

The role of Dan Brown's works in american postmodernism

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Annotation. This paper discusses the significant role of postmodernism in American literature, analyzing examples of this movement from its early representatives to the prominent works and authors of today. Besides this, it also examines the categories of postmodernism in the best-selling works of the famous American writer Dan Brown. The concept of postmodernism is broad, encompassing not only literature but also creating a significant wave in the fields of art and architecture. Therefore, diversity is observed among the creators of this period.

Key words: postmodernism, intertextuality, metafiction

Роль произведений Дэна Брауна в американском постмодернизме

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Аннотация. В данной статье обсуждается значительная роль постмодернизма в американской литературе, анализируются примеры этого течения от его первых представителей до выдающихся произведений и авторов современности. Кроме того, рассматриваются категории постмодернизма в бестселлерах знаменитого американского писателя Дэна Брауна. Понятие постмодернизма является широким, охватывая не только литературу, но и создавая значительную волну в таких областях, как искусство и архитектура. Поэтому среди творцов этого периода наблюдается разнообразие.

Ключевые слова: постмодернизм, интертекстуальность, метапроза

Amerika postmodernizmda Den Braunning ijodining o'rni

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Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada postmodernizمنىڭ Amerika adabiyotidagi muhim o'rni muhokama qilinadi, ushbu oqimning ilk vakillaridan tortib zamonaviy taniqli asarlar va mualliflargacha bo'lgan namunalar tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, mashhur amerikalik yozuvchi Den Braunning bestsellerlarida postmodernizm kategoriyalari ko'rib chiqiladi. Posrmodern tushunchasi keng qamrovli bo'lib, u nafaqat adabiyot balki san'at va arxitektura sohalarida ham katta to'lqin bo'ldi. Shuning uchun bu davr ijodkorlarida xilma-xillik kuzatiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: postmodernizm, intertekstualizm, metafiksiya

Looking at the history of literary studies in the 20th and 21st centuries, we encounter streams such as modernism, surrealism, magical realism, absurdism, and postmodernism; terms like metaphor, intertextuality, allusion, pastiche, sarcasm, and irony; and concepts such as eclecticism, skepticism, eccentricity, cosmopolitanism, and metafiction. These terms and concepts serve as integral components in elucidating the characteristics of novels created within the framework of postmodernism, shedding light on its artistic features and stylistic issues.

This research aims to scientifically analyze the causes and consequences of the emergence of postmodernism in contemporary American literature, understand the principles of the postmodernist movement, observe its influence from various perspectives, and study how characteristics of the postmodern style manifest in prose works.

The concept of postmodern literature naturally raises questions about when it emerged, its place in world literary studies, and the extent of its exploration. Throughout our research, we aimed to thoroughly analyze this direction.

Postmodernism is a widely recognized and complex movement in literature, emerging in the mid-20th century as a reaction against modernism. It opposes traditional narratives and forms, often emphasizing unconventional and fantastical storytelling, blending elements of high and low culture, and harmonizing with skepticism. (F.M.Xajiyeva, 2022)

Postmodernism is very complex and multilayered from the perspective of American literature. There are a few points to consider while judging it:

Multiple Narratives: The postmodern has from perspectives and stories. This invites a reader to probe other realities by conducting various situations and characters.

Intertextuality: The postmodern works refer to and borrow from an array of other works. All this is useful for the readers to comprehend how literature evolves.

Irony and Playfulness: Ironically and playfully, they are the hallmarks of postmodernism. In their writing, authors use sarcasm or humor in dealing with serious issues.

Authority under question: Postmodernism questions refer to the established structures of authorship and narrative. These allow readers to circumvent several constraints or conventions.

Cultural Reflection: Postmodernism reflects the complexities, diversities, and globalization of American culture. (Hans-Peter Wagner, 2003) All these are developing more avenues for experimentation for authors.

Postmodernism encompasses also features such as metafiction, unreliable narration, self-reflection, intertextuality, and irony, often addressing historical and political issues as central themes. This experimental literary style emerged in the 1960s in the United States through the works of writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, Philip K. Dick, Kathy Acker, and John Barth.

