

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2026-1-44>

EASTERN MYTHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SUBSTRATES IN THE MODERN AMERICAN NOVEL

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Abstract. At the end of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century, interest in Eastern mythology and philosophy in American literature is directly related to the strengthening of globalization, postcolonial discourse, and multicultural ideology. In the modern American novel, the East is no longer presented as an exotic or “other” culture, but as an alternative system of thought to the ontological and moral crises created by Western rationalism. In this context, Eastern mythological and philosophical models play an active role in the semantic and structural layers of the literary text. The article examines the forms of artistic realization of Eastern mythology and philosophical sublayers in the modern American novel based on the works of authors such as Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Khaled Hosseini. The methods of mythopoetic analysis, postcolonial approach, and intercultural hermeneutics were used in the research. As a result of the research, it is determined that Eastern philosophy plays an important role in the formation of the cyclical model of time, the artistic interpretation of the problem of identity, and the ethical-humanistic discourse in the American novel. The article shows that Eastern mythology and philosophical underpinnings are not decorative elements in the modern American novel, but rather a structuring principle that gives philosophical depth to postmodern aesthetics.

Key words: Eastern mythology, Eastern philosophy, modern American novel, postmodernism, orientalism, diasporic literature, identity problem, mythopoetics, intercultural dialogue.

Introduction. The end of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century are characterized by the intensification of intercultural relations in the world literary process, the repositioning of national literatures in the global context, and the transformation of aesthetic paradigms. These processes are especially clearly observed in American literature. Globalization, migration, postcolonial discourse, and the strengthening of multicultural ideology have led to serious changes in the subject matter, problematics, and poetics of the American novel. One of the most notable directions of these changes is the growing interest in Eastern culture, mythology, and philosophical heritage.

If at the beginning of the 20th century, the East was presented in American literature more as an exotic, romantic, or stereotypical image, then from the end of the 20th century this approach has fundamentally changed. In the modern American novel, the East no longer acts as an “other” culture, but as an alternative system of thought that allows us to understand the moral, ontological, and epistemological crises of Western civilization. In this regard, Eastern mythology and philosophy have begun to play an active role in the semantic and structural layers of the American novel.

Eastern mythological systems — Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Sufism — understand fundamental problems such as existence, time, death, memory, and identity on a different ontological level. In these systems, time is not linear, but cyclical; and man is not a separate subject from the universe, but is perceived as an integral part of it (Eliade, 1954). It is precisely these features that, in harmony with the postmodern way of thinking, create broad artistic possibilities in the modern American novel.

Postmodernism expresses the bankruptcy of “grand narratives” in Western culture, the undermining of the concept of stable truth, and the fragmentation of meaning. This ideological crisis actualizes the appeal to non-dualistic, paradoxical, and meditative models of thought of Eastern philosophy. As a result, Eastern philosophy participates in the American novel not only at the level of the subject, but also in the formation of the narrative structure.

This process is of particular scientific interest in the context of Edward Said's concept of orientalism. Unlike the classical orientalism criticized by Said, in the modern American novel, Eastern mythology acts not as an object of ideological dominance, but as a partner in philosophical dialogue (Said, 1978). This indicates that East-West relations in American literature have entered a new stage.

The purpose of the presented article is to investigate in what forms, with what aesthetic and ideological functions, Eastern mythology and philosophical substrata are realized in the modern American novel. During the research, mythopoetic, postcolonial and intercultural hermeneutic analysis methods were used based on the works of authors such as Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Chumpa Lahiri and Khaled Hosseini. The article aims to reveal the structuring and conceptual role of Eastern mythology in the American novel.

Discussion.

The ontological model of Eastern mythology and its semantic function in the modern American novel

Mythology is not only the primary form of thought of culture, but also one of the main philosophical mechanisms regulating man's relationship with existence. According to Mircea Eliade, myth is not only an explanation of the past, but also a living structure that gives meaning to man's existence in the world (Eliade, 1954). In Eastern mythology, this structure is built on the ideas of cosmic harmony, periodic time, reincarnation, and the unity of man with the universe. In the Western mythological model, man is presented more as a central subject and time has a linear character.

