

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN REALIST FICTION

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Abstract

This study focuses on the role of women in realist fiction and explains how female characters are used to present real life and social reality. In realist literature, women often become central figures because their daily experiences clearly show the problems existing in society. Unlike romantic or ideal characters, women in realist works are portrayed as realistic individuals with ordinary lives, responsibilities, and difficulties. Female characters in realist fiction belong to various social backgrounds and perform different roles, such as mothers, wives, daughters, and workers. Through these roles, authors demonstrate how social rules and traditions influence women's lives and limit their freedom. At the same time, realist writers give much attention to women's inner world, showing their emotions, thoughts, and personal struggles. These characters help reveal social injustice, inequality between men and women, and moral challenges.

Moreover, women's lives in realist fiction often reflect wider social issues. Their personal stories are connected with problems such as economic hardship, forced marriage, lack of rights, and limited access to education. Some realist works also present women as strong personalities who try to change their situation and seek independence despite social pressure.

To sum up, women play an essential role in realist fiction because they help portray society in a truthful and realistic way. Through female characters, authors express criticism of social systems and raise important questions about justice, morality, and the status of women. Therefore, the depiction of women remains a significant element of realist literature.

Keywords: Women in literature, realism, female roles, society, social reality, gender inequality, realist fiction

Аннотация

В данной работе рассматривается роль женщин в реалистической художественной литературе и объясняется, как женские образы используются для изображения реальной жизни и социальной действительности. В

произведениях реализма женщины часто становятся центральными персонажами, поскольку через их повседневный опыт ярко раскрываются проблемы общества. В отличие от романтизированных или идеализированных героев, женщины в реалистической прозе показаны как обычные люди с реальными обязанностями, трудностями и жизненными испытаниями. Женские персонажи в реалистической литературе принадлежат к разным социальным слоям и выполняют различные роли, такие как матери, жёны, дочери и работницы. Через эти образы авторы показывают, как общественные нормы и традиции влияют на жизнь женщин и ограничивают их свободу. В то же время писатели-реалисты уделяют большое внимание внутреннему миру героинь, раскрывая их чувства, мысли и личные переживания. Эти образы помогают выявить социальную несправедливость, неравенство между мужчинами и женщинами, а также нравственные конфликты.

Кроме того, судьбы женщин в реалистической литературе часто отражают более широкие социальные проблемы. Их личные истории связаны с бедностью, принудительными браками, отсутствием прав и ограниченным доступом к образованию. В некоторых произведениях реализма женщины показаны как сильные личности, которые, несмотря на давление общества, стремятся изменить свою жизнь и обрести независимость.

В заключение можно сказать, что женщины играют важную роль в реалистической литературе, поскольку именно через них авторы правдиво изображают общество. Женские образы помогают критически осмыслить социальные порядки и поднимают важные вопросы справедливости, морали и положения женщин в обществе. Таким образом, изображение женщин остаётся значимым элементом реалистической литературы.

Ключевые слова: Женщины в литературе, реализм, женские образы, общество, социальная реальность, гендерное неравенство, реалистическая проза.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu ishda realistik badiiy adabiyotda ayollarning o‘rni ko‘rib chiqiladi hamda ayol obrazlari orqali real hayot va ijtimoiy vogelik qanday tasvirlanishi tushuntiriladi. Realizm yo‘nalishidagi asarlarda ayollar ko‘pincha markaziy qahramon sifatida namoyon bo‘ladi, chunki ularning kundalik hayoti orqali jamiyat muammolari yaqqol olib beriladi. Idealizatsiya qilingan qahramonlardan farqli o‘laroq, realistik asarlardagi ayollar haqiqiy majburiyatlar va hayotiy qiyinchiliklarga duch keladigan oddiy insonlar sifatida tasvirlanadi. Realistik adabiyotdagi ayol qahramonlar turli ijtimoiy qatlamlarga mansub bo‘lib, ona, xotin, qiz farzand va ishchi kabi rollarni bajaradi. Ushbu obrazlar orqali mualliflar ijtimoiy me’yorlar va an’analar ayollarning hayotiga qanday ta’sir ko‘rsatishini va ularning erkinligini qanday cheklashini yoritib beradi. Shu bilan birga, realist yozuvchilar ayol qahramonlarning ichki dunyosiga katta