Postmodern poetry is entirely opposite to modernist poetry, reacting against Enlightenment ideals. In this context, writers frequently advocate anti-government ideas. According to Canadian literary scholar Linda Hutcheon, these views indicate that the style of literature that emerged in the 1960s is a result of political principles of the time. This influence is particularly evident in the highly self-reflective nature of postmodern literature concerning the political issues it addresses. (F.M.Xajiyeva, 2022)

Modernism was typically based on idealism, a utopian (unrealistic) vision of human life and society, and a belief in progress. It held that certain universal rules or truths, shaped by religion or science, could be used to understand or explain reality. Modernist artists focused not on themes but on experimenting with form, method, and processes, believing they could discover an absolute way to represent the modern world.

The clash of ideas in the 20th century was also reflected in literature. As Eurocentrism, logocentrism, and ethnocentrism were dismantled, characteristics such as chaos, confusion, disorder, decentralization, lack of structure, and eccentricity found expression through postmodernism. (Linda Hutcheon, 1988)

The sequence of ideas and ideological clashes (chaos) that emerged in society after the First and Second World Wars found expression in literature in the form of postmodernism. This reflects the various ideological upheavals and contradictions, changes, and the diversity of worldviews in society. Elements such as the dominance of the material world over the spiritual, the push for social and gender equality, the advancement of science leading to humanity's exploration of the cosmos, the invention of computer technology, and the discovery of the cyber world—diverse and chaotic factors—gave rise to postmodernism in literature.

Early representatives of postmodern literature include works such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–1615), Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767), James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–1834), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). However, postmodern literature gained significant traction in the 1960s and 1970s and retained a strong presence in 21st-century American literature. Examples of this include post-ironic works such as Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011), both of which contributed to further developing the postmodern form. (Hutcheon, 1988)

Representatives of the new generation of writers—David Foster Wallace, William T. Vollmann, Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, Zadie Smith, Chuck Palahniuk, Jennifer Egan, Neil Gaiman, Carole Maso, Richard Powers, Jonathan Lethem—and publications such as *McSweeney's*, *The Believer*, and *The New Yorker* can be said to have initiated a new phase of postmodernism, often referred to as “*post-postmodernism*.” Most of these writers emphasize the importance of sincerity in literature.

Canadian authors and literary scholars such as *Brian McHale*, *Linda Hutcheon*, and *Paul Maltby* have noted that the postmodern style was only fully named as “postmodern” by the 1980s. Linda Hutcheon, a professor at the University of Toronto, challenges the views of American writer and critic Fredric Jameson, arguing that postmodern forms coexist with critical styles. In her works, she emphasizes the significant role of irony in postmodernism. Moreover, she suggests that instead of separating the present from history or turning history into a fragmented and disjointed mosaic, postmodernism can reinterpret history and offer new critical possibilities. (K. Booker, 2003)

It is evident that postmodernism is a boundaryless and style-free movement, distinct from other trends. Postmodernism emerged as a movement that abandoned universal, ideal, and aesthetic concepts in favor of promoting experimental and unique ideas. Science, television, computer technologies, and ideological conflicts were the primary factors behind the rise of postmodernism in a historical and political context.

Globalization and the integration brought about by the rise of the internet, the decline of Eurocentrism, the emergence of postcolonial literature, and the distinctiveness and national identity of each country's literature became clearly apparent. For this reason, postmodernism in literature became a significant wave. Experiments in art, music, and architecture, especially in literature, led to innovative results. This movement can be described as an eclectic trend that distinguishes itself from other movements while encompassing all its unique characteristics.

According to the opinion of the English literary scholar P. Barry, “*Postmodern literature is usually defined in relation to the period that preceded it. For instance, works of postmodern literature often do not conclude with the clear and orderly resolutions commonly found in modernist literature; instead, they frequently parody them*”. (P. Barry, 2009) Irony, parody and fragmentation are basic elements of postmodern literature that expresses the intertextuality of the texts.

As every era has its unique styles and themes, the 20th century marks the birth of postmodern literature. Postmodernism—whether in literature, art, sculpture, or music—triggered a seismic shift in structures, akin to an earthquake. This literary movement is composed of various styles and characteristics, including intertextuality, pastiche, metafiction, fragmentation, magical realism, and paradox. Each of these features can encompass multiple dimensions within itself.

