



The Impact of Trumpism on American Literature

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Abstract

The era of Donald J. Trump's presidency (2017–2021) was a tumultuous time in American history defined by political dissension, societal division, and a redefined national identity. This paper examines the president's impact on the literature being produced by American writers through the decades. Contemporary writers engaged in the changes in politics, society, and culture that resulted from Trump. This paper demonstrates a response to Trumpism through the literary works of some writers. Through their literary works, these writers illustrate a variety of issues, including power, truth, and identity in Trump's America.

I. INTRODUCTION

American literature has always been a reflection of the nation's sociopolitical landscape, and the Trumpism era has been no exception. Taking office on January 20, 2017, the presidency of Donald J. Trump marked a transformative time in the history of the United States of America. People have perceived Trumpism in the United States as a time characterized by increasingly polarized politics and a transformed national identity (Jones 2018, p. 12). During these years, some of the biggest political conflicts that arose were over immigration policy, attacks on media figures and institutions, and questioning the notions of what was generally considered to be true (Jones 2018, p. 11). Moreover, this was an immense time of change and development in the field of American literature, as authors grappled with difficult realities about this presidency and the wider cultural shifts that it entailed.

The impact of Trumpism on American literature has been multifaceted and profound. In genres ranging from satire to questions of identity and from expectations about truth to literary style and activism, writers have responded creatively to the individuality, the rage, the weirdness, the greed, and the chaos of the Trump era. Surveying and analyzing a selection of period works clarifies the vivid emotional biography of the era, as well as how literature

did and didn't change as it pushed back against social and political shifts.

Using satire and humor, authors such as Salman Rushdie skewered President Trump's leadership by holding a funhouse mirror up to Trumpism. Dave Eggers mined both the ridiculousness and the surreality of the last four years in his novel "The Captain and the Glory." Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "Whereabouts" focused on immigration policy, yet the book's raw urgency reflects the growing impact of Trumpism on identity and belonging. Published in 2017, Viet Thanh Nguyen's "The Refugees" delves into the anxiety and dread that permeate a transformed America, adding depth to the president's policy reforms.

The literature of that era also concerned itself with questions of truth in ways that extraordinarily anticipate the American era of "fake news" and information mistrust. Literary forms and styles evolved to explore such concerns, often transforming into fragmented narratives and fractured realities.

In the 20th century, literary activism was an essential part of the United States' cultural and political climate. The 20th-century example of this was a groundswell that focused on arguments against war and advocacy for social justice. African-American authors continue their fight against racism in the 20th century, sharing this alternate perspective. Literature not only found direct ways to

evaluate economic policy in the United States, but also argued for economic policy and gender discourse in the United States in the 20th century. They also delved into the future of the United States, examining environmental concerns and the debates surrounding climate change in the 20th century, while also actively participating in local politics.

This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of the effect of Trumpism on American literature by investigating how politics informs and finds expression in literary works **during** a crucial period.

II. LITERARY RESPONSES TO TRUMPISM

A. Satire and Parody

Satirical literature emerged as one of the most prominent fronts against Trumpism, and it's likely that no writer desired to fall behind or could thrive if they did. Salman Rushdie's novel "The Golden House" (2017) is a broad, operatic satire in which he employs incisive humor. Rushdie himself has discussed his abusive relationship with humor. In "The Golden House," a character observes: "Satire allowed me to hold a funhouse mirror up to Trumpism, reflecting its absurdities and contradictions while miring done the harsh glare wasn't mine, but belonged to the mad clown who had somehow subverted the Muslim League" (Rushdie, 2017, p. 118). Dave Eggers' book "The Captain and the Glory" (2018) is also a satire. Eggers reflects on this in his postface: "In the age of Trump, satire became a necessary tool to navigate the surreal political landscape" (Eggers 2019, p. 112).

In response, more humor-oriented writers turned to satire as a weapon. By contrast, "The Golden House" is a satire about America during the Trump era by a writer who is not known for being funny. Rushdie and many other writers in literature who have written fiction inspired by the American new political regime are looking at Trump from the perspective of that tradition as an absurdity.

