



Multireligious Understanding and Contestation of Works in World Literature

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between religion and literature, and how it can promote or hinder multireligious understanding. This paper delves deeper into the concept of multireligious understanding and explains its importance in fostering harmony and peaceful coexistence between different religious communities. By exploring how the concept of cultural capital, as developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, can help us understand the dynamics of multireligious understanding and contestation in the context of world literature. This paper also examines how works of literature from different religious traditions can promote multireligious understanding by highlighting commonalities and shared experiences between different communities. In addition, this paper discusses the potential for works of literature to challenge and contest established religious beliefs and practices, and the implications of such contestation for multireligious understanding. Overall, this paper summarizes the main arguments of the article and underscores the potential of literature to serve as a powerful tool for promoting multireligious understanding and reducing conflict between different religious communities.

Keywords: *Bourdieu; Contestation; Multireligious; World Literature*

Introduction

In today's diverse world, it is important to have a deep understanding and appreciation of different cultures and religions. Literature can serve as a powerful tool in promoting multireligious understanding, as it offers readers a glimpse into the beliefs, practices, and values of people from different religious backgrounds (Panjwani, 2020). Religion has played a crucial role in shaping the world's cultures and societies. Religious beliefs and practices have influenced everything from politics and economics to art and literature.

World literature is a rich source of multireligious understanding, offering insights into different religious traditions and their impact on individual and collective identities. At the same time, works of literature can also contest religious beliefs and practices, challenging traditional understandings and offering new perspectives on the complex relationship between religion and society (Astor & Mayrl, 2020). Multireligious literature can take many forms, from religious texts to contemporary novels and poetry. It can offer readers a chance to explore the similarities and differences between different religious

traditions, and can provide a platform for dialogue and discussion about important social and political issues (Afdholy, 2023).

One approach to studying multireligious literature is through the critical method of character analysis. This method involves studying the protagonists of a work of art from a critical point of view, and can provide insights into the ways in which religious beliefs and practices shape individual identity and behavior (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). In addition to character analysis, multicultural literature can also offer an accurate representation of different cultures and must be free from stereotypes (Yang, 2019). It helps students understand diversity and builds respect for people of different cultures. Multicultural literature is especially important in battling negative stereotypes and offers readers an appreciation of other cultures and beliefs.

Moreover, multireligious literature has the potential to foster empathy and understanding between people of different faiths (Museka, 2019). By reading literature that explores the experiences and perspectives of people from different religious backgrounds, readers can develop a deeper sense of compassion and respect for others, even those with whom they may disagree. In conclusion, multireligious literature plays an important role in promoting multireligious understanding in today's diverse world (Fernando, 2023). By offering readers insights into different religious traditions and fostering empathy and understanding between people of different faiths, literature can help build bridges of understanding and promote a more peaceful and harmonious world.

This article explores the role of multireligious understanding and contestation in works of world literature. It begins by examining the ways in which literature can offer insights into different religious traditions and their impact on individual and collective identities. It then turns to the contestation of religious beliefs and practices in literature, exploring the ways in which works of literature challenge traditional understandings and offer new perspectives on the complex relationship between religion and society (Roy, et al., 2020). Finally, the article concludes by considering the potential of literature to promote multireligious understanding and foster greater empathy and respect between people of different faiths.

Defining Multireligious Understanding

Religion has played a significant role in shaping human culture and societies throughout history. It has been a source of inspiration for art, music, and literature, providing a framework for human beings to understand their place in the world and the purpose of their existence (Hadrovic, 2022). As a result, world literature has been greatly influenced by religious themes, motifs, and ideas.

In today's world, where globalization and multiculturalism are becoming increasingly prevalent, the need for multireligious understanding has become more pressing than ever (Akramkulovich, 2020). In this article, we will explore how world literature can help promote multireligious understanding and tolerance by examining works of literature that deal with religious themes and motifs.