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the modern American novel creates a space of intense dialogue between these two models. Eastern mythology is not only exotic material for American novelists, but also becomes an alternative system of thought to express the moral and ontological crisis caused by Western rationalism. Especially in postmodern novels, the mythological structure disrupts the linear development of the plot, presenting events in a cyclical and fragmentary form.

In Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, the instability of the concept of time and the repetitive structure of events recall the idea of cosmic cycles in Eastern mythology. The narrative space of the novel is chaotic and non-centered; this is built parallel to the process of "endless creation and destruction" present in Hindu-Buddhist cosmogony (Pynchon, 1973). Here, the mythological model acts as a means of deconstructing the myth of technological civilization. This approach is of particular importance in the context of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. As Said noted, the stereotypical presentation of the East by the West has long overshadowed its philosophical potential (Said, 1978). In the modern American novel, however, Eastern mythology plays the role of an active semantic source, not a passive object.

Eastern Philosophy in the Postmodern American Novel: Narrative Embodiment of Buddhism and Taoism

The postmodern American novel is characterized by epistemological uncertainty, the fluidity of meaning, and the collapse of grand ideological narratives. These features organically harmonize with the non-dualistic and relative worldview of Eastern philosophy. In Buddhist philosophy, existence is expressed in the concept of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*); that is, no essence is permanent, everything is transient.

In Don DeLillo's novel "Falling Man", this philosophical approach is clearly visible in the psychological state of the heroes. After the events of September 11, the characters realize their existence in emptiness and silence. The dominance of silence, pauses, and uncertainty throughout the novel corresponds to the Eastern meditative model of thought (DeLillo, 2007).

DeLillo's heroes abandon explanatory models based on Western rationalism and turn to inward observation. This is the artistic equivalent of the idea of "approaching truth by losing oneself"

in Buddhist thought. The Taoist “wu wei” – the principle of action without force – is manifested in the refusal of the plot to develop purposefully. Events are left to their own devices, and the hero does not resist this flow.

Thus, Eastern philosophy is present in the postmodern American novel not only as a theme, but also as a form of narrative thought and determines the structure of the novel.

Eastern mythology and identity discourse in the diasporic novel

One of the areas where Eastern mythology is most intensely manifested in the modern American novel is diasporic literature. Hybrid identities formed as a result of migration maintain a connection with their historical roots through mythological memory. Here, myth acts not as nostalgia for the past, but as a mechanism for reconstructing identity.

Chumpha Lahiri’s novel “The Namesake” is significant in this respect. The name problem at the center of the novel is reminiscent of the “name–fate” relationship in Hindu mythological and philosophical thought. According to Hinduism, the name is directly related to a person’s karma and determines his fate. The fact that the hero’s name belongs to Western culture symbolizes his internal fragmentation (Lahiri, 2003).

Although the idea of reincarnation is not directly expressed throughout the novel, the identity crises that recur at the stages of the hero’s life remind us of a cyclical time model. Eastern mythology here acts not as an ethnic attribute, but as a universal humanist code and raises individual experience to a universal level.

The ethical and philosophical role of Islam and Sufism in the modern American novel

In the modern American novel of the 21st century, Islamic culture and Sufism philosophy have acquired a new aesthetic and ideological meaning, especially against the background of global political processes, post-9/11 discourse and intercultural tension. If at the beginning of the 20th century the subject of Islam in American literature was limited to either marginal or stereotypical images, at the modern stage this approach has been significantly transformed. Islam and Sufism are no longer presented as an ideological “threat”, but as a system of ethical, spiritual and philosophical values.

