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21ST CENTURY LITERATURE INFLUENCE ON TODAY'S SOCIETY AND PEOPLE

The article analyzes how literature of the 21st century influences societies, nations and their culture. Literature continues to be a witness and a participant in the changes of our time as the twenty-first century develops in all its speed and complexity. Today's literary works reflect not just the exterior realities of our digital, globalized world, but also the internal textures of individual and communal experience. Literature has expanded, gotten more diversified, and become more intricately linked with our understandings of identity, community, and change in this new period, which has been characterized by cultural realignment, technological acceleration, and increasingly permeable national boundaries.

The article also explores the characteristics, impact, and future of 21st-century literature through both theoretical analysis and practical examples. Drawing on literary theory and technological insights the article has highlighted the multifaceted nature of modern literature and its evolving role in society. Special attention is given to the analysis of dystopian and climate literature of the 21st century.

From the theoretical perspective, the article examines how 21st-century literature has moved beyond traditional boundaries to incorporate diverse voices, experimental forms, and socially conscious themes. Whether through the emergence of new genres like climate fiction or the blending of digital media with storytelling, literature today reflects a rapidly changing world. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of inclusivity, identity, and the reader's role in meaning-making-principles that are now central to literary creation and reception.

Key words: realities, digital, dystopian, climate fiction, identity.

Problem Statement. The relevance of the research lies in the fact that 21st-century literature is distinguished by its capacity to address difficult global topics, its interaction with digital platforms, and its flexibility in form and substance. Since the emergence of e-books, audiobooks, and digital storytelling platforms has changed the way people read and share tales, technology has had an unparalleled influence on literature. As Margaret Atwood wisely observed, "A word after a word after a word is power" [1]. This statement is still relevant in the digital age, when the written word is still a powerful weapon for social change and self-expression, even when it is presented in fresh and creative ways.

The article provides a comprehensive overview of the key trends and themes in 21st-century literature, focusing on how technology and globalization have transformed literary production and consumption. This includes examining the rise of self-publishing,

the role of social media in book marketing, and the changing relationship between authors and readers in the digital age.

It also analyzes the societal impact of contemporary literature, with particular emphasis on how modern works reflect and influence public discourse on issues such as identity, diversity, environmentalism, and mental health. Special attention will be given to how these themes are addressed in young adult (YA) literature, which has emerged as a powerful force in shaping the perspectives of younger generations.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the works of contemporary literary theorists and cultural critics, including scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles [2] on posthumanism and digital culture, Henry Jenkins [3] on convergence culture, and bell hooks on intersectionality and representation in literature. The article will also draw on the works

of environmental scholars such as Amitav Ghosh [4] on climate change narratives, and literary critics like Sarah Brouillette [5] on the commercialization of literature in the digital age. Roxane Gay [6] explores the notion of a “bad feminist”.

The purpose of the article. The article aims to explore how literature in the 21st century connects with the world we live in today. It examines how contemporary narratives adapt to significant events, such as the emergence of technology, the consequences of globalization, and the evolving standards that influence our day-to-day existence. Beyond mere amusement, literature is a potent medium for discussing significant issues like race, identity, the climate catastrophe, and mental health. Today’s authors are expressing the anxieties, aspirations, and inquiries of a generation attempting to make sense of a world that is changing quickly, just way authors like Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens did with their books by reflecting the hardships of their own day.

By analyzing the impact of contemporary narratives on readers, this article hopes to provide insights into how literature can continue to serve as a vital tool for personal and social transformation, and to contribute to the broader field of literary studies by offering new perspectives on the role of literature in shaping cultural and societal norms in an increasingly complex world.

Outline of the main material of the study. In the 21st century, literature has emerged not only as an artistic expression but also as a mirror of society. Contemporary works often reflect prevailing political ideologies, societal unrest, collective struggles, and aspirations for a better future. In a rapidly evolving global landscape, where issues such as inequality, mental health, and identity politics are at the forefront of public discourse, literature provides a space for both critique and connection. Authors today do not merely observe society; they actively participate in shaping it through the stories they tell, the characters they create, and the themes they explore.