Multireligious understanding can be defined as the ability to appreciate, respect, and understand the beliefs, practices, and traditions of different religions (Daheri, et al., 2023, Afdholy, 2017). It involves acknowledging the diversity of religious beliefs and recognizing that each religion has its own unique perspective on the world. Multireligious understanding is essential for building a peaceful and harmonious society, where individuals can coexist despite their differences.

Multireligious Understanding and Contestation in Bourdieu's Idea

Pierre Bourdieu was a prominent French sociologist whose ideas and theories have been influential in a variety of fields, including literary studies (Wolf, 2021). Bourdieu's concept of cultural

capital and the ways in which it is acquired, distributed, and valued within different social fields can help us understand multireligious understanding and contestation in the context of world literature.

In Bourdieu's view, cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and other cultural assets that individuals possess, which are valued and recognized within particular social fields (DiMaggio, 2019, Afdholy, 2021). These fields can include art, literature, music, education, and religion, among others. Different social fields have different criteria for what constitutes cultural capital and how it is acquired and evaluated. Within the context of world literature, the acquisition and distribution of cultural capital can be influenced by factors such as religion, language, and national identity (Sinkovics, 2021). For example, a work of literature written in a particular language or from a particular religious or national perspective may be valued more highly within that community or social field than in others.

However, the acquisition and distribution of cultural capital can also lead to contestation and conflicts between different religious and cultural groups (Singh & Rana, 2019). In Bourdieu's view, such conflicts arise when different social fields have different criteria for what constitutes cultural capital, and when individuals or groups seek to assert their own cultural capital as superior to others. For example, in the context of world literature, a work of literature from one religious or cultural tradition may be seen as more valuable or significant than a work from another tradition, leading to debates and disagreements about the relative merits of different literary works.

In order to promote multireligious understanding and reduce such contestation and conflicts, it is important to recognize and value the cultural capital of different religious and cultural traditions (Sahide, et al., 2022). This requires a willingness to engage with and appreciate works of literature from different traditions, as well as a recognition of the complex and diverse ways in which cultural capital is acquired, distributed, and valued within different social fields.

Multireligious Understanding in World Literature

World literature can play a significant role in promoting multireligious understanding by exposing readers to different religious perspectives and ideas. Literature can help readers to develop empathy and understanding for people of different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds (Lähdesmäki, 2021). It can also provide readers with a window into the historical, cultural, and social context in which religions have emerged (Arifani, Hidayat, Afdholy, & Hermuningsih, 2022).

One of the most famous examples of world literature that deals with religious themes is the Bible. The Bible has also had a significant impact on Western culture, providing a framework for ethics, morality, and spirituality (Gallego-Alvarez, et al., 2020, Afdholy, 2019). Another example of world literature that deals with religious themes is the Quran. The Quran is the central text of Islam and provides Muslims with guidance on how to live a virtuous life (Soebahar, et al., 2021). The Quran has been translated into numerous languages and has influenced literature, music, and art around the world. In addition to these religious texts, there are countless works of literature that deal with religious themes and ideas. For example, Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" explores themes of faith, doubt, and redemption, while Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" examines the clash between traditional African beliefs and Christianity (McManus, 2022).

One of the primary functions of literature is to offer insights into the cultural and social contexts in which it is produced (Maruti & Afdholy, 2021). Works of literature can provide readers with an understanding of different religious traditions and their impact on individual and collective identities (Nur, 2021). This is particularly true of works of world literature, which often explore the complex relationships between different religions and cultures.

For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* offers a powerful portrayal of the impact of Christian missionaries on traditional African societies (Agustin, 2022). The novel depicts the clash

between traditional Igbo beliefs and the Christian teachings of the missionaries, highlighting the ways in which religion can be used to assert power and control over others. Through its vivid portrayal of the interactions between different religious traditions, the novel offers readers a deeper understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics at play in colonial Africa.

