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UNIVERSAL VALUES OF WORLD LITERATURE IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Zamira Bavbekova
Teacher of Russian Language and Literature
Secondary School No. 246 Tashkent, Uzbekistan
bavbekova.zamira@gmail.com
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Abstract: The contemporary world is experiencing profound social, cultural, and technological transformations that reshape systems of values and redefine the foundations of human coexistence. Under these conditions, world literature acquires renewed significance as a universal cultural phenomenon capable of preserving and transmitting ethical ideals across historical periods and national boundaries. This study examines the role of world literature in the formation of universal human values from a social philosophical and axiological perspective. The paper argues that literary texts perform not merely aesthetic functions but also serve as instruments of moral cognition, intercultural communication, and spiritual continuity. Special attention is devoted to the humanistic traditions embodied in classical and modern literary works and their influence on the development of personal identity, civic consciousness, and intercultural dialogue. The findings demonstrate that world literature remains one of the most effective cultural mechanisms for preserving humanistic ideals in the context of globalization and digital transformation.

Keywords: world literature, universal values, axiology, humanism, globalization, intercultural dialogue, cultural identity, moral consciousness.

Global transformations have fundamentally altered the cultural landscape of the twenty first century. Intensified migration, technological innovation, digital communication, and the expansion of transnational cultural interactions have created unprecedented opportunities for dialogue while simultaneously generating new challenges for preserving moral and spiritual values. Contemporary societies increasingly encounter ethical uncertainty, fragmentation of cultural traditions, and the commercialization of social life. Against this background, the question of how universal human values can be maintained and transmitted becomes one of the central concerns of contemporary social philosophy [1].

World literature occupies a unique position within this process. Unlike political doctrines or ideological systems, literature addresses the individual through artistic imagination and emotional experience. Literary narratives enable readers to engage with moral dilemmas, empathize with characters representing diverse cultures, and reflect upon fundamental questions concerning justice, dignity, responsibility, freedom, and compassion. Consequently, literature functions not only as an artistic practice but also as a form of ethical education and philosophical reflection.

The concept of universal values has attracted considerable scholarly attention within philosophy, cultural studies, ethics, and literary criticism. Universal values refer to those moral principles that transcend geographical, political, religious, and ethnic boundaries while preserving their significance for humanity as a whole. Respect for human dignity, justice, freedom, solidarity, tolerance, mercy, and responsibility constitute the normative foundation of civilized coexistence [2]. Throughout history these values have found their most profound artistic expression in literary works created across different civilizations.

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The educational significance of world literature becomes particularly evident within multicultural societies. Literary texts introduce readers to cultural diversity while simultaneously revealing the common ethical foundations shared by humanity. This dual function allows literature to strengthen intercultural understanding without eliminating national specificity. Instead of promoting cultural uniformity, literary dialogue encourages mutual respect based upon recognition of common human aspirations.

Recent developments in digital communication have significantly transformed reading practices. Electronic media have expanded access to literary heritage while simultaneously reducing sustained engagement with complex literary texts [3]. The predominance of fragmented information and visual communication often limits opportunities for deep ethical reflection traditionally associated with literary reading. Therefore, reconsidering the social and philosophical functions of literature has become an important academic task.

This study investigates the role of world literature in preserving universal values during the era of global transformations. Particular attention is devoted to the axiological dimension of literary discourse, the educational potential of classical literature, and the capacity of artistic texts to facilitate intercultural dialogue in contemporary society.

The research is based upon an interdisciplinary methodological framework integrating social philosophy, axiology, comparative literature, and cultural studies. The primary material consists of philosophical works devoted to the theory of values together with literary studies examining the ethical and humanistic functions of artistic discourse. Classical literary texts representing different national traditions are considered as cultural documents reflecting the evolution of universal moral ideals.

The interdisciplinary character of the research makes it possible to investigate world literature simultaneously as an aesthetic phenomenon, a philosophical discourse, and a social institution participating in the preservation of humanity's spiritual heritage.

The conducted analysis demonstrates that world literature constitutes one of the most stable cultural mechanisms for preserving universal human values despite continuous historical transformations. Literary works created in different civilizations, languages, and historical periods reveal remarkable consistency in their interpretation of fundamental ethical principles. Although individual cultures express moral ideals through distinctive artistic traditions, their philosophical essence remains closely connected with the universal aspirations of humanity toward justice, dignity, freedom, responsibility, and compassion [5].

The universality of literary values originates from the anthropocentric nature of artistic discourse. Throughout the history of civilization, literature has focused primarily on the human being as a moral subject whose existence is determined by the necessity of ethical choice. Unlike legal systems or political doctrines that regulate external behavior, literature explores the internal motivations underlying human actions. Consequently, literary texts enable readers to examine moral conflicts from within rather than through externally imposed norms. Such an approach transforms reading into an act of ethical self reflection.

