

## ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

*Qodirova Zahro*

*Faculty of Foreign Language and Literature of the State University of World  
Languages of Uzbekistan (English language)*

**Abstract:** This article is focused on English-language literature rather than the literature of England, so that it includes writers from Scotland, Wales, and the whole of Ireland, as well as literature in English from former British colonies. It also includes, to some extent, the United States, though the main article for that is American literature. Modernism is a major literary movement of the first part of the twentieth-century. The term Postmodern literature is used to describe certain tendencies in post-World War II literature. This article is about 20th century English literature.

**Keywords:** "American Tragedy", American literature, modernism, drama, psychologism.

The new, 20th-century problems of American literature are determined by a very important fact: the richest, most powerful capitalist country, leading the whole world, produces the darkest and most bitter literature of our time. Writers acquired a new quality: they were distinguished by feeling the tragedy and destruction of this world. Dreiser's "American Tragedy" represented the writer's desire for grand generalizations typical of American literature at that time in the 20th century. The short story no longer plays the important role in American literature that it did in the 19th century, replaced by the realistic novel. But all novelists continue to devote much attention to it, and a number of prominent American prose writers devote themselves primarily or exclusively to the novella. One of them is O. Henry (William Sidney Porter), who tried to define a different path for the American novel by "bypassing" the already defined critical-realist direction. O. Henry can also be called the founder of the American happy ending (it was present in many of his stories), which was later used very successfully in American popular fiction. Despite the sometimes unflattering reviews of his work, it is one of the most important and turning points in the development of the American story of the 20th century. The 20th century opened with great hope but also with some apprehension, for the new century marked the final approach to a new millennium. For many, humankind was entering upon an unprecedented era. H.G. Wells's utopian studies, the aptly titled *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon*

Human Life and Thought (1901) and A Modern Utopia (1905), both captured and qualified this optimistic mood and gave expression to a common conviction that science and technology would transform the world in the century ahead. To achieve such transformation, outmoded institutions and ideals had to be replaced by ones more suited to the growth and liberation of the human spirit. One of them is O. Henry (William Sidney Porter), who tried to define a different path for the American novel by "bypassing" the already defined critical-realist direction. O. Henry can also be called the founder of the American happy ending (it was present in many of his stories), which was later used very successfully in American popular fiction. Despite the sometimes unflattering reviews of his work, it is one of the most important and turning points in the development of the American story of the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, new trends appeared that made a unique contribution to the formation of critical realism. In the 900s, the mud rake movement emerged in the United States. Mud Rushers - a large group of American writers, publicists, sociologists and public figures of liberal orientation. There were two streams closely related to each other in their work: journalistic (L. Steffens, I. Tarbell, R.S. Baker) and literary-artistic (E. Sinclair, R. Herrick, R. R. Kauffman). Great writers such as D.London, T.Dreiser, at certain stages of their creative path approached the movement of mukrakists (as President T. Roosevelt called it in 1906). The 1910s were marked by a realistic rise in American poetry, called the "poetic renaissance." This period is associated with the names of Carl Sandberg, Edgar Lee Master, Robert Frost, W. Lindsay, E. Robinson. These poets addressed the life of the American people. Relying on Whitman's democratic poetry and the achievements of realist prose, they destroyed the outdated romantic canons and founded a new realist poetics, which included updating the poetic vocabulary, prosesizing and deepening the poems. psychologism. This poetics met the requirements of the time, helped to reflect the American reality in its diversity with poetic means.

Irish playwrights George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) and J.M. Synge (1871–1909) were influential in British drama. Shaw's career began in the last decade of the 19th century, while Synge's plays belong to the first decade of the 20th century. Synge's most famous play, The Playboy of the Western World, "caused outrage and riots when it was first performed" in Dublin in 1907. George Bernard Shaw turned the Edwardian theatre into an arena for debate about important political and social issues, like marriage, class, "the morality of armaments and war" and the rights of women. An important dramatist in the 1920s, and later, was Irishman Seán O'Casey (1880–1964). Also in the 1920s and later Noël Coward (1899–1973)

achieved enduring success as a playwright, publishing more than 50 plays from his teens onwards. Many of his works, such as *Hay Fever* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930), *Design for Living* (1932), *Present Laughter* (1942) and *Blithe Spirit* (1941), have remained in the regular theatre repertoire.

