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## THE CONCEPT OF TIME IN AMERICAN LITERATURE THROUGH THE LENS OF METAMODERN PERCEPTION

**Abstract.** *Time, as a basic concept of physics and philosophy, being an obligatory coordinate of our world, is present in modern American literature, both as an artistic effect that adorns the narrative, a tool for creating artistic reality, and as a system that changes the way of thinking. The action of the laws of time extends both to a person and to a literary work, but modern literature adapts these laws to fiction needs and experiments with its flow within a work. This article examines the artistic aspects of various concepts of time in modern American literature (starting from the end of XX to its current state) and their influence on the reader through the lens of the transition from postmodern to metamodern philosophical worldview provoked by the actual level of science development, globalization, and digitalization as well as the interaction of human perception of these processes and reactions to them with contemporary literary trends.*

**Key words:** *fiction; literature; metamodernism; philosophy; postmodernism; physics; science; time.*

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## КОНЦЕПЦІЯ ЧАСУ В АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ КРИЗЬ ПРИЗМУ МЕТАМОДЕРНОГО СПРИЙНЯТТЯ

**Анотація.** *Час, як базове поняття фізики та філософії, що є обов'язковою координатою нашого світу, присутній у сучасній американській літературі і як художній ефект, що прикрашає оповідь, як інструмент створення художньої реальності, і як система, що змінює спосіб мислення. Дія законів часу поширюється як на людину, так і на літературний твір, але сучасна література адаптує ці закони до потреб художнього твору та експериментує з його внутрішнім часом. У цій статті розглядаються художні аспекти різних концепцій часу в сучасній американській літературі (від кінця ХХ до її сучасного стану) та їх вплив на читача крізь призму переходу від постмодерністського*

до метамодерного філософського світогляду, спровокованого актуальним рівнем розвитку наук, глобалізацією та цифровізацією, а також взаємовплив людського сприйняття цих процесів та реакції на них сучасних літературних тенденцій.

**Ключові слова:** *література; метамодернізм; наука; постмодернізм; фантастика; фізика; філософія; час.*

Each historical epoch inherited from the previous set of knowledge and beliefs, stereotypes, and

images that influence the cultural unconscious of entire peoples. The unique cultural features of a certain period in the development of mankind become the key to understanding of intellectual research philosophy and action psychology of contemporaries of a certain era. In *Metamodern Guide to Politics*, The Listening Society, sociologist Daniel Görtz and artist Emil Ejner Friis, writing under the pseudonym Hanzi Freinacht, emphasize the pres-

ence of "... a qualitative difference between the various cultural codes available to contemporary people, and that this difference arises from the logic of the semantic structures available to individuals and groups, but not because of their cognitive level. Each such code includes a set of tools consisting of interrelated symbols that are used to interpret the world. The symbolic toolkit determines how a person sees the world and acts in it" (Freinacht, 2017, p. 212). This cultural code becomes a kind of time stamp in literature and influences its artistic messages, the topics it touches on, and the methods it uses. Time becomes both an object of study and a tool that creates artistic reality.

The process of development of literature in different countries and in different eras was characterized by general trends that depend on the human's worldview. At the turn of the millennium, the post-industrial world, having reached a serious stage of globalization, entered a period of digitalization, when science reached depths inaccessible to complete cognitive coverage by the human mind, but any knowledge was available to a person who was able to use the Internet.

The literature reflected the cultural impression of mankind, oversaturated with information, by another turn from the author to the reader. Based on the scientific achievements of mankind, it adopted the philosophy of modernism, which believes that science and rationality are able to liberate people and that physics is the basis of reality, approaching it with the irony inherent in postmodernism, which critically evaluates the possibilities of cognition and the power of science, which believes that humanity itself has created schemes and structures into which a person seeks to squeeze in with his individual consciousness weighed down by unconscious impulses and cognitive deviations.

This cultural dualism gave rise to thoughts about the beginning of a new social movement of metamodernism that arose in the contemporary era of metamodernism at the turn of the millennium among scholars of literature and art. The Dutch philosopher Robin van den Akker and the Norwegian media theorist Timotheus Vermeulen framed their observations of cultural characteristics that manifested themselves in all spheres of human activity from politics to art, from literature to cinema in the period from the late 20th century to the present in their essay "Notes on Metamodernism", published in 2010 in the *Journal of Aesthetics*

& Culture: "Metamodernism... oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern" (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010).

Looking for certain signs that allow us to attribute certain literary works not to modernism or postmodernism, but to a new direction that has its own cultural characteristics, literary critics in many countries have put forward various theories confirming and contradicting each other. The versatility of such a phenomenon as literature, the multi-level meanings, and artistic forms complicate the process of distinguishing between different works according to the degree of belonging to certain cultural trends. While postmodernism is afraid of expressing the sincerity of serious feelings, challenging straightforward truths, metamodernism is ready to believe in the inexplicable and openly show sentimentality. "The central motivation of metamodernism is to protect interior, subjective felt experience from the ironic distance of postmodernism, the scientific reductionism of modernism, and the pre-personal inertia of tradition" (Dember, 2019).

A new sense of self appears in the literature written by authors who can be called the "heirs" of the postmodern tradition. New heroes have a deep center and psychological integrity. This feeling is conveyed in reading, as contemporary literature uses narrative strategies that appeal to the reader and allow him to identify with the character or narrator. Such narrative is characteristic of modern American literature, it involves the reader into solving family difficulties and problems including ethical issues.

