addresses issues like climate change, digital life, and Post-Brexit identity. The rise of self-pub-

lishing, online literature, and AI-generated texts has transformed storytelling nowadays. Modern English literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues the traditions of the past, but also forms new directions. The literary process has become more hybrid: traditional genres intersect with experimental forms, and fiction actively interacts with non-fiction.

Taking into account the current stage of development of British literature, we can outline the main trends in its development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that, in fact, define the face of modern English literature and specify distinctive features of its dynamics.

*Postmodernism and its evolution.* Although postmodernism reached its peak in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its influence continues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but acquires a more meaningful and philosophical character. However, contemporary authors are moving away from radical postmodern playwriting, satire and all-out deconstruction, replacing them with deeper psychological and social research. “Many authors do not just play with texts, but use postmodern techniques to deeply analyze reality” [4, p. 92]. It is characterized by Metanarrative and self-irony, intertextuality and rethinking the classics, open endings, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction. Julian Barnes considers “The Sense of an Ending” (2011) as a reflection on memory and the subjectivity of perception of the past, combining realism with philosophical reflection. Barnes masterfully blends fiction with philosophical and historical themes, often questioning the nature of truth and memory. Yann Martel in his novel “Life of Pi” (2001) highlights a combination of allegory and philosophical parable. Ian McEwan uses metafiction but focuses on the moral aspects of the story “Atonement” (2001).

*New type of Realism.* Modern realism has moved away from the classical forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and adapted to the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides, the realistic tradition remains an important part of English literature, but now it is enriched with new techniques: psychological depth, focus on the internal conflicts and experiences of the characters, fragmentation of the narrative. Many contemporary works present a mosaic narrative that conveys the complexity of perceiving the world. The introduction of documentary and autobiographical chronicles. The line between reality and fiction is becoming increasingly blurred. At the center of the story is not just the outside world, but the psychological complexity of the characters, the influence of society on the individual and a detailed depiction of everyday life. Sub-directions include: psychological realism with emphasis on the inner world of characters, their emotions and memories, social realism with analysis of problems of society, politics, economic, documentary realism is a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction. Ian McEwan wrote a psychological novel “Atonement” (2001) that explores the theme of guilt and redemption. Sally Rooney's novel “Normal People” (2018) is a minimalist story about complex relationships in modern society. S. Rooney is considered to be the voice of the millennial generation, “writing about relationships, mental health, and social dynamics with minimalist yet deeply emotional prose” [5].

*Dystopia and post-apocalypse.* Contemporary writers turn to dystopian scenarios, comprehending the threats of global warming, technological progress and political control. Against the backdrop of political instability, climate change and scientific progress, dystopias have acquired new relevance. Unlike the classic novels of Orwell and Huxley, modern dystopias focus on social and ethical issues such as information control, artificial intelligence, and genetic

technology. Margaret Atwood's "The Testaments" (2019) can be treated as a continuation of "The Handmaid's Tale" with new interpretations of women's fate in a totalitarian society. Kazuo Ishiguro presents "Clara and the Sun" (2021) – a reflection on the future of humanity and artificial intelligence. Ian McEwan's "Machines Like Me" (2019) represents an alternative reality in which robots coexist with humans. Ian McEwan is known for his psychological depth and precise prose. His novels often deal with moral dilemmas and the unpredictability of human behavior.

*Feminist literature and the deconstruction of gender.* The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of rethinking of gender stereotypes and traditional roles in literature and the struggle for equality. Female characters gain more depth, and themes of violence, oppression and the search for freedom become central. Literature doesn't just talk about women, but also reimagines traditional narratives and explores identity and social constraints. Peculiar features of this trend: an exploration of female subjectivity and criticism of patriarchal structures. For instance, Bernadine Evaristo's "Girl, Woman, Other" (2019) is a novel about the lives of black women in Britain. Evaristo is a pioneer in contemporary British literature, using experimental forms and polyphonic narratives to explore identity, race, and gender. Jennifer Egan with her novel "The Tin Drummer" (2010) explores the themes of gender and the digital age including chapters in PowerPoint presentation format. Margaret Atwood in the "The Testaments" (2019) continues the development of the dystopian theme of female subjugation. Atwood's works often explore feminism, power structures, and speculative dystopian futures. Her literary influence extends beyond fiction into activism and social critique.

*Magical realism, mythological consciousness and return of ethics to literature.* In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a shift away from the extreme relativism of postmodernism towards ethical issues related to social justice, historical memory, and the environment. "English literature nowadays continues the traditions of magical realism, but adapts them to modern realities" [6, p. 85]. Magic and myths become not just a decoration for the plot, but a way of philosophical understanding of reality. Salman Rushdie in his "Quixote" (2019) combines mythology and modern reality. Rushdie's use of magical realism and historical allegory has made him one of the most significant literary figures of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Mohsin Hamid's work "Vanishing Light" (2017) interprets magical realism and political allegory to reflect on migration.

