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Research Article

## Diversity of Genre in Post-Colonial Literature

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**Abstract.** The main aim of this article is to outline main tendencies in the development of post-colonial literature in the face of Jean Rhys and her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a vivid example of starting attempt to break a white-domeering view of Asian countries and build up a new identity. Research attempts to refer to a wider scope of literary texts, including the ones that outline issues and problems related to the so-called “invasion narratives”. The term “invasion narratives” is seen as referring to a number of different texts, including *English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje or *the Reader* by Bernhard Schlink. One of numerous possibilities of analyzing post-colonial literature is the analysis of the novels by Zadie Smith *White Teeth* and *on Beauty*, the latter being a good example of a return to “realism” and actualizing what is called coined as “the meanwhile”. Special attention is given to meta-modernism and its function on the contemporary cultural and literary scene, above all with its attempt to start a neo-romantic “direct” kind of prose, or verse, simple in its form, yet aiming to construct new identities. This kind of prose incorporates the narratives exploring different traumas, including trans-generational traumas.

**Key words:** post-colonial literature, post-colonial theory, post-colonial reading, post-colonial thinkers

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## Проблематика жанра в постколониальной литературе

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**Аннотация.** Основная цель данной статьи — очертить основные тенденции развития постколониальной литературы в романе Джин Рис «Широкое Саргассово море» как ярком примере стартовой попытки сломить доминирующий взгляд на страны — бывшие колонии и выстроить новую идентичность для героев. В некоторых исследованиях обращаются к более широкому кругу художественных текстов, в том числе к тем, в которых излагаются вопросы и проблемы, связанные с так называемыми нарративами вторжения (invasion narratives). Термин рассматривается как относящийся к ряду различных текстов, в том числе к роману «Английский пациент» Майкла Ондатье или книге «Чтец» Б. Шлинка. Одной из многочисленных возможностей анализа постколониальной литературы является анализ романов Зади Смит «Белые зубы» и «О Красоте», последний является хорошим примером возврата к «реализму» и актуализации того, что называется «одновременно протекающими событиями» (meanwhile). Особое внимание уделяется метамодернизму и его функции на современной культурной и литературной сцене, прежде всего с его попыткой создать «неоромантическую» прозу, простую по своей форме, но нацеленную на создание новых идентичностей с собственных правил построения. Этот вид прозы включает в себя повествования, исследующие различные травмы, в том числе травмы трансгенерационные.

**Ключевые слова:** постколониальные исследования, нарратология, постколониальная теория

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## Introduction

Post-colonial literature covers a wide range of different novels depending on the time period, country, tradition of the narrative construction. The main aim of this research has been to identify the main tendencies in the development of post-colonial narrative (Anglophone literature) as regards the question of the author's and the character's identity. The objective and new contribution of research and semantic and structural analysis was

to see the main vector of development of post-colonial literature in the face of classical writers like J. Rhys. Special attention is given to the vector of development observed in post-millennial literature which shows a vivid trend of changing the structure of the so-called “invasion narratives”, as well as opting for the so-called “return to realism” or an attempt to construct “reality” in a different way, opting for what Anderson coins as “meanwhile” phenomenon. Meta-modernism and an attempt to simplify the texts, making it an event at the moment of construction is also viewed.

Methodology and methods of this research includes biographical and structural and semantic analysis of literary texts that comprise Anglophone literature. Certain subject areas like meta-modernism and “invasion narratives” are explored, together with narratives that feature traumatic experiences and trans-generational trauma.

### Discussion

The number one issue, that is related to the characteristics of post-colonial literature, is the idea of a re-make that is manifested in the attempt of many writers to take a famous topic or a book and change it, making an “oppressed” identity the main one. That is quite vivid in J. Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) in which she famously changes the fate of Mr Rochester’s first wife who had been placed in the attic by the 19<sup>th</sup> century classical writer Ch. Bronte, and constructed in *Jane Eyre* as a mad woman who is later in the novel “burned” by the author and is, in other words, reduced to a minimum and disregarded as a participant or a character. *Wide Sargasso Sea* beautifully done by J. Rhys is a manifestation of a creole identity that comes in place of an old and stereotypical one, the one who succumbs to men’s values and adheres to a domineering view.