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, literature has undergone a profound transformation, shedding its former confines as a purely artistic or aesthetic endeavor and instead emerging as a potent force within the socio-political arena. No longer does the written word merely reflect the temper of the times; rather, it now serves as an active participant in shaping the political and moral consciousness of its readers. Authors of contemporary fiction and non-fiction, whether newly emerging voices or season literary figures, engage directly with the pressing injustices of the age-questioning authority, subverting

dominant ideologies, and elevating the narratives of those long relegated to the margin of public discourse.

This spirit of critique is perhaps most vividly presented in contemporary dystopian and speculative fiction, where imagine worlds serve as metaphors for existing societal injustices. In *The Power* (2016), Naomi Alderman envisions a reality in which women possess the power to generate electricity through their hands, a biological shift that opened millennia of patriarchal dominance. Beneath its speculative veneer lies a sharp interrogation of gender politics, prompting readers to reflect on the invisible structures of power that govern their own lives. As Margaret Atwood once noted of her own dystopian work, “nothing in my book has not already happened” [1], a reminder that the most chilling visions of the future are often grounded in the present.

The growth of independent publishing through online platforms, and literary collectives has radically altered the means by which such socially engaged literature reaches the public. Writers from historically underrepresented communities are now able to bypass traditional, often exclusionary publishing channels, opting instead for grassroots modes of dissemination. These alternative spaces not only democratize literary culture but also challenge institutional gatekeeping, offering a stage to voices once silenced or ignored.

Thus, contemporary literature stands as both a mirror and an instrument of change, simultaneously reflecting the injustices of its time and laboring to reshape them. By harnessing the art of storytelling, writers engage directly with the civic realm, not as passive commentators but as active participants in the unfolding struggle for justice, equity, and collective liberation. In this light, literature becomes not merely a site of representation, but a dynamic and enduring force within the broader architecture of social transformation.

A defining characteristic of contemporary literature is its engagement with themes of mental health and psychological trauma, marking a decisive shift in both literary focus and cultural consciousness.

This literary movement is marked by an expanding corpus of narratives that place psychological vulnerability at their core, often portraying characters living with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, or complex forms of emotional dislocation. Such works offer visibility to readers who find their own experiences mirrored in these depictions, while simultaneously cultivating empathy among those who encounter such realities from the outside. As Matt Haig reflects in *Reasons to Stay Alive*, “Books are how we understand what it is to be human” [7], a statement

that encapsulates the power of fiction not only to entertain but to heal. Through narrative, readers are invited into the recesses of the human mind, exploring emotional terrains often left unspoken in daily life.

In essence, the prominence of mental health and trauma in contemporary fiction signals a larger cultural reorientation – one that values emotional truth and seeks to dismantle the silence surrounding psychological struggle. Through the written word, literature becomes a sanctuary for empathy and a vehicle for psychological exploration. As authors continue to confront the invisible wounds of the mind, fiction emerges as both an artistic and therapeutic space-where survival, expression, and transformation are not only possible but necessary.

Literature in the 21st century has undergone a notable transformation in how it engages with race, gender, and sexuality. As cultural conversations surrounding identity, inclusivity, and representation gain traction, contemporary literature increasingly reflects the diverse realities of human experience.

Memoir has also emerged as a powerful medium for exploring race, gender, and sexuality. R. Gay's *Hunger* (2017) blends personal history with social critique, examining how body image, trauma, and race intersect in ways that shape identity and agency. Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness* (2014) provides an unflinching account of growing up. These texts function not only as personal testimony but as political interventions, challenging readers to confront structural injustice.