The earliest monuments of world literature already demonstrate the universal character of moral inquiry. The Homeric epics present courage, loyalty, honor, and responsibility as indispensable qualities of human existence. Although rooted in the cultural environment of ancient Greece, these ethical principles transcend their historical context and continue to resonate within contemporary societies. Similarly, the tragedies of Sophocles reveal the permanent tension between individual conscience and social obligation, emphasizing that moral responsibility cannot be reduced to legal conformity alone.

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The medieval literary tradition further expanded the philosophical understanding of universal values. Dante Alighieri transformed the spiritual journey of the individual into a comprehensive moral vision of humanity. The Divine Comedy presents justice not merely as divine punishment or reward but as the realization of moral order governing both individual life and collective existence [4]. Dante's poetic universe demonstrates that ethical development represents an essential condition for intellectual and spiritual freedom.

The Renaissance introduced a new conception of human dignity that profoundly influenced subsequent literary traditions. William Shakespeare explored the complexity of human character with unprecedented psychological depth. His dramatic works reveal that virtue and vice coexist within every individual, making ethical responsibility a continuous process rather than a fixed moral condition. Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, and Macbeth illustrate different manifestations of moral choice under conditions of political instability, personal ambition, and existential uncertainty. Shakespeare thereby transformed literature into a philosophical investigation of human freedom and responsibility.

The Enlightenment and the nineteenth century strengthened the humanistic orientation of literary discourse by emphasizing the intrinsic value of every individual. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe viewed human existence as an endless process of intellectual and moral development. In *Faust*, knowledge acquires genuine meaning only when combined with responsibility for others and commitment to the common good. Goethe's vision rejects purely utilitarian interpretations of progress and instead presents spiritual self perfection as the highest achievement of civilization.

Russian classical literature occupies a particularly significant position within the global history of ethical thought. The novels of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky transcend national boundaries because they address universal philosophical questions concerning conscience, justice, freedom, suffering, and moral responsibility. Tolstoy consistently argued that authentic happiness depends upon spiritual harmony rather than material success. His literary philosophy places love, compassion, and moral self improvement at the center of human existence. Dostoevsky, in turn, investigated the psychological consequences of ethical alienation, demonstrating that denial of moral responsibility inevitably leads to spiritual destruction [6]. Their works continue to influence philosophical discussions concerning human dignity and ethical choice throughout the contemporary world.

Among the representatives of modern realism, Anton Chekhov occupies a distinctive place due to his subtle representation of everyday morality. Unlike writers who construct dramatic ethical confrontations, Chekhov reveals the gradual erosion or development of human values through ordinary situations. His characters rarely become heroic figures, yet their daily choices expose profound philosophical questions regarding responsibility, empathy, honesty, and personal dignity. Chekhov's artistic method demonstrates that moral transformation often occurs through seemingly insignificant actions rather than extraordinary historical events. Contemporary axiological studies of Chekhov's prose further confirm that his artistic world represents an important source for understanding universal ethical ideals within modern literary discourse.

The twentieth century introduced new historical challenges that substantially transformed literary representations of universal values. World wars, totalitarian ideologies, forced migration, and technological modernization required writers to reconsider traditional ethical paradigms. Albert Camus interpreted human existence through the experience of absurdity while simultaneously affirming solidarity and moral responsibility as the only meaningful responses to existential uncertainty. Gabriel García Márquez demonstrated that collective memory, cultural continuity, and human compassion remain essential conditions for preserving dignity even under circumstances of violence and historical upheaval.

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The comparative examination of these literary traditions reveals that universal values are not static philosophical abstractions. Instead, they continuously acquire new meanings through changing historical contexts. Literature preserves continuity precisely because it does not merely repeat ethical doctrines but reinterprets them according to the experiences of successive generations. This capacity for constant renewal explains why classical literary works remain intellectually and morally relevant despite profound transformations of political institutions, economic systems, and cultural practices [7].

The educational implications of these findings are particularly significant within contemporary multicultural societies. Literary education encourages individuals to recognize both cultural diversity and ethical commonality. Through engagement with texts originating from different civilizations, readers develop empathy toward unfamiliar cultural experiences while simultaneously discovering values that unite humanity beyond ethnic, religious, and political distinctions. Consequently, world literature contributes not only to aesthetic education but also to the formation of intercultural competence and responsible global citizenship.

From a social philosophical perspective, literary discourse functions as an important mediator between individual consciousness and collective cultural memory. Universal values survive historical crises because they remain embedded within artistic narratives capable of being continuously interpreted by new generations of readers. Literature therefore performs a dual function. It preserves the accumulated ethical experience of humanity while simultaneously creating intellectual conditions for the emergence of new value orientations appropriate to changing historical realities.

In the context of globalization, this function becomes increasingly important. Contemporary societies require cultural mechanisms capable of balancing global interconnectedness with respect for cultural diversity. World literature fulfills this task by demonstrating that genuine universality does not eliminate cultural plurality but rather emerges through dialogue among different literary traditions. For this reason, literature should be regarded not merely as a component of cultural heritage but as an active participant in the ongoing formation of global humanistic consciousness.