Secondly, as pointed out by Wilson [1. P. 47–66], contemporary literary writers (and critics) have faced a difficult period of “post-millennial” shift. For many critics, the contemporary novel has rejected a postmodern playfulness that draws attention to textuality and exhibits a scepticism about the nature of representation. Instead, it attempts to reattach itself to what is usually called ‘the real’ and a new seriousness in narrowing the gap between fictional representation and the world around it. This concerns, above all, Zadie Smith. In her earlier novel *White Teeth* (2000) she attempts at combining different traditions.

The post-colonial tradition in Anglophone literature assumes, first of all, that traditions, cultural and historical, are combined and coexist in the text. There isn’t a story, there are many stories, there is clearly a spectrum of their interweaving and interaction. Episodes of history are multidirectional, because there is no common cultural tradition or stereotype. The identity of the hero Zadie Smith called Samad is outlined in the novel through the prism of a sense of pride in the life of Mangal Pandey, a famous character whose actions at one time provoked a famous event in history — the Sepoy Uprising in 1847, when the British forced Indians (Hindus and Muslims) to use fat from pigs and cows to lubricate guns (which was impossible for representatives of both religions, and which caused colossal bloodshed in history). The image of Archie is realized in the text due to the fact that he was saved from the idea of suicide by meeting his new wife, whose mother had previously lived in Jamaica and had been taken to the continent by an English colonizer.

Critics note that the main theme of Zadie Smith's novels is confusion, characteristic of most post-colonial texts and labelled as a confusion in a sense of mixed identity, which gives her books a certain comical tone. Magid, one of the characters in *White Teeth*, comes to England and no longer feels like an Indian. On the contrary, he feels one hundred percent English (much more native than the English have ever felt). Similarly, the Japanese-born author K. Ishiguro wrote the novel *Remains of the Day*, in which the traditional image of the English butler, honest, clean, reserved, correct, with great dignity, is outlined and written about with more precision than any English author has ever done. Millat, another Zadie Smith's character, has fallen under the influence of an Islamic group: instead of acquiring an ambiguous, hybrid identity, he becomes a trivial nationalist. It is funny and quite revealing how the episode of the undoubted faith of the inhabitants of the former colonies is described.

*On Beauty* (2004) is a later novel by Zadie Smith which explores mixed and shared identity of the couple leaving in the USA. As was pointed by Wilson [1. P. 47—66], *on Beauty* allows to construct the “we” narrative, uniting different identities and building it up as a global one, at the same time showing the differences by means of a so called “meanwhile” which (according to Anderson) allows to show the simultaneous development of different episodes and making the whole story “real” which aims at post-millennial ambition of a return to realism on a different level.

Thirdly, a most intriguing and interesting dimension of post-colonial writing is the topic of the so-called “invasion narratives” which incorporates a wide range of texts, including the ones related to Second World War (retrospective, or constructed with built-in flashbacks). The topic allows to explore the War, in general, and the Second World War, in particular, from a different perspective. The authors who approached the topic are numerous and they have used a number of techniques to do so. Yanush Vishnevsky in his novel *Bikini* (2009) is using a number of archive materials to construct a story of the Second World War events. The tool used in the novel's construction is a combination of the archive materials and real data with fictitious events.

*The Reader* (1995) by B. Schlink attempts to address the main issues of the history not by changing them in a sense of the point of view, but by means of addressing the issue of the morale not intrinsic to the Germans only but characteristic of people in general [2]. The story explores the turbulent life of the concentration camp supervisor who seduced a younger boy and yet managed to escape the punishment. The sequence of events shows that the qualities she possesses are weird yet adhere to human laws. The fact of being an assassin and killer can't be justified by normal logic, yet the author manages to persuade the reader to see something else behind the character, that is the character's own ways of coping with reality, being punctual and too shy of being illiterate. At closer look it is the boy himself who turns out to be even more cruel than the concentration camp supervisor. A person in a system is somebody who is not free at all. This view over centuries ahead on different agendas is what makes the book unique and powerful.

