

WOMEN WRITERS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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The article is dedicated to a wide range of literary writings by contemporary American women writers. The rich complexity and diversity of contemporary American literature are analyzed. Questions about race, class and gender which women writers raise in the novels are discussed in the article. A brief overview of creative work of Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros is given. Main literary works in which these women writers reflect on their experiences are analyzed in the article. **Keywords:** contemporary American literature, women writers, novel, vignette, character, novelist.

Introduction. Contemporary American literature which reflects the life and culture of an ethnically and racially diverse country is characterized by a huge increase in the creative work of women writers who raise powerful questions about race, class and gender. Although American women writers made great contributions to important literary movements in twentieth and twenty-first century literature of the USA, they have been denied respectable literary voices for a long period of time. Everything changed in the 1970s during the second wave of American feminism when creative work of women writers began to receive long overdue attention. Thus, the **main purpose** of the following article is to provide a brief overview of the creative work of contemporary American women writers and their biographic notes in order to reflect retrospectively on developments throughout the contemporary period in American literature, to understand who the American women writers are and what they have in common.

Presentation of basic material of research. Contemporary American women writers who contributed significantly to the literature of the USA during the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries represent diversity in terms of their ethnicity. Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros are only a few names of women writers who reflect a rich complexity of contemporary American literature in their creative works and who are discussed in the following article.

America's most celebrated novelist is Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford) who won the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature for being an author and who vividly depicts different aspects of American reality.

Toni Morrison was born in a black working-class family on February 18, 1931 in Ohio (the USA) and showed a keen interest in literature since early childhood. Toni graduated from Lorain High School with honors in 1949. Then she studied the humanities at Howard and Cornell Universities, followed by an academic career at Texas Southern University, Howard University and Yale.

A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters since 1981, she has been awarded a number of literary distinctions, among them the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

«*The Bluest Eye*», «*Sula*», «*Song of Solomon*», «*Jazz*», «*Beloved*» and many others which are characterized by her unique narrative technique and based on her great sense of equity are among the best known novels by this outstanding American writer. In addition to her breathtaking novels, Toni Morrison is the author of short stories, a children's book and nonfiction which includes stories various reviews, essays, social and literary criticism [5; 6].

Her first novel which was called «*The Bluest Eye*» and was published in 1970 is the quest for cultural and individual identity and perception of beauty [3]. In «*The Bluest Eye*» Toni Morrison shows a cruel picture of the United States of 1900's where fami-

ly values, love and affection are destroyed because of racial issues. Experienced racism firsthand, Toni Morrison raises a powerful question about racial discrimination in «*The Bluest Eye*».

The main heroine of this creative work is a black girl who is eleven. Her name is Pecola Breedlove and she is mocked by everyone for her dark skin and brown eyes. Pecola expects love but instead she is rewarded with hatred and told that she has been ugly: *Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always ... Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond. She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say. «Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!» and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused* [3, p. 45].

Pecola is constantly dreaming about having blue eyes and believes that if she had them her life would be completely different from what it is now: *It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, «Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes»* [3, p. 46].

She is treated rudely by everyone even her parents since they all believe in the white standards of beauty: *Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family – Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove – wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their con-*

viction. *It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, «You are ugly people.» They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. «Yes,» they had said. «You are right.» And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way [3, p. 38].*

At the end of the novel Pecola Breedlove who dreams about blue eyes and blond hair loses her mind: *She, however, stepped over into madness, a madness that protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end [3, p. 206].*

«*The Bluest Eye*» in which the main character is portrayed as the scapegoat of society where the white want to treat down the existence of the black is an astonishing example of how racism can ruin a life of any person.

The next novel which was well received by critics is «*Song of Solomon*» was published in 1977 in the wake of the Black Power movements, the main aim of which was the achievement of social and political change.

The main hero is Macon «Milkman» Dead. Macon who is depicted as spiritually dead is estranged from his family, community, historical and cultural roots. But with the help of his best friend and his aunt he manages to reconnect with his past and realize his self-worth.

In the novel «*Song of Solomon*» main characters are searching not only for freedom and liberation but for love and identity as well [9].

«*Beloved*» which Toni Morrison dedicated to millions of slaves who died in the trans-Atlantic journey to the USA won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 [1; 2].

Sethe who is the protagonist of this novel was a slave but escaped slavery fleeing to another state. Unfortunately, many years later she is still not free. Her new home is haunted by the ghost of her baby whom she killed. Although Sethe doesn't spend much time in jail for the crime, she spends most of her life paying for the murder.

«*Beloved*» clearly makes us think about history of slavery in the USA and powerlessness of slaves who were constantly abused by the white slave owners:

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too.

Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her.