Children's and young adult literature also play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of identity from an early age. Books such as Jessica Love's *Julian Is a Mermaid*, Alex Gino's *George*, and Kacen Callender's *Felix Ever After* provide affirming representations of gender diversity and queerness, creating spaces of belonging for young readers. These texts act as both mirrors and windows, reflecting live realities and encouraging understanding across difference.

Thus, the evolving representations of race, gender, and sexuality in contemporary literature are not incidental but foundational. These shifts reflect a broader reckoning with power, identity, and historical exclusion. Literature today functions as a site of resistance, a tool for re-imagining, and a means of collective healing. As authors and readers alike continue to challenge and expand the boundaries of representation, literature will remain a vital space for interrogating who we are-and who we have the potential to become.

Literature influences public perception and opinion. As the boundaries between literature, media,

and politics become increasingly porous in the 21st century, literature plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals understand the world around them. Contemporary literary works are not merely artistic endeavors but active participants in public discourse. They challenge, reinforce, or reshape prevailing opinions and cultural norms. Literature's influence extends beyond the page into social media platforms, political movements, and educational curricula, making it a vital force in shaping public consciousness.

Dystopian fiction reflects modern fears and government criticism. In the 21st century, dystopian fiction has undergone a powerful resurgence, emerging as a dominant literary mode for interrogating contemporary fears and criticizing governance. These speculative narratives often marked by authoritarian rule, environmental degradation, technological surveillance, and systemic inequality-do more than depict bleak futures. They function as allegorical frameworks through which readers can examine the socio-political anxieties of the present. Dystopian literature offers not only imaginative warnings but also calls for vigilance and resistance, inviting critical engagement with the system shaping our world.

One of the defining traits of modern dystopian fiction is its sharp critique of government and institutional power, particularly in light of the global surge in authoritarianism, nationalism, and widening social rifts. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), although written decades ago, has gained renewed relevance amid recent political shifts in the United States and beyond. Its haunting depiction of reproductive control under a theocratic regime strikes a powerful chord in ongoing conversations about bodily autonomy and religious extremism. Atwood's claim that "nothing in *The Handmaid's Tale* is pure invention" [1] highlights how dystopian fiction can unearth and confront rising authoritarian threats by grounding its stories in real historical events.

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010) similarly critiques state sponsored violence, media manipulation, and entrenched class divisions. The spectacle of the Games, orchestrated by the Capitol to maintain dominance through fear and distraction, parallels real-world mechanisms of propaganda and the commodification of violence.

Dystopian fiction has also globalized, offering new perspectives on authoritarianism and resistance in diverse cultural contexts.

In educational contexts, dystopian fiction has proven a powerful pedagogical tool. Writings such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *The Hunger Games* are used to prompt critical reflection

on media manipulation, environmental degradation, and political disengagement. Carter Lief H. (2016) observes that such narratives “promote active citizenship by fostering critical awareness of structural injustices and the student’s role in either maintaining or resisting them” [8]. In this way, dystopian literature becomes a means of cultivating civic consciousness, particularly among young readers.

Gendered dystopias in particular have offered important insights into the social construction of femininity and the policing of gender roles.

The rise of populism, disinformation, and institutional distrust in the post-2016 global landscape has ushered in a new wave of dystopian narratives that grapple with the crisis of truth. Atwood’s *The Testaments* (2019) and Ling Ma’s *Severance* (2018) depict societies where objective reality is destabilized, and misinformation becomes a tool of control. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when scientific consensus was often politicized and authoritarian rhetoric escalated, such stories reflected and magnified public fears about epistemic instability and state power.

Despite their grim settings, many dystopian narratives are ultimately grounded in hope. Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993), newly celebrated for its prophetic vision, charts the rise of a new belief system rooted in adaptability, interdependence, and ecological stewardship. Butler’s protagonist, Lauren Olamina, exemplifies how visionary thinking and community-building can emerge from societal collapse. In sum, 21st-century dystopian fiction is not merely a genre of despair but a mode of urgent inquiry and political intervention. Through critical extrapolation of contemporary trends, it challenges readers to confront systemic injustices, reflect on personal and collective responsibility, and envision paths toward resistance and renewal. Its enduring appeal lies in its capacity to blend critique with imagination making it one of the most culturally and politically significant genres of our time.