*The English Patient* (1992) by Ondaatje [3] is another example of post-colonial literature in a sense of its attempt to build up a story set during the Second World War times, and change the perspective of well-established “rules” and “schemes” that are in play when developing the narrative. The main character in this novel “betrays” his friends and colleagues in the attempt to save his beloved woman, and gives away all the secrets to Germans, because at previous attempt his name was not recognized as “non-German”

thus not allowing him to prove his identity. Change of a well-established identity “not to give away” secrets and not to attempt treason under any circumstances is challenged by the main character, thus providing special tension in the novel. However, the “values” are not challenged entirely, as other characters in this book (the nurse, the Indian character), all of the others, go through the difficulties and end up with dignity allowing the “English patient” to perish and pay the price for valuing love more than honor, and dignity.

Fourthly, and not least importantly, is, of course, the “invasion narratives”, involving aliens as characters, the tradition similar to the famous story of *the Birds* by Daphne du Maurier in which she describes the attack of birds on humanity. This sort of anti-utopian trend in science fiction (or “the invasion narratives” per se), allow to label this tendency as certain “blending” and “mix” of genres not only in post-colonial texts, but also in texts that construct a diverse identity of participants.

John Wyndham is a well-known classic science fiction writer. The style of his works is a logical, rigid narrative, without excessive details of the Jules Verne school. Debuting in 1931, John Wyndham wrote under many pseudonyms, and his disaster novels usually tell us not about the disasters themselves, but about the behavior of people. In one novel, everyone loses their sight and life is invaded by predatory carnivorous plants. In another novel, the planet Earth is unexpectedly visited by aliens. In General, Darwin’s famous slogan “it is not the strongest who survives, but the most adaptable one” is precisely the main philosophical question that the classic of the science fiction genre poses to readers. The short story *No place like Earth* (1951) was first published in a collection of other short stories, and then published posthumously in the 2003 collection of the same name. The narrative is not so interesting or complicated in its structure or plot, similar to other works of the author. Its only difference is the main character’s place of residence — the planet Mars. There he meets girls, there he evaluates and re-evaluates life situations, there he realizes the subsequent fate of the planet, its death, there he looks at his life again, as well as the fate of his others and relatives, who, however, fortunately, are not so many, that is, few people will regret his absence. In our view, this trend of making up science fiction texts could be seen as one more attempt of post-colonial literature to extend its boundaries, making it almost extra-terrestrial. This dimension allows to view events from the point of view of the narrator, thus re-establishing post-modern writing and giving it more volume.

The fifth aspect found as one of the possible results of our research is seen in the general attempt to change the post-modern paradigm and introduce not only the post-millennial term (used previously), but also talk about meta-modernism in literature.

Boris Groys presents the process of continuous innovation in art as acts of transferring objects from every day (profane) space to Museum space [4]. Here, as some of the researchers point out, there is a sense of world culture as a global supermarket; interaction with images of reality, not with reality itself; post-traumatic reflection of the expanding information universe; the initial emotional atrophy; the inability to be taken seriously any meta-narration. All of these facts allow to assume that a new trend (sometimes called meta-modernism) is developing that comes in place of former post-modern patterns. Hrusheva [5] outlines main tendencies in the development of meta-modernism and mentions, among other factors, its tendency to construct “neo-romantic” narrative, as well as “flower — like pattern” instead of the rhizome metaphor developed by Gilles

Deleuze. The tendency to have “simple” narratives, poetry instead of prosaic texts (or pay special attention to the form rather than the meaning only) is indeed what most post-colonial texts adhere to. The iconic view of the language (as opposed to the traditional symbolic one), manifesting that the sign has a direct connection to the represented world and is similar to the icon, is seen as a new tendency of development. In our words, the picture of the icon becomes even more powerful today, as the digital technology is developing.

Trans-generational trauma (among other types of traumas) and the narratives exploring it, seems to be a fruitful area of research that allows authors to track the past experience concerning not only their own life and time span, but also the life span of their ancestors. Areas under research will include topics and issues related to migration, immigration, wars and other disasters.

### Conclusion

To sum up, post-colonial literature is very diverse, with its main tendency of constructing post-millennial narrative which is characterized by different tools that establish “reality” in its new form. Meta-modernism is another term that is used to cover the new tendency for “new simplicity” “neo-romanticism”, “directness” of the new post-colonial prose, including post-traumatic experiences and development of narratives describing trans-generational traumas. “Invasion” narratives is one of the possible manifestations of post-colonial writing, which allows to change identities of characters making them more hybrid like and diverse.

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