*Bare feet and chamomile sap.
Took off my shoes; took off my hat.
Bare feet and chamomile sap
Gimme back my shoes; gimme back my hat.
Lay my head on a potato sack,
Devil sneak up behind my back.
Steam engine got a lonesome whine;
Love that woman till you go stone blind.
Stone blind; stone blind.
Sweet Home gal make you lose your mind [2, 138].*

Another contemporary American novelist, short-story writer, essayist and poetess whose works are great in fresh ideas and culture resonance is Sandra Cisneros. She is one of the first American writers whose works brought the perspective of Mexi-

can-American (Chicana) women into the mainstream of literary feminism.

Sandra Cisneros was born on the 20th December, 1954, in Chicago. Although Sandra grew up mainly in Chicago, she often visited her father's relatives in Mexico.

Sandra was educated in Catholic schools and at Chicago's Loyola University, where she took a B.A. in 1976. She was admitted to the prestigious writer's workshop at the University of Iowa and was awarded the M.F.A. degree in 1978.

Sandra Cisneros is the author of some poetry collections, novels, essays and a book for juveniles. By and large her literary works are dedicated to feelings of alienation and degradation which are associated with poverty, divided cultural loyalties and different conflicts among the residents of a city district [7; 8].

One of the most famous novels written by Cisneros is «*The House on Mango Street*» which was published in 1983. The main protagonist, a Latina girl named Esperanza Cordero, describes the lives of Mango Street residents in a collection of vignettes which creates a whole novel. It also shows how Esperanza makes friends, develops her first crush, endures sexual assault and starts to write as both a way of expressing herself and a way to escape crowded Latino neighborhood where she lives.

Esperanza Cordero who moves with her family to a house on Mango Street depicts different characters, their cultural backgrounds and the way these characters are affected by poverty and restrictions of prescribed in the society gender roles: *We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there'd be one more of us. By the time we got to Mango Street we were six – Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me [4].*

The girl is ashamed about her family's poverty and name which is difficult to pronounce:

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name – Magdalena – which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza [4].

Her bitter experience of being raped forces her to mature extensively and the girl has a strong desire to escape the neighborhood and have her own house: *Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after [4].*

I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong.

We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to.

I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says good-bye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free [4].

Although most of these vignettes are painful and sad, Sandra Cisneros doesn't write them with a sense of despair. Instead her main character displays a determination to persevere, to reach and to dream of a better life.

«*The House on Mango Street*» gives both solace and realistic lessons about cultural division, injustice

and loneliness. It is also distinguished by a great sense of optimism of its author.

Conclusions. The provided overview allows us to conclude that contemporary American literature helps its readers to construct their own perception of the multi-ethnic society where many different races, cultures and religions live together alongside each other. It is represented by a wide range of literary works in which women writers reflect on their experiences shaped by culture, color and gender. They have great respect for the value and importance of each individual and tend to emphasize the equality of all people regardless of their gender, ethnic or religious background.

The main common feature of the creative work of these contemporary American women writers is

that although main characters created and found on the pages of their novels are completely different and their lives are full of misery, hatred, grief, despair and infinite sufferings, they are searching for who they are, struggling to find their place in the present-day world, striving for better lives without emotional pain and physical distress and are steadfast in adversity.

Prospects of further research. However, the undertaken study is not at the end of all aspects of investigation of creative work of contemporary American women writers throughout the contemporary period in American literature. Challenging directions of further scientific research can be as follows: the investigation of creative work by Claudia Emerson as a lacuna in the receptive practice of contemporary Ukrainian literature.

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ЖІНКИ ПИСЬМЕННИЦІ У СУЧАСНІЙ АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ

Анотація

Стаття присвячена широкому колу літературних творів сучасних американських жінок письменниць. Проаналізована багатогранність та різноманітність сучасної американської літератури. У статті обговорюються расові, класові і гендерні питання, які жінки письменниці ставлять у своїх романах. Проведено короткий огляд творчості Тоні Моррісон та Сандри Сіснерос. Проаналізовані основні художні твори, в яких жінки письменниці роздумують про свій життєвий досвід.

Ключові слова: сучасна американська література, жінки письменниці, роман, літературний нарис, персонаж, романіст.

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена широкому кругу литературных произведений современных американских женщин писательниц. Проанализирована многогранность и разнообразие современной американской литературы. В статье обсуждаются расовые, классовые и гендерные вопросы, которые женщины писательницы ставят в своих романах. Проведен краткий обзор творчества Тони Моррисон и Сандры Сиснерос. Проанализированы основные художественные произведения, в которых женщины писательницы размышляют о своем жизненном опыте.

Ключевые слова: современная американская литература, женщины писательницы, роман, литературный набросок, персонаж, романист.