Climate fiction and environmental awareness shift public discourse.

As the 21st century grapples with the escalating consequences of climate change, literature has emerge as both a witness to ecological breakdown and a participant in the conversation around environmental responsibility. Among the most significant developments in contemporary literature is the rise of climate fiction which often refers to a genre that blends science fiction, speculative realism, and environmental advocacy to confront the planetary crisis. Through imaginative grounded narratives, climate fiction shapes public perception by making

abstract threats visible, personal, and emotionally resonant.

Unlike scientific reports or journalistic accounts, literature provides readers with intimate, immersive experiences that foster empathy and emotional understanding. In doing so, it plays a unique role in shifting public discourse from data-driven awareness to emotional engagement – an essential step toward motivating action. In an era where “climate denial” and apathy still persist, the power of storytelling lies in its ability to “translate carbon parts per million into human terms” [9, p. 3].

A leading voice in this genre is Kim Stanley Robinson, whose 2020 novel *The Ministry for the Future* offers a detailed, near-future scenario in which climate change has already resulted in mass heat deaths, economic collapse, and forced migration. Unlike traditional dystopias, the novel also imagines global cooperation and policy reform. Robinson’s work blends fiction with research, providing what some critics call “speculative realism” – a vision of what could happen if current trends continue, but also what might happen if collective action is taken. As Robinson (2020) writes, “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism – but that’s the problem we must solve” [10, p. 101].

Similarly, Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012) explores climate disruption through the eyes of a rural Appalachian woman who discovers a displaced colony of monarch butterflies. Though the novel does not feature global cataclysm, its strength lies in its quiet, localized portrayal of how ecological change touches the lives of ordinary people. Through the protagonist’s journey, Kingsolver illustrates how scientific complexity intersects with cultural, economic, and religious beliefs – making climate change a deeply human, not just environmental, issue. “Science doesn’t tell us what we should do,” she writes. “It only tells us what is” [11, p. 259].

Climate fiction often uses emotionally driven storytelling to connect large-scale global issues with individual responsibility. Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018), which won the Pulitzer Prize, intertwines the lives of various characters through their deep connections with trees. The novel addresses deforestation, environmental destruction, and activism through a series of linked stories that stretch across different times and places. Powers brings emotional depth to ecological grief, portraying trees as conscious beings and partners in the fight for Earth’s survival. As one character insightfully notes, “The best arguments in the world won’t change a

person's mind. The only thing that can do that is a good story" [12, p. 387].

This emphasis on narrative persuasion is central to climate fiction's social impact. According to eco-critic Ursula Heise, stories help audiences process large-scale, slow-moving disasters like climate change by creating temporal and emotional coherence: "Narratives can render visible the invisible – the slow violence of environmental change" [13, p. 47]. Without stories, data alone struggle to inspire urgency or change behavior.

What distinguishes climate fiction is not only its thematic focus but its function as a call to consciousness. Scholars of eco-criticism, such as Heise, Clark, and Nixon, emphasize that literature helps readers conceptualize the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch in which human activity is the dominant influence on climate and environment. Through narrative, readers are able to imagine the consequences of inaction, the potential of resilience, and the moral implications of environmental choices. Literature thus becomes an ethical landscape where questions of justice, responsibility, and sustainability are explored with urgency and imagination.

In addition, young adult climate fiction plays an increasing role in educating and mobilizing the next generation. Novels like Neal Shusterman's *Dry* (2018), where a severe drought leads to societal breakdown, introduce teenage readers to climate-related disaster scenarios while fostering critical thinking and empathy.

