

The Major Issues in Teaching and Writing of Contemporary Literature

Abduvalieva Sevara

3rd year student of Fergana State University

Dildora Akhmadalieva

Teacher of FerSU

Abstract: This article explores some of the key issues in contemporary literature, including representation and identity, literary value and the canon, and the role of technology. It examines debates over cultural appropriation, the right to tell certain stories, and the demand for literature that reflects marginalized voices. The article also considers the challenges posed by the reevaluation of the traditional canon, the role of literary prizes and awards, and the impact of technology on reading and writing. Overall, it argues that these issues offer opportunities for growth and innovation in the literary world, and that by engaging with them, we can create a more inclusive and dynamic literary landscape for the 21st century.

Keywords: postmodernism, cultural appropriation, racial stereotypes, representation, diversity, marginalized groups, derivative works.

As we enter a new decade, the world of literature is a complex and diverse one, with a multitude of voices and styles competing for attention. From the traditional canon of classics to the latest experimental works, contemporary literature reflects the many social and cultural issues of our time. However, it is not without its challenges and controversies. In this article, we will explore some of the key issues in contemporary literature, from questions of representation and identity to debates over literary value and the role of technology.

A broad range of literary works created from a particular period of history through the present day comprise contemporary literature. This literary era not only depicts a specific time period but also a specific writing style and caliber. While some consider this time to be a continuation of postmodern writing, most people refer to it as a separate literary era¹.

Most people concur that the 1940s marked the start of the contemporary writing period. According to a few academics, this time period began at the conclusion of World War II, which is how it came to be associated with postmodern literature. After World War II, in the 1940s, the postmodern era started and lasted until the 1960s. The present day is included in the modern era.

Although there are a few disagreements about the beginning of this literary period, the biggest dispute surrounds what qualifies a written work as literature. The word refers to both poetry and prose, where prose includes works of fiction such as novels and novellas, essays, and dramatic works. This term also refers to the quality of writing. In order to be considered literature, a written work must uphold the highest writing standards and contain a particular beauty and style. Many literary works become socially relevant

¹ Nguyen, V. T. (2016). On writing the 'other': challenges and responsibilities. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/06/viet-thanh-nguyen-on-writing-the-other-challenges-and-responsibilities>

and have the power to influence the public.

The term "contemporary literature" does not necessarily refer to English or American literature; rather, it can refer to written works from any part of the globe. Western authors account for a large portion of contemporary literature. In reality, globalization made it possible to include contemporary writings from a variety of Middle Eastern, African, and Asian authors.

Realistic stories with compelling characters and a plausible plot are typical of the current era. Science fiction and futuristic books are rarely included in this category because their settings typically adhere to the present or contemporary period. A written work must have clearly defined, realistic, and fully developed characters in order to be considered modern, and the majority of the writing in this genre is character-driven rather than plot-driven².

Modern narratives are present in contemporary writing, but they also include harsher realities. However, this literary genre has its roots in the destruction that war brought to the world. Modern written works frequently draw inspiration from the flourishing lifestyle that followed World War II. In the post-war mind, a new reality emerged that reflected the personal cynicism, disillusionment, and frustration typical of this literary age.

The problem of representation and identity is one of the most important ones in modern literature. Literature that represents diversity is becoming more and more in demand as our society becomes more multicultural and diverse. This, however, has given rise to arguments over who has the authority to tell specific tales and how they ought to be told. As Roxane Gay said: "The world is changing rapidly, and literature must adapt to reflect these changes. We need stories that reflect the diversity of our society, and that challenge the dominant narratives that have been perpetuated for too long."³

In her article about racial stereotypes Lindsay Perez Huber, critical race theorist, associate professor in the university of California, said that she wanted read a book to her kid before bedtime. The book was sort of a modern-day "boy who cried wolf" story, only it was about a little girl named Lucy who had a bad habit of telling lies. In the story, Lucy borrowed her friend Paul's bike and crashed it. Lucy lied to Paul, telling him "a bandit" jumped in her path and caused the crash. She saw the image and immediately stopped reading. The image on the page was the racist stereotype of the "Mexican bandit" wearing a serape, sombrero and sandals.

Sentences like "Ms. Smith had skin the color of caramel." "The girl brought her coffee-colored hands to her face in wonder." might not seem like they are problematic until you realize two things. One: Only people of color are typically subjected to these kinds of descriptions. Additionally, there is a history of using people of color as slaves to produce food, particularly coffee, chocolate, and other items. Perhaps a white person wants to mentor a black man in self-care and football, as in "The Blind Side" by Michael Lewis, or wants to help a black person in need, as in *The Soloist* by Steve Lopez. One such story is not harmful in and of itself. But it becomes an issue when the trope appears frequently in the media. It gives people of color no agency and no respect, infantilizing them.