*Experimental prose and postmodern forms.* Literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century actively uses non-standard forms of storytelling: a break in chronology, fragmentation, hypertextuality, the influence of digital technologies. Ali Smith tries to connect stream of consciousness, philosophical reflection and experimentation with language in the novel "Autumn" (2016). Smith is a writer known for her playful language and innovative storytelling, often engaging with contemporary political and social issues. Another example of a hybrid of prose, poetry and dramatic text is Max Porter's "Grief is the Thing with Feathers" (2015). Many critics admit another tendency – the revival of interest in nonfiction. Mixing fiction and documentary storytelling is becoming increasingly popular. The authors explore real events, comprehending them through the prism of personal experience or artistic analysis. Rebecca Solnit compares essayism with literary journalism in her work "Men Explain Things to Me" (2014). George Saunders in his "Lincoln in the Bardo" (2017) uses historical documents in a fictional novel.

*Literature of the future: digital technologies and multimedia.* The emergence of social media and digital platforms is changing both the way literature is written and the way literature is distributed. Many modern novels contain elements of blogs, texts from instant messengers and posts from social networks. The majority of authors use not only traditional book forms, but also digital media, interacting with Internet culture, and creating hypertextual works. Jonathan Safran Foer published a novel "Here I Am" (2016) that includes references to social networks and digital technologies. Mark Danilevsky produced "The Familiar" is a series of books with innovative typography that imitates the digital age. Lauren Oliver and other writers actively use instant messaging and internet culture in their storytelling [7, p. 29].

*The impact of multiculturalism and globalization.* Modern English literature is no longer exclusively "national". It actively includes writers with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. English literature is no longer confined to the UK or the US. Writers from India, Africa, the Caribbean, and other non-Western regions contribute actively, bringing diverse perspectives and cultural influences. Authors like Salman Rushdie, Chimamanda Adichie, and Arundhati Roy blend local traditions with global themes, expanding the definition of English literature. British and American authors explore themes of migration, identity and cultural clash, hybridity, and postcolonialism. Mohsin Hamid's novel "Vanishing Light" (2017) explores the plight of refugees through magical realism. Bernadine Evaristo presents a polyphonic narrative of the lives of black women in Britain in the novel "Girl, Woman, Other" (2019). Books like "White Teeth" (2000) by Zadie Smith and "The Namesake" (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri examine the complexities of cultural assimilation and diaspora. Z. Smith is known for her sharp social commentary, humor, and ability to capture multicultural experiences in modern Britain. Globalization has enriched English literature by making it more inclusive, diverse, and reflective of contemporary global experiences. It has allowed literature to transcend borders, fostering greater cultural exchange and understanding. The challenge for 21<sup>st</sup> century English literature is to balance global diversity with the preservation of national literary heritage.

*Englishness in a Post-Brexit Era.* Researchers note the revival of English identity in the genre of "novel about the state of the nation," where the authors analyze social processes against the backdrop of significant socio-political events. For example, Jonathan Coe's trilogy "Middle England" (2018) which describes the crisis of the English political system and its impact on personal relationships. The concept of Englishness in the postmodern novel examines how contemporary authors such as Graham Swift and Peter Ackroyd redefine national identity through historical and cultural symbols. Modern English literature rejects a fixed, traditional English identity, instead portraying it as fluid, multicultural, and contested. Writers challenge historical narratives, incorporate global perspectives, and redefine Englishness in a rapidly changing world. The question "Who is English?" remains central to contemporary storytelling, with literature offering multiple, often conflicting, answers [8, p. 145].

*Issues of memory, rethinking the past and history.* World literature, including British literature, often turns to the past. This trend is not new, however, many novels with past reflection appeared in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Literary exploration of Britain's past is essentially an exploration of wounds, both personal and national. Here we can



distinguish two types of works – literature that explores social history and collective trauma, and literature that examines an individual experiencing a crisis against the backdrop of traumatic events in the country. In the first case, the author shows the role of collective memory, and in the second – individual memory [9, p. 103]. Although, both types of texts study memories. Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Buried Giant" (2015) is an exploration of collective memory and guilt wrapped in a fantasy novel, a story about the duty to remember and the desire to forget. Deborah Levy's "The man who saw everything" (2019) is a phantasmagoric novel about memory, perception and the cyclical nature of history.

*Experiments with Language and Form.* The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen radical experimentation with language and literary form, influenced by digital technology and evolving cultural identities. Writers challenge traditional storytelling methods, blending genres, altering narrative structures, and playing with linguistic innovation. Modern novels often break linear storytelling, using fragmented or circular structures to mirror contemporary disorientation. Ali Smith's in "Seasonal Quartet" (2017) uses nonlinear time shifts to reflect Brexit-era uncertainty. David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas" (2012) interweaves six interconnected stories across different time periods in a layered, experimental format. Multilingualism has influenced English literature by introducing code-switching, dialects, and multilingual storytelling. Junot Díaz's novel "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" (2007) combines English, Spanish, and Spanglish, creating a hybrid linguistic experience. Bernardine Evaristo mixes formal and informal English, Caribbean dialects, and African vernaculars in his "Girl, Woman, Other" (2019).