This renewed interest in plain storytelling revived a commitment to traditional literary forms, such as the realistic or historical novel, or the family saga. *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace is a novel that inherits the irony of postmodernism, distrust of grand narratives, and emphasis on symbols and contexts, supported by a large number of footnotes, which in turn have their own footnotes. But in the fight against the linearity of the text, Wallace maintains the integrity of the narrative in his complex semi-parodic narrative about the future of America, touching on many aspects of society

from politics to family and personal psychological traumas. The family saga or rather memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) by Dave Eggers has elements of a postmodern game with the reader, which the author warns about in the preface offering rules for reading, but the fantasy elements and time compression increase the emotional effect, and the new sincerity, reinforced by self-reflection and self-irony brings the work closer to metamodernism. Metamodernism has not yet developed into a philosophy or a coherent system; its postulates are vague and controversial, but it asks many questions that are relevant to today, making the new cultural direction particularly timely and neoteric. Can social processes contribute to personal development? Can humanity create its own microclimate that promotes development at the local and global levels? Can life and personality finally become the main values of society?

In the era of universal literacy, the triumph of science and artificial intelligence, the world does not leave the feeling of an approaching catastrophe: the problems of ecology, social inequality, and military instability return literary thought to studies of the nature of reality, the world and being. These metaphysical questions are quite appropriate in the new paradigm of metamodernism.

Specific concepts of the world order are considered in Niffenegger's novel *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003), which describes an unusual love story of two characters in its development in a space-time continuum based on a static concept of time, which treats all events of the present, past and future as existing simultaneously. This story, presented in the form of a diary, makes the reader feel the passage of time in an unusual sequence and, despite the complexity of the temporal structure, empathize with the characters, clearly seeing the parallels in their own lives.

Another representative of metamodernism in science fiction is the American writer Ted Chiang. His novel *Story of Your Life* (2002) tells about a woman scientist who, as a linguist, studies the language of aliens who have arrived on Earth and gets acquainted with their picture of the world based on physical laws that are not characteristic of our system, and it changes her perception of reality. According to the aliens' paradigm, time does not flow sequentially, but simultaneously, that is, everything exists at the same moment. This concept of time is

not clear to our contemporary but is scientifically explained by Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

The basis of the story is the Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, which believes that language affects the worldview and way of thinking of its speakers. In an effort to convey information and understand those around them, intelligent beings create a language that unites them and separates them from other cultures. Other cultures are mysterious and attractive, their unusualness. However, overcoming mental barriers is dangerous for the psyche. A person, seeking to embrace the immensity, destroys a cozy world, but the thirst for knowledge and mutual understanding pushes a person to overcome the boundaries of his universe, his knowledge, and capabilities.

The metamodernism fiction calls into question the possibility of understanding this world, which resonates with postmodernism, but appeals to science as an instance capable of asking questions that may not have answers, but only a hope for the solution and faith in a miracle that can be scientifically justified law of nature which is not proven yet.

Time, being an obligatory coordinate of our world, is one of the main conditions for its existence. Being one of the basic concepts of philosophy and physics, it is present in any literary work. It flows sometimes parallel to the reader's time, sometimes intermittently, sometimes accelerated, forcing them to experience the events of literature at the pace set by the author.

The theme of time formed the basis of the intrigue of Rainbow Rowell's novel *Landline* (2014), using the classic chrono-fiction tropes of intertemporal communication. The main character is forced to part with her husband for the Christmas holidays, calls him from the old phone and dials into the past, 15 years ago, when their love was still bright, but fragile. She relives their teenage spat, trying to influence their future life together. Putting forward theories of possible time turns, she evaluates herself, her husband, and her marriage from the experience of passed years. The temporal distortion in this novel balances is on the verge of science fiction, which tries to find a scientific justification for the possibility of such a phone call, using various theories of the nature of time and metaphors of self-reflection and immersion in the heroine's memories. Having called into the past, she is not able to change the life already lived and understands that only the future can be corrected.

Being a screenwriter and author of comedy sitcoms and often looking at herself as a participant in a movie or series, ironically laughing at the funniness of situations and choosing the right soundtrack for the moment, she emotionally experiences her own introspection, drawing the reader to feel the importance of family, friendship, love and reassess their own values in favor of simple and important truths. This new romanticism comes to the fore in metamodern literature, unabashed by passionate displays of feeling and almost childish sentimentality. “Authenticity is making a comeback, in the guises of memory, ethics, religion, the new sincerity, and the renewed interest in ‘real things’. Although sometimes envisioned as the rejection of postmodernism, the ‘new’ authenticity remains profoundly shaped by postmodern skepticism regarding the grand narratives of origin, telos, reference, and essence’ (Haselstein, Gross, & Snyder-Körber, 2010, p. 19).

At the turn of millennia, when science reached inexplicable heights, and humanity faced insoluble problems, the theory of the end of time arose. Such theories are put forward by each generation, considering itself the pinnacle of progress. But life goes on, and literature renews its strategic potential, reviving forgotten methods and combining the incompatible. The main task that metamodernism sets itself is to find ways to bring the reader back again, proving the viability of literature in competition with cinema and the Internet. Overcoming the new globalism, which has aggravated the psychological dependence of mankind on media resources and the clip-like consciousness, literature encourages the reader to identify himself with the characters, not shunning intertextual

clues and self-irony, trying to get rid of the false pathos of advertising and propaganda, metamodernism finds the sublime and worth preserving in human life, relying on a new specific interpretation of subjectivity. Humanity asks questions that science cannot yet answer, but what is still inaccessible to experimental knowledge is already felt by literature, unlike religion, which proposes to rely on Faith, literature offers Hope. Miracles happen not only in novels, everything is still inexplicable, but existing is a miracle. Metamodernism is a new metaphysics that has brought Transcendence back into modern literature.

Metamodernism is the beginning of a new cultural trend, which, over time, having developed its philosophy and formalized the system, will become the basis of future cultural processes, giving way to them.

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