The dispute surrounding cultural appropriation is one of the most prominent instances of this discussion. This phrase describes the practice of incorporating aspects of a different culture into one's own work, frequently without giving due credit or comprehending their importance. While supporters contend that it is a normal part of cultural interaction and creativity, detractors contend that it can result in harmful

² Emezi, A. (2018). Who gets to be a storyteller? TED. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/akwaeke_emezi_who_gets_to_be_a_storyteller

³ Roxane Gay (2018). The importance of representation in literature. Time. Retrieved from <https://time.com/longform/roxnane-gay-interview/>

stereotypes and the erasure of the original culture. This is what Yaa Gyasi⁴, Ghanaian-American novelist, meant when she said: "Cultural appropriation is not a new phenomenon, but in today's globalized world, it is more important than ever to be mindful of the power dynamics at play. We must be willing to listen to the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, and to learn from their experiences."

Talking about pieces of contemporary literature with good representation we can use "How to kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, "The Hate You Give" by Angie Thomas, "Internment" by Samira Ahmed. "Give me some truth" by Eric Gansworth "Monster" by Walter Dean Myers as an example of great reads and helpers in the discussion around racial stereotypes as well as injustice.

Another related issue is the question of who gets to tell certain stories. As marginalized voices gain more visibility and recognition, there is a growing demand for stories that reflect these experiences. However, this has led to debates over whether writers from privileged backgrounds have the right to write about these experiences, and whether they can do so in an authentic and respectful way.

These discussions aren't just about race and nationality. Gender and ethnic background issues are also prominent in modern literature. Women's, poc (people of color), and other marginalized groups' experiences are increasingly being represented in writing. This has, however, sparked debates about whether writers from privileged backgrounds can correctly represent these experiences, and whether they are taking up room that should be reserved for marginalized voices.

Another significant issue in contemporary literature is the debate over literary worth and the canon. As the literary world becomes more diverse, there is a growing appreciation for works that have previously been overlooked or marginalized. This has resulted in a reevaluation of the traditional literary canon, as well as an increase in demand for works that represent a broader range of perspectives and styles.

This has, however, sparked debates about what constitutes literary value and whether certain works should be deemed "great" literature. Some critics argue that popular or financially successful works do not always have high literary value, while others argue that the difference between "popular" and "literary" is artificial and elitist.

Another problem that is related is the function of literary prizes and awards. While these awards can bring attention and acknowledgment to deserving works, they also have the potential to perpetuate biases and support the dominance of certain cultural institutions. Critics argue that the criteria for these awards frequently reflect the literary establishment's values and biases, and that they can miss works that question the status.

Finally, the influence of technology in contemporary literature is a significant concern. "The rise of technology has created new opportunities for writers to reach a global audience, but it has also raised new challenges. We must find ways to ensure the quality and authenticity of online writing, and to protect marginalized voices from harassment and abuse." - Jia Tolentino⁵.

The digital era is changing the way we read and write as it continues to reshape our society. E-books, audiobooks, and online publishing platforms have made it simpler for writers to reach a worldwide audience than ever before, while social media and online communities have created new spaces for literary discussion and collaboration.

⁴ Gyasi, Y. (2016). What does cultural appropriation actually mean? Elle. Retrieved from <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a31794/what-does-cultural-appropriation-actually-mean/>

⁵ Tolentino, J. (2019). The I in the internet age. The New Yorker. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/18/the-i-in-the-internet-age>

This, however, has raised concerns about the quality and authenticity of internet writing. With so much content accessible online, it can be difficult to discern between the good and the bad, as well as between original works and plagiarized or derivative works. Furthermore, the anonymity and lack of accountability in online places can lead to harassment and abuse, especially against marginalized voices.

The rise of technology has also raised questions about the future of the traditional publishing industry. As self-publishing becomes more accessible and popular, some critics argue that this will lead to a decline in the quality and diversity of literature, while others see it as a democratizing force that will allow more voices to be heard.

As one of those lowest rated works of literature “Don’t ever change” by Beth Bloom can be the example to this problem. Eva has always desired to be a writer, but she is unable to truly “write what she knows” until she has experienced all that life has to offer. The summer before she leaves for college, however, things don’t exactly go as planned when she accepts a job at a summer camp—a position for which she is wholly unqualified—and begins to drift away from her closest friends. Five word sums up the main problem with this book: the way Eva was written. Viet Thanh Nguyen rightfully mentioned: “The question of who gets to tell certain stories is a complex one, but ultimately, it comes down to a question of empathy and respect. If a writer can approach a story with empathy and a willingness to learn, then they can tell any story they choose.”⁶

The majority of reviewers thought she was extremely annoying and unlikeable. People considered her to be snobby, jealous, whiny, and selfish due to the character her development given by the author. It can be challenging to care about the book at all when you strongly dislike the protagonist. The concept of the book is one that most readers are initially drawn to. An aspiring author is the main character. She is courageous, determined, independent, and ambitious. Unfortunately, the execution fell flat, and nothing in the book really made sense. The characters, especially Eva, acted quite immature and young (especially when they were supposed to be 18 and graduating high school), which has an impact on how much viewers enjoy the rest of the book, as was mentioned in the reviews.

To summarize, the world of modern literature is complex and diverse, with many competing voices and perspectives for consideration. While there are many issues and controversies in this area, from representation and identity to literary value and the role of technology, these challenges also provide chances for growth and innovation. We can build a more inclusive and dynamic literary landscape for the twenty-first century if we engage with these issues and strive to address them.

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