The findings of this study confirm that world literature should be understood not merely as a collection of artistic texts but as a dynamic cultural system responsible for preserving humanity's ethical memory. The universality of literary values does not arise from the elimination of cultural differences. On the contrary, it emerges through the diversity of historical experiences represented in literary works originating from different civilizations. Each national literature contributes its own cultural perspective while simultaneously participating in the formation of a common humanistic tradition.

The contemporary process of globalization has significantly intensified scholarly interest in the relationship between cultural diversity and universal values. The increasing mobility of populations, expansion of digital communication, and growing interconnectedness of societies have transformed the conditions under which cultural identities are constructed. These developments have created new opportunities for intercultural dialogue while also exposing societies to ideological polarization, cultural homogenization, and the weakening of traditional moral institutions. Under such circumstances, literature assumes an especially important social function by providing symbolic spaces where different cultural experiences may coexist without losing their distinctive identities.

Unlike political discourse, which frequently emphasizes differences and competing interests, literary discourse encourages understanding through imagination and empathy. Readers encounter unfamiliar historical realities, social traditions, and ethical perspectives not as abstract concepts but as lived human experiences. This imaginative participation enables individuals to transcend stereotypes and develop a more comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity. Consequently, literature

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promotes dialogue rather than confrontation, mutual respect rather than exclusion, and ethical reflection rather than ideological dogmatism.

The preservation of universal values through literature is particularly significant in the digital age. Contemporary communication technologies have radically transformed patterns of reading, learning, and cultural consumption. Information is increasingly transmitted through short visual messages, fragmented narratives, and algorithmically selected content. While digital technologies have democratized access to literary heritage, they have simultaneously reduced opportunities for sustained engagement with complex philosophical and ethical texts [3]. As a result, the educational function traditionally associated with literary reading faces new challenges.

Nevertheless, digital transformation should not be interpreted exclusively as a threat to literary culture. Contemporary technologies also create new possibilities for the international circulation of literary works, multilingual translation, electronic libraries, and intercultural academic collaboration. Readers today possess unprecedented opportunities to engage with literary traditions that previously remained inaccessible because of geographical, linguistic, or political barriers. The digital environment therefore possesses a dual character. It may contribute either to superficial consumption of cultural products or to deeper intercultural understanding depending upon educational strategies and institutional support.

The research confirms that universal values represented in world literature possess both historical continuity and cultural flexibility. Respect for human dignity, justice, compassion, responsibility, freedom, solidarity, and moral integrity appear consistently in literary traditions originating from different civilizations. Although these values are expressed through diverse artistic forms, their philosophical foundations remain remarkably stable. Such continuity explains why classical literary works continue to preserve their intellectual and educational relevance despite profound social, political, and technological changes.

The conducted analysis also demonstrates that literature contributes significantly to the formation of moral consciousness through mechanisms unavailable to other forms of knowledge. Philosophical concepts presented in abstract theoretical language become emotionally meaningful when embodied in literary characters and narratives. Readers do not merely acquire ethical information but actively participate in moral reflection by interpreting complex human situations, evaluating conflicting value systems, and identifying with individuals representing different historical and cultural experiences. Consequently, literature transforms ethical knowledge into personal experience and encourages the development of independent moral judgment [7].

Particular attention has been devoted to the role of literary education within contemporary multicultural societies. The findings indicate that world literature creates favorable conditions for the development of intercultural competence by combining respect for cultural diversity with recognition of common human values [5]. Literary dialogue enables readers to appreciate the uniqueness of different civilizations while simultaneously discovering ethical principles shared across national, religious, and linguistic boundaries. Such an educational function acquires increasing importance under conditions of globalization where successful intercultural communication has become an essential component of social development.

The study further demonstrates that globalization does not diminish the significance of classical literature. On the contrary, rapid technological modernization, digital communication, and the fragmentation of contemporary information environments increase the educational importance of literary reading. While digital technologies facilitate access to literary heritage, they cannot replace the reflective experience generated through sustained engagement with complex artistic texts. Literature

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therefore remains an indispensable means of cultivating empathy, critical thinking, moral responsibility, and philosophical self awareness.

The axiological interpretation of world literature presented in this research confirms that literary texts should be regarded as dynamic cultural systems rather than static historical artifacts. Every generation discovers new meanings within classical works because universal values continuously interact with changing historical realities [3].

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying its conclusions within higher education, literary studies, philosophy, cultural studies, comparative literature, and teacher education. The proposed social philosophical approach may contribute to the development of educational programs aimed at strengthening students' ethical awareness, intercultural competence, and civic responsibility through the study of world literature.

Future research may focus on comparative axiological analyses of individual national literary traditions, the influence of digital culture upon literary reception, and the role of classical literature in shaping civic identity among younger generations within multicultural educational environments. Such investigations will further clarify the mechanisms through which literature continues to preserve humanity's spiritual heritage while responding creatively to the challenges of the twenty first century.

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