In postmodern literature, this often appears in the form of references to fairy tales—for example, in the works of writers like Margaret Atwood and Donald Barthelme, among many others—or through allusions to popular genres such as science fiction and detective literature. In some cases, intertextuality takes on a more complex form than a simple reference to a single text. (Graham Allen, 2000) For instance, connections can be observed between Brothers Grimm's fairy tale *The Fisherman and His Wife* and the Russian writer A.S. Pushkin's tale *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*.

In contemporary literature D. Brown is a prominent representative of postmodern literature, as postmodern elements are vividly manifested in his works. D. Brown is known with his best seller books around the globe, therefore, I consider to analyze the elements of his works. Born on June 22, 1964, Daniel Gerhard Brown is an American novelist best known for his thrillers, such as *Angels & Demons* (2000), *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), *The Lost Symbol* (2009), *Inferno* (2013), and *Origin* (2017), all written by Robert Langdon. His books resemble treasure hunts, typically spanning a full day. (D. Brown, 2006) Conspiracy theories, art, and cryptography are among their recurrent themes. As of 2012, his works had sold more than 200 million copies and were translated into 57 different languages. Of these, three—*Angels & Demons*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *Inferno*—have been made into movies, and one—*The Lost Symbol*—was made into a TV show. Because of their intense engagement with historical fiction and Christian themes, Robert Langdon's writings have caused controversy. According to Brown's website, he is on a "constant spiritual journey" himself and his novels are not anti-Christian. (D. Brown, 2006) According to him, his book *The Da Vinci Code* is "an entertaining story that promotes spiritual discussion and debate" and might be used "as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith."

Brown's editors credited him with "keeping the publishing industry afloat; renewed interest in Leonardo da Vinci and early Christian history; spiking tourism to Paris and Rome; a growing membership in secret societies; the ire of Cardinals in Rome; eight books denying the claims of the novel and seven guides to read" when they named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World in 2005.

Growing up on a prep school campus, Brown—the son of a church organist and a math teacher—became fascinated by the contradictory relationship between religion and science. His novels later drew inspiration from these subjects. After graduating from Phillips Exeter Academy and Amherst College, he taught English there for a while before deciding to devote himself full-time to writing. He and Winston, his yellow lab, reside in New England.

Results from analysis

From the works of the American writer Dan Brown, it is evident that although his creative period does not fully align with the era of postmodernism's peak development, elements of postmodernism can still be found in his works. While his writing cannot be categorized as wholly belonging to the postmodernist literary movement, several postmodern characteristics can be identified in his novels *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*, as analyzed below:

Intertextuality:

Dan Brown often works with historical sources, religious texts, and other fictional narratives in conjunction. Based on information about the author's life and work, he spent a significant amount of time collecting oral historical accounts in Spain and France. Using these gathered sources and real-life facts, he was able to create an extraordinary fictional reality. This demonstrates that intertextuality, a key element of postmodernist literature, is widely applied in his works. (D. Sadikova, 2025)

Symbols and Puzzles:

Brown's books are filled with mystical narratives and puzzles, brimming with secrets and mysteries. The short chapters, which progress rapidly even without a traditional narrator, are a hallmark of postmodern style.

Metafiction:

The Robert Langdon series, rich in historical and fictional sources, particularly *The Da Vinci Code* and *Origin*, challenges readers to question the balance between science, nature, and religion, as well as the authenticity of the historical references presented. Readers are left doubting whether these sources are genuine historical fragments or fictional constructs. This aspect aligns with historical metafiction, a characteristic of postmodern literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Dan Brown's creative output holds significant value in modern literary studies within the framework of postmodernism. He gained worldwide recognition for his historical and fictional narratives. His novels not only develop intricate plots but also present readers with works rich in unheard-of and unseen sources. By breaking away from traditionalism and exploring secrets and puzzles through characters who experience unprecedented realistic yet fictional events, Brown's work quickly gained popularity, further highlighting its postmodern style.

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