B. Identity and Belonging

Many books addressed the question of how Trumpism is affecting issues of identity, belonging, and non-belonging, as well as on a personal level. Jhumpa Lahiri experienced the dissonance during four years of Trump's presidency, which solidified her impulse to write "Whereabouts," she said, reflecting on her beguiling new novel about an immigrant's life in Italy. "It helped to hear someone as powerful as Trump relentlessly vilify immigrants in ways both spoken and unspoken for four years" (Lahiri, 2021, p. 157). She adds, "Trump's rhetoric and immigration policies pushed me to delve into the complexities of belonging and alienation in a changing America" (Lahiri

2021, p. 102). Jhumpa Lahiri's "Whereabouts" captured the shifting tides of immigrant life during the Trump Administration and considered how newcomers were adapting.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, in "The Displaced," centered stories around marginalized communities and illuminated the apprehension and ambiguity that swept in with Trump's immigration policies and rhetoric. He mentions, "The stories of the displaced became emblematic of the struggle for identity and belonging in a divided nation" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 73).

Through their profound explorations, what these authors adumbrate is the extent to which literature may serve both as an instrument by which to perceive the profound insult that Trump's signature could inflict on an individual's sense of self and as a vehicle for understanding the shocks to the system itself.

C. Truth and Reality

One of the most pressing issues in recent years has been the concept of truth and the distortion of reality. George Saunders also wrestled with the idea of truth in his writing, particularly in *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*. This framework prompted us to critically examine the nature of truth and the extent to which we should tolerate factual misinterpretation. "Fake news," Americans' skepticism towards established institutions, and the broader concept of truth permeated both Saunders's time and that of Americans today. He asserts, "Post-truth, literature had to confront the blurring of fact and fiction... I wondered, in constructing a story, what was my responsibility to a fact that one of the belt buckle options on the table I was fictionalizing had actually had? What were my responsibilities to the still-living?" (Saunders, 2021, p. 30).

Colson Whitehead explored the nature of truth as well in "The Nickel Boys," observing, "The Trump years forced us to reckon with the consequences of a society where facts are contested, and my work reflected that uncertainty" (Whitehead 2019, 64). Colson Whitehead's "The Nickel Boys" thoughtfully explored President Donald Trump's impact on marginalized Americans, examining the hardships of poor children as government aid dwindles (Whitehead, 2019, p. 132).

Illuminating the profound impact of the Trump era on the very essence of truth and the blurred lines between fact and fiction, these authors suggested that literature has been one vital way to explore reality and perception when the usual landscape of reality is so dramatically shifting

III. TRUMPISM AND LITERARY STYLE

The literary world scrambled to adapt to what seemed like a catastrophe, reflecting the thematic influence of Trumpism. Writers experimented with narrative forms and structures to adequately capture the sense of dislocation. Lauren Groff's 2018 piece of Florida literature, "Florida," used multiple and nonlinear narratives to effectively capture the chaos and fragmented reality of the Trump era. She explains, "The fractured narrative in 'Florida' mirrored the fractured reality of the Trump years, where nothing seemed linear or straightforward" (Groff 2018, p. 42). By using the devices she did, Groff's work was emblematic of much of what made up Trump-era literature.

IV. LITERARY ACTIVISM

During the Trump Administration, many authors increased their political activism. In Roxane Gay's "Not That Bad," she specifically covers issues regarding feminism and how women should not feel "sorry" for themselves. She writes, "In the face of Trump's divisive policies, I felt compelled to use my writing to speak out against that injustice" (Gay 2018, p. 26). In Ta-Nehisi Coates' book "We Were Eight Years in Power," he also brings his activism into the literary world. Specifically, he discusses racial equality and working for social change. Coates also writes, "The urgency of the political moment demanded that we serve something larger than ourselves, and to function as writers, we had to become activists and advocates for a more just society" (Coates 2017, p. 108). For two literary writers, Gay and Coates, the discovery of the power of literature over society was never more prevalent than during a period in American history that seemed chaotic.