In 1947 Malcolm Lowry published *Under the Volcano*, while George Orwell's dystopia of totalitarianism, *1984*, was published in 1949. One of the most influential novels of the immediate post-war period was William Cooper's naturalistic *Scenes from Provincial Life*, a conscious rejection of the modernist tradition.<sup>[26]</sup> Graham Greene was a convert to Catholicism and his novels explore the ambivalent moral and political issues of the modern world. Notable for an ability to combine serious literary acclaim with broad popularity, his novels include *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961), and *The Human Factor* (1978). Other novelists writing in the 1950s and later were: Anthony Powell whose twelve-volume cycle of novels *A Dance to the Music of Time*, is a comic examination of movements and manners, power and passivity in English political, cultural and military life in the mid-20th century; comic novelist Kingsley Amis (1922–1995) is best known for his academic satire *Lucky Jim* (1954); Nobel Prize laureate William Golding's allegorical novel *Lord of the Flies* 1954, explores how culture created by man fails, using as an example a group of British schoolboys marooned on a deserted island who try to govern themselves, but with disastrous results. Philosopher Iris Murdoch was a prolific writer of novels throughout the second half of the 20th century, that deal especially with sexual relationships, morality, and the power of the unconscious, including *Under the Net* (1954), *The Black Prince* (1973) and *The Green Knight* (1993). Scottish writer Muriel Spark pushed the boundaries of realism in her novels. Her first, *The Comforters* (1957) concerns a woman who becomes aware that she is a character in a novel; *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), at times takes the reader briefly into the distant future, to see the various fates that befall its characters. Anthony Burgess is especially remembered for his dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), set in the not-too-distant future, which was made into a film by Stanley Kubrick in 1971. In the entirely different genre of Gothic fantasy Mervyn Peake (1911–1968) published his highly successful *Gormenghast* trilogy between 1946 and 1959. One of Penguin Books' most successful publications in the 1970s was Richard Adams's heroic fantasy *Watership Down* (1972). Evoking epic themes, it recounts the odyssey of a group of rabbits seeking to establish a new home. Another successful novel of the same era was John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), with a narrator who freely admits

the fictive nature of his story, and its famous alternative endings. This was made into a film in 1981 with a screenplay by Harold Pinter. Angela Carter (1940–1992) was a novelist and journalist, known for her feminist, magical realism, and picaresque works. Her novels include, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* 1972 and *Nights at the Circus* 1984. Margaret Drabble (born 1939) is a novelist, biographer and critic, who published from the 1960s into the 21st century. Her older sister, A. S. Byatt (born 1936) is best known for *Possession* published in 1990. An important cultural movement in the British theatre which developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s was Kitchen sink realism (or "kitchen sink drama"), a term coined to describe art (the term itself derives from an expressionist painting by John Bratby), novels, film and television plays. The term angry young men was often applied to members of this artistic movement. It used a style of social realism which depicts the domestic lives of the working class, to explore social issues and political issues. The drawing room plays of the post war period, typical of dramatists like Terence Rattigan and Noël Coward were challenged in the 1950s by these Angry Young Men, in plays like John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). Arnold Wesker and Nell Dunn also brought social concerns to the stage.

American realism is popular protest literature. Realist writers refused to accept reality as a natural consequence of progress. Criticizing the developing imperialist society and pointing out its negative aspects are becoming the hallmarks of American critical realism. New themes appear, emphasized by the changed conditions of life (the destruction and impoverishment of the peasantry; the capitalist city and the small man in it; the exposure of monopoly capital).

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