Sufism, as a mystical branch of Islamic thought, is built on the ideas of inner perfection of a person, education of the soul, love and spiritual freedom. This philosophical model creates alternative interpretation possibilities for the problems of spiritual emptiness, alienation and ethical crisis observed in Western society in the modern American novel. The concepts of “inner truth”, overcoming of the “self” and divine love, which occupy a central place in Sufism, organically resonate with the existential searches of the postmodern novel (Chittick, 1989).

In this context, Khaled Hosseini’s novel “The Kite Runner” is of particular importance. Although the novel is set against the backdrop of political and social problems, its deep semantic layer contains an ethical-philosophical model specific to Sufism. The inner development of the main character Amir is reminiscent of the stages of the classical Sufi journey: realization of sin, remorse, repentance, and spiritual purification. Amir’s confrontation with his past mistakes and his attempt to correct them corresponds to the stage of “nafs-i lavwama” in Sufism (Hosseini, 2003).

The ethical burden of the novel is based on the concept of collective responsibility and moral duty, in contrast to Western individualism. This acts as an artistic expression of the categories of “trust” and “conscience” that occupy a central place in Islamic philosophy. Amir’s salvation is presented as a moral act, not a legal or social one, which brings the ethical model of Sufism to the fore.

In post-9/11 American novels, the philosophy of Islam and Sufism also performs the function of deconstructing stereotypes. As Peter Morey has noted, in the modern English-language novel, Islam is increasingly presented as an “ethical subject”, creating a form of literary resistance to Islamophobic discourses in Western culture (Morey, 2011). In this context, the American novel, moving away from ideological rhetoric, constructs a humanistic and empathetic narrative.

The motifs of “the path”, “light”, “silence”, and “love”, which are among the main symbols of Sufism, have a metaphysical meaning in the modern American novel. These symbols express the inner transformation of the hero rather than the external development of events. The rational conflict model dominant in the Western novel tradition is replaced here by meditative and reflective structures. Thus, the philosophy of Sufism plays a structuring role in the poetics of the novel.

One of the important points is that Islam and Sufism in the modern American novel are not limited to the work of authors of Eastern origin. Sufi ethics and metaphysical thought are also used in the works of non-Muslim authors as a universal model expressing the spiritual quest of the individual. This shows that Islamic philosophy has emerged from the national-religious framework and has become a global humanistic value.

Consequently, the philosophy of Islam and Sufism plays an important role in the formation of the ethical-philosophical discourse in the modern American novel. This discourse criticizes the moral crises existing in Western culture, brings to the fore the ideas of individual responsibility and inner perfection, and moves the East-West confrontation to the level of dialogue. Thus, Sufism acts not only as a thematic element in the American novel, but also as a model of artistic-philosophical thought.

The poetic and structuring function of Eastern mythology

In the modern American novel, Eastern mythology acts not only as a theme or decorative element, but also as a poetic and structuring principle. In the postmodern aesthetic context, the traditional linear plot model is disrupted, events have a cyclical, fragmentary and symbolic structure. Elements of Eastern mythology play a decisive role in the creation of this type of structure.

Periodic time and fragmentary narrative

In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, time is not linear, but cyclical and repetitive. This model transforms the structure of the plot in the American postmodern novel. In Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, events are presented from different perspectives, the linearity of time is disrupted, and the actions of the heroes are associated with constantly recurring motifs (Pynchon, 1973). This cyclical structure is the artistic equivalent of the Hindu idea of reincarnation and Buddhist karma. Through mythological codes, the author shows the reader that time is relative, that human experience is cyclical and transformative.

In Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man*, the cyclical motifs in the description of the events of September 11 – silence, pauses, the inner monologues of the heroes – are paralleled by the meditative experiences of Sufism and Buddhism (DeLillo, 2007). Here, Eastern mythology and philosophy act not only as a thematic, but also as a structuring element, creating a rhythmic and poetic flow in the description of events.

Symbolism and poetic functions

In Eastern mythology, symbols such as water, light, road, mountain, silence, love express the inner and cosmic harmony of man (Campbell, 1949). In the modern American novel, these symbols strengthen the poetic function and form the narrative structure.