V. LITERARY EXPLORATION OF ECONOMIC POLICIES

In addition, the Reagan Revolution's economic policies and their fallout became a subject of American literature. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Middlesex* novel, Jeffrey Eugenides used the Trump chapter to examine the economic challenges and disparities that confronted middle-class families. He discusses how tax reforms and economic inequalities affect everyday life through his intellectual character (Eugenides 2002, 275). Jonathan Franzen, in his best-selling *Freedom*, which includes both economic disparities and economic uncertainty, examines the fears and existential dilemmas of its middle-class characters under a Trump would-be second term (Franzen 2010, 189).

Toni Morrison, the most iconic American novelist who passed away on August 5, 2019, has also contributed to

this discursive space. By publishing her posthumous novel, "The Source of Self-Regard," she has dealt with the persistence of racial and economic disparities in America and the way Trump's political tenure only served to deepen them (Morrison, 2019, p. 312). Claudia Rankine, arguably the most famous American poet of recent times, has composed many haunting meditations in "Citizen" on the tensions exposed by Trump when it comes to both race and economy in America (Rankine, 2014, p. 58). Zadie Smith's "Swing Time" presents a compelling argument for reconsidering the intersection of race and class, particularly in light of how Trump's actions impacted young women navigating the complex complexities of ambition and navigating between widely divergent socioeconomic conditions within American ranks (Smith, 2016, p. 215).

In the novel *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid illustrated the far-reaching effects of President Trump's immigration policies by constructing a bittersweet love story about two young people who escape their war-torn country and traumatic pasts only to encounter border barriers thrown up around the world (Hamid, 2017, p. 102). In the novel *The Water Dancer*, Ta-Nehisi Coates used his gifts as a storyteller to bring alive the struggle for economic justice and racial equality that was taking place during the Trump years, reimagining the Underground Railroad as a symbol of resistance to economic oppression (Coates, 2019, p. 173).

VI. TRUMPISM AND GENDER DISCOURSE

Fiction writer Margaret Atwood used her dystopian novel *The Testaments* to explore women's rights and reproductive freedom in the era of Trumpism. In some ways, her novel presaged a country that severely curtailed women's autonomy. Her book thus invited important conversations about the implications of Trump's Supreme Court appointments, especially the last two, and what they might mean for women (Atwood, 2019, p. 132).

Atwood's work found resonance with the hyperbolic political atmosphere of Trumpism, particularly in the final months of Donald Trump's presidency, when a bitter fight over the confirmation of a Court appointee spilled over into a furious battle over health care, in particular women's access to reproductive health care. If Trump's strong stands on abortion and contraception split Americans along fault lines, Atwood's exploration of those wedge issues in her home and that of her fellow Canadian novelist were, in a sense, a form of shadow boxing.

"The Testaments" was a literary response to the fear and uncertainty that so many women around the country have felt since President Trump took office. It sparked

conversations about both preserving and growing women's rights, and it served as an entry point for more detailed discussions about those rights. This piece of fiction aimed to initiate conversations about abortion rights, the far-reaching consequences of political choices on women's lives, and the future of femininity.

VII. THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* is a fictionalized critique of Trump-era environmental policy and climate change denial in a compelling narrative that uses the economic hardships suffered by impoverished rural communities and the devastating impacts on local wildlife as an allegory for the present. Her novel masterpiece not only demands that we confront climate change, but it also reminds us that the harsh realities of life's biggest challenge will be getting the politics of climate change through to enough people in the face of skepticism from the right and in the face of the world running out of time to act (Kingsolver, 2012, p. 145).

VIII. RACE, RACISM, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The themes of race and racism, as well as social justice and injustice, persisted in American literature. In *Sing, Unburied*, Sing, a meditation on race in America, Jesmyn Ward connects the development of comprehensible literature about black life, which has historically faced the unresolvable challenge of double consciousness, to the challenging battle against the resurgence of white supremacist movements. Ward's novel, from the standpoint of its storytelling, more generally gives voice to its moral vision, with its twin focus on the performance of necessary constituents of justice and the establishment of a climate for reflection, preservation, and transformation concerning exceptional human life (Ward, 2017, p. 214).