**Research conclusions and prospects for further research in this scientific direction.** The English literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is in constant development, adapting to new realities and challenges of the time. Contemporary English literature continues the traditions of realism, postmodernism and modernism, but at the same time represents them in the light of new social and technological changes. The main artistic and aesthetic features are the hybridity of genres, deep psychological reflection, experimentation with language and the search for new forms of storytelling. Many scholars highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of modern English literature, emphasizing its global connection, ethical considerations, and the expanding scope of literary criticism. These perspectives underscore the importance of viewing English literature within a broader, more inclusive context.

Writers like Kazuo Ishiguro and Ian McEwan explore deep psychological and philosophical themes, while Zadie Smith and Bernardine Evaristo focus on multiculturalism and social justice. The continued success of historical fiction (Hilary Mantel), dystopian literature (Margaret Atwood), and millennial fiction (Sally Rooney) shows the diversity of contemporary storytelling. Moreover, contemporary literature addresses urgent global issues, including climate change (Richard Powers), post-Brexit identity (Ali Smith), and political instability (Margaret Atwood). The rise of autofiction reflects a trend toward personal, introspective storytelling. Writers experiment with new forms to capture the complexities of contemporary life, ensuring that literature remains a vital force in understanding modern human experiences.

Thus, in the future, we can expect further development of hybrid genres, strengthening of documentary, increased interaction with multimedia, development of digital literature, delving

into philosophical and social issues and expansion of the boundaries of literary discourse.

#### **Bibliography:**

1. Ashcroft B., Griffiths G., Tiffin H. The Empire Writes Back. N. Y. : Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004. 296 p.
2. Childs P., Williams R. J. P. An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory. N. Y. : Prentice Hall, 1997. 240 p.
3. Wagner H. P. A History of British, Irish and American Literature / H. P. Wagner. – Trier, 2010. 579 p.
4. Dell K. The Family Novel in North America from Post war to Post Millennium : A Study in Genre . VDM Verlag, 2008. 248 p.
5. Ako E. O. From Commonwealth to Postcolonial Literature // CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 6. 2 (2004). URL: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol6/iss2/1>.
6. Bentley N. Contemporary British Fiction: Edinburgh Critical Guides. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2008. 264 p.
7. Hayles, N. Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary. University of Notre Dame Press, 2008. 121 p.
8. Loewenstein D., Mueller M. J. The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature. Cambridge University Press, 2003. 320 p.
9. Durant A., Fabb N. Literary Studies in Action / A. Durant, N. Fabb. – London : Routledge, 1990. 224 p.

#### **Ведернікова Т. Провідні літературні напрями та особливості сучасної англійської літератури у XXI столітті**

**Анотація.** Англійська література XXI століття – багатогранне явище, що постійно й динамічно розвивається. Під впливом глобалізації, цифрових технологій, соціальних і політичних змін література Великої Британії та англосфери трансформується, зберігаючи класичні традиції, водночас опановуючи нові форми оповідання. У статті розглядаються ключові риси розвитку сучасної англійської літератури, основні тенденції, провідні письменники та перспективні напрями на майбутнє. Цей період характеризується перетином традицій і новаторства, руйнуванням жанрових кордонів і активною взаємодією з іншими видами мистецтва. Дослідження англійських літературних тенденцій 21 століття має вирішальне значення для розуміння сучасного суспільства, культури та людського досвіду.

Сучасна англійська література привертає значну увагу міжнародних дослідників, які продовжують аналізувати її еволюцію, теми та глобальний вплив. Літературознавці відзначають, що сучасна англійська література все більше відображає глобальні перспективи, виходячи за традиційні національні кордони. Цей зсув пояснюється зростанням глобалізації та постколоніальних досліджень, які заохочують більш інклюзивний підхід до літературного аналізу. Науковці наголошують на важливості врахування різноманітних культурних контекстів і взаємозв'язку глобальних наративів у сучасних творах. Сьогодні вчені оцінюють англійську літературу не лише за її естетичну цінність, але й за її відповідність сучасним проблемам, різноманітні голоси та інноваційні техніки оповідання. Оскільки література продовжує розвиватися, критика адаптується до нових форм, технологій і перспектив, роблячи сучасну англійську літературу динамічною та постійно розширюваною сферою. В роботі представлено огляд традиційних і інноваційних тенденцій, які відображені в роботах сучасних англійських письменників.

**Ключові слова:** сучасна англійська література, літературний напрям, естетична тенденція, жанр, постколоніальні письменники, літературна критика, роман 21-го століття, постмодернізм.