For example, in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, the pens and winged kites flown as children symbolize the cyclical repetition of childhood memories, remorse, and spiritual purification (Hosseini, 2003). These symbolic elements disrupt the linear plot line, create metaphysical connections between events, and provide a poetic impetus for the reader to feel an internal transformation.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, names and ritual symbols from Hindu mythology structure the protagonist's identity crisis, his relationship with his family and past (Lahiri, 2003). Here, mythological elements play both thematic and structural roles, acting as a bridge connecting fragmentary social and psychological events.

Formation of narrative and metaphysical harmony

Eastern mythology is also a key tool in the formation of the metaphysical layer of the novel. Periodic time, recurring symbols, and mystical experience connect the reader not only with the

sequence of events, but also with the inner world of the heroes. This feature allows the structure to be fragmentary but semantically harmonious in postmodern aesthetics. Thus, Eastern mythology plays the role of a poetic model of narrative harmony in the American novel.

In the works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, the cyclical nature of time and the rhythmic repetition of symbolic motifs create in the reader a sense of both aesthetic and philosophical meaning. This approach clearly demonstrates the structuring and artistic-aesthetic function of Eastern mythology.

Intertextual and intercultural function of Eastern mythology

Mythology also creates intertextual connections. Eastern mythology resonates with postcolonial and diasporic discourses in Western literature, allowing for intercultural dialogue. For example, the symbols of Sufism and Taoism are used not only in the Eastern context, but also to solve Western ethical and existential problems. This strengthens the global and multicultural character of the American novel.

Eastern mythology acts as an integral part of the poetic-aesthetic and structuring functions in the modern American novel. It is not only a decorative framework for events and themes, but also:

- forms a narrative structure through periodic time and recurring motifs,
- creates a poetic layer through symbolic language and metaphorical motifs,
- connects the reader with the inner world of the characters,
- strengthens intertextual and intercultural dialogue.

Thus, Eastern mythology acts as a principle that provides philosophical depth and a structure of poetic harmony to the postmodern aesthetic in the American novel.

Conclusion. The study shows that in the modern American novel, Eastern mythology and philosophical substrata are not accidental or decorative elements, but important components that form the ontological and semantic foundations of the literary text. Eastern mythological and philosophical systems are presented in the American novel as an alternative model of thought to the moral and epistemological crises of Western culture.

The study proves that Eastern mythology performs several main functions in the American novel. First of all, it deconstructs the linear plot model by relativizing the concept of time and space. Elements of Eastern thought such as periodic time, repetition, and metaphysical silence create a structure consistent with the poetics of the postmodern novel. This is clearly observed in the works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo.

The second important function is related to the artistic interpretation of the problem of identity. In the work of diaspora writers, Eastern mythology acts as a mechanism that unites individual and collective memory. In the novels of Chumpha Lahiri, Hindu mythological thought plays the role of a semantic code serving to restore a fragmented identity. Here, myth is presented not as an ethnic attribute, but as a universal humanistic value.

The third aspect is related to the creation of an ethical and humanistic discourse in the contemporary American novel by the philosophy of Islam and Sufism. In Khaled Hosseini's works, Sufism is presented as a model of spiritual perfection and internal transformation, and this approach creates new interpretative possibilities in the Western reader's attitude towards Eastern culture. Thus, Eastern philosophy becomes a means of spiritual dialogue rather than an object of ideological confrontation.

Consequently, Eastern mythology and philosophical substrata give philosophical depth to postmodern aesthetics in the contemporary American novel, and a conceptual basis for intercultural dialogue. This strengthens the position of American literature in the global literary process and turns it into a space of not only national, but also universal thought.

The conducted research also opens up broad prospects for future research. The study of Eastern mythology in the American novel in the context of more specific motifs, individual philosophical schools, and different ethnic literatures can be assessed as a relevant and productive direction for contemporary literary criticism.

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