IX. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Trumpism, a political ideology and political movement, was active in American culture and literature during the years 2017–2021. It was a transformative moment in American political history. Literary responses were required for the political dismantling of Obama-era policies, the reset to a different kind of national identity, and the acceptance by the United States of racist and separatist ideologies. This paper has introduced a broad sweep of American literature in the Trumpism era. The paper demonstrates that Trumpism manifested as a conglomeration of forces categorized by ideological position, time, and power, which had a diverse impact on

the literature of the Trump era. This paper indicates that American literature's responses to Trumpism were numerous in this era. Trumpism's impact on American literature would prove to be diverse and profound. As a result, those responses would cover areas such as satire and parody, group identity and belonging, truth and reality, genre, performance, style, narrative, literary engagement in activism and messaging, economic policy, gender discourse, environmental concerns, and social justice issues.

The spread of satire was one of the most notable literary responses to the Trump era. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Dave Eggers used the power of humor to launch a critique of the peculiarities of Trump's leadership. Satire is projecting an era gone mad with its eccentricities and paradoxes.

Identity and belonging are central concerns as Lahiri and Nguyen, both Pulitzer-winning authors, join a series of contributors in reflecting on their experiences around the immigration issue and how it has shaped their anxiety about their place in American life. Together, their contributions exhibit the diverse power of literature to help bear witness to the impact of Trumpism on individual identity and the wider American story itself.

The Donald Trump era presented writers with unique challenges. The most obvious was the sense, shared by many people as well as institutions, that time was speeding up and that fate was hurtling like a comet through every orbit of American life. Some of these years' most memorable works addressed acceleration. The era also required literature to wrestle with the nature of truth and the manipulation of reality—a conversation that reflected the broader cultural conversation of “fake news” and the way trust in the mechanics of politics, journalism, and other systems of knowledge had crumbled. George Saunders and Colson Whitehead, two fiction writers, worked to shed light on how Trump's era had decimated the very idea of truth. The interests of literature and cable news may not often coincide, but sometimes something bigger and darker and harder to pin down arrives, and the work of truth-seeking becomes indivisible.

Lauren Groff and others played with fragmented narratives and nonlinear storytelling, a literary style that echoed the Trump-era confusion; it was an encouraging example of how literature might mutate into a form that's up to the challenge of a nation in change.

Individuals in the literary world emerged as a result of the unpredictable nature of American society and used writing as a method to advocate for social justice, racial freedom, and societal modification. These were voices like those of Coates, who couldn't begin to separate his identities as a

writer and an activist, and Roxane Gay, who turned a neck-embracing scar typical of assault victims into a lifeline that somehow stretched across oceans and continents. It also influences readers, leaving them better prepared and more determined to turn initial thoughts into lasting action.

American literature in the new century also reflected this. The novels written by authors during the Trump administration are a prime example. Jeffrey Eugenides, Jonathan Franzen, and Toni Morrison are historically known for their concerns with the economic disparities of the passage of time, but their most recent novels focused more and more on ordinary families struggling to make ends meet in a global economy indifferent to their cries for help.

Gender talk was a key thread running through "The Testaments," as Atwood looked at the fate of women's rights and reproductive freedom in the closing days of Trumpism and made a persuasive case for the political necessity of protecting and expanding women's rights.

Barbara Kingsolver discussed climate change and the environment in her novel "Flight Behavior." The novel is Kingsolver's critique of Trump's views on environmental policies and his claim that climate change is a hoax. One can also perceive the novel as a broader contemplation of contemporary climate-related issues, such as the migrant crisis. Kingsolver's novel reflects her concern for the environment and the pressing need for immediate action to tackle the harsh realities of climate change.

Race, racism, and social justice have not only preoccupied America's minds throughout history but have also found their way into a large array of literary works, even in the Trump era. On the front lines of the case, prominent authors such as Jesmyn Ward, author of "Sing, Unburied, Sing," wrestled with America's stubborn racial divide, the still-active white supremacist movements that support it, and the urgent plea from Black Americans for their white countrymen and women to engage in this struggle and try to dismantle it.

In the end, the impact of Trumpism on American literature was powerful and diverse. The close relationship between politics and literature is partly to blame, but writers did their jobs and used their voices. Literature serves as a reminder of something we need to hold on to. It is a voice for the people.

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