Another example of multireligious understanding in world literature is Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The novel explores the complex relationship between Islam and Western culture, offering a nuanced portrayal of the tensions and conflicts that arise when different religious traditions come into contact with one another (Mossière, 2022). Through its exploration of the experiences of Muslim immigrants in Western societies, the novel offers readers a deeper understanding of the ways in which religious identity can shape individual and collective identities in multicultural societies.

Contestation of Religious Beliefs and Practices in World Literature

While literature can offer insights into different religious traditions and their impact on individual and collective identities, it can also contest religious beliefs and practices, challenging traditional understandings and offering new perspectives on the complex relationship between religion and society (Nyhagen, 2019). Works of literature can offer a critique of religious institutions and practices, highlighting the ways in which they can be used to reinforce social inequality and oppression.

One example of the contestation of religious beliefs and practices in literature is James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Demeter, 2019). The novel offers a powerful critique of the role of religion in reinforcing social inequality and oppressing marginalized communities. Through its portrayal of the experiences of African American communities in the United States, the novel challenges traditional understandings of Christianity and offers a new perspective on the ways in which religion can be used as a tool of oppression.

Another example of the contestation of religious beliefs and practices in literature is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (Birgani, et al., 2019). The novel offers a critique of the rigid caste system in India, which is often justified on religious grounds. Through its portrayal of the experiences of a family in Kerala, the novel challenges traditional understandings of Hinduism and offers a new perspective on the ways in which religion can be used to reinforce social inequality.

Potential of Literature to Promote Multireligious Understanding

Despite the potential for literature to contest religious beliefs and practices, it can also promote multireligious understanding and foster greater empathy and respect between people of different faiths (Iliško, 2022). Works of literature can offer readers a deeper understanding of different religious traditions and help to break down stereotypes and prejudices. In this chapter, we will examine several works of literature that promote multireligious understanding and tolerance.

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingslover tells the story of a missionary family who travels to the Congo in the late 1950s to spread Christianity (Sharma, 2022). The novel explores the clash between Western and African cultures and the devastating impact of colonialism on the people of the Congo. The novel is told from the perspective of five different narrators, including the wife and daughters of the missionary, who each have their own unique perspective on the events that unfold.

The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie is a controversial novel that explores themes of religious identity, cultural conflict, and the nature of faith (Tah, 2021). The novel tells the story of two Indian immigrants who are caught up in a plane hijacking and fall from the sky. One of the men, Saladin Chamcha, begins to transform into a devil-like figure, while the other, Gibreel Farishta,

Furthermore, one example of literature's potential to promote multireligious understanding is Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. The novel explores the complex relationship between Islam and Western culture, offering a nuanced portrayal of the experiences of Afghan immigrants in the United States (Ghafoor & Farooq, 2020). Through its portrayal of the experiences of two friends from different religious backgrounds, the novel offers readers a deeper understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics at play in multicultural societies.

Another example of literature's potential to promote multireligious understanding is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The novel explores the experiences of African American communities in the United States, offering a powerful critique of the ways in which religious institutions and practices can be used to reinforce social inequality and oppression (Jweid, 2021). At the same time, the novel also offers a nuanced portrayal of the role of religion in shaping individual and collective identities, highlighting the ways in which religious beliefs and practices can offer hope and healing in the face of trauma and oppression.

Conclusion

Multireligious understanding and contestation are important themes in works of world literature. Through their exploration of different religious traditions and their impact on individual and collective identities, works of literature can offer readers a deeper understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics at play in multicultural societies. At the same time, works of literature can also contest religious beliefs and practices, challenging traditional understandings and offering new perspectives on the complex relationship between religion and society. Ultimately, the potential of literature to promote multireligious understanding and foster greater empathy and respect between people of different faiths is vitally important in today's diverse world. By breaking down stereotypes and prejudices and promoting a deeper understanding of different religious traditions, literature can help to build bridges of understanding and promote a more peaceful and harmonious world.

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