Importantly, climate fiction does not only explore collapse – it also explores imagination as resistance. Subgenres such as solarpunk present optimistic visions of sustainable futures, renewable energy, and cooperative living. These hopeful narratives challenge the fatalism often associated with environmentalism and instead promote a mindset of possibility and agency. According to Roos and Hunt, solarpunk stories "resist apocalypse by crafting green utopias grounded in real-world technologies and grassroots activism" [14].

Moreover, the rise of climate fiction coincides with growing public engagement in climate activism, particularly among youth-led movements such

as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion. Literature, whether consciously or not, feeds into these movements by shaping emotional language and visual metaphors that resonate with public audiences.

The influence of climate fiction has also spread to popular media, with TV series, films, and documentaries adapting cli-fi themes and aesthetics.

Despite its growing popularity, climate fiction also faces criticism. Some scholars argue that cli-fi risks oversimplifying scientific complexities or encouraging despair through "eco-anxiety." Others note that many mainstream cli-fi novels center white, Western perspectives, often neglecting Indigenous knowledge systems or voices from the Global South – regions most affected by climate change. However, a new wave of authors is beginning to address this gap. Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), set in Nigeria, and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) incorporate ecological disruption into narratives of colonialism, resistance, and survival, offering alternative frameworks rooted in community and tradition.

In conclusion, climate fiction occupies a vital place in 21st-century literature, functioning as a bridge between science, imagination, and civic awareness. By making climate change emotionally legible and morally urgent, these narratives reshape how readers understand their relationship to the planet and their responsibility within it. In classrooms, book clubs, and activist spaces, cli-fi is not just a genre, it is a tool for awakening, preparing, and, ultimately, transforming public discourse in the age of environmental crisis.

Conclusions. To sum up, the 21st century marks a time of remarkable transformation in literature. It is a period characterized by pluralism, hybridity, and technological integration. Yet, amidst these changes, literature's essential functions remain intact: to educate, to challenge, and to connect people through shared narratives. The findings of this thesis suggest that, while the path forward may be complex, literature will continue to play a vital role in both personal and societal development. As long as there are stories to be told and readers to engage with them, literature will remain a powerful force shaping the way we understand ourselves and the world around us.

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Баняс Н. Ю., Баняс В. В., Токар Б. І. ВПЛИВ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯ НА СУЧАСНЕ СУСПІЛЬСТВО ТА ЛЮДЕЙ

У статті аналізується, як література 21-го століття впливає на суспільства, нації та їхню культуру. Література продовжує бути свідком і учасником змін нашого часу, оскільки 21-е століття розвивається у всій своїй швидкості та складності. Сучасні літературні твори відображають не лише зовнішні реалії нашого цифрового, глобалізованого світу, але й внутрішні текстири індивідуального та спільного досвіду. Література розширилася, стала більш різноманітною та тісніше пов'язана з нашим розумінням ідентичності, спільноти та змін у цей новий період, який характеризується культурною перебудовою, технологічним прискоренням та дедалі більш проникними національними кордонами.

У статті також досліджуються характеристики, вплив та майбутнє літератури 21-го століття, як за допомогою теоретичного аналізу, так і практичних прикладів. Спираючись на літературну теорію та технологічні знання, стаття висвітлює багатогранну природу сучасної літератури та її еволюційну роль у суспільстві. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу антиутопічної та кліматичної літератури 21-го століття.

З теоретичної точки зору, стаття досліджує, як література 21-го століття вийшла за традиційні межі, включивши різноманітні голоси, експериментальні форми та соціально свідомі теми. Чи то через появу нових жанрів, таких як кліматична художня література, чи то через поєднання цифрових медіа з оповіддю, сучасна література відображає світ, що швидко змінюється. Особливий акцент було зроблено на важливості інклюзивності, ідентичності та ролі читача у створенні сенсу – принципах, які зараз є центральними для літературної творчості та сприйняття.

Ключові слова: *реалії, цифровий, антиутопія, кліматична художня література, ідентичність.*