e'tibor qaratib, ularning his-tuyg'ulari, fikrlari va shaxsiy kechinmalarini olib beradi. Bunday obrazlar ijtimoiyadolatsizlik, gender tengsizlik va axloqiy ziddiyatlarni aniqlashga yordam beradi.

Bundan tashqari, realistik adabiyotda ayollar taqdiri ko'pincha kengroq ijtimoiy muammolar bilan bog'liq holda tasvirlanadi. Ularning shaxsiy hayoti qashshoqlik, majburiy nikoh, huquqlarning yetishmasligi va ta'lim olish imkoniyatlarining cheklanganligi kabi masalalar bilan uzviy bog'langan. Ayrim realistik asarlarda ayollar jamiyat bosimiga qaramay, o'z hayotini o'zgartirishga va mustaqillikka erishishga intiluvchi kuchli shaxslar sifatida tasvirlanadi.

Xulosa qilib aytganda, realistik adabiyotda ayollar muhim o'rin tutadi, chunki ular orqali mualliflar jamiyatni haqqoniy va real tarzda aks ettiradi. Ayol obrazlari ijtimoiy tartiblarni tanqidiy baholash imkonini beradi hamda adolat, axloq va jamiyatda ayollarning mavqeい haqidagi muhim masalalarni ko'taradi. Shu sababli, ayollar tasviri realistik adabiyotning muhim unsuri hisoblanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Adabiyotda ayollar, realizm, ayol obrazlari, jamiyat, ijtimoiy voqelik, gender tengsizlik, realistik adabiyot.

Introduction

Realist fiction is a type of literature that tries to show life in a realistic and honest way. Writers of realism describe everyday life, ordinary people, and real social problems without making them look ideal or perfect. One of the key topics in realist fiction is the image of women, because women's experiences often clearly show how society works and how social rules affect people's lives.¹ In many realist stories, women are important characters who help the reader understand family relationships, marriage, and social responsibilities. Female characters are usually shown in situations where they must follow traditions and social expectations, even when these rules limit their freedom. Through these stories, authors explain how women often have to put their own wishes aside in order to meet the demands of society.² Realist literature presents women as real human beings with emotions and personal struggles. They feel happiness and sadness, love and disappointment, and often face difficult choices. Their problems are connected to real social issues, such as poverty, unequal rights, limited education, and dependence on men.³ By showing these problems, realist writers aim to present the true position of women in society.

Another important aspect of women's roles in realist fiction is social criticism. Writers use female characters to point out injustice, unfair traditions, and inequality between men and women. At the same time, some realist works show women who try

¹ Smith, Women in Realist Literature, 2018, p. 23.

² Brown, The Portrayal of Female Characters in 19th Century Realism, 2016, p. 45.

³ Johnson, Family and Gender in Realist Fiction, 2017, p. 12.

to change their lives, defend their dignity, and achieve independence despite social pressure.

In conclusion, the study of women in realist fiction is important for understanding both literature and society. Female characters help reveal real human experiences and social problems, making realist fiction meaningful and relevant even today.

The Emergence of Realism in Fiction by American Women

The study of American literature has tended to focus on certain decades at the expense of others. The masterpieces of the American Renaissance — *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Walden* (1854), the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855) — have obviously secured a significant amount of attention to the early 1850s. On the other hand, the period from 1855 until 1875 has received surprisingly little attention from literary critics. These twenty years saw the United States move into increasingly virulent sectional conflict, which finally culminated in a devastating Civil War and then the difficult period of reconstruction. During this time, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson produced much of their best poetry, and Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier continued to turn out the verse that made them household names.⁴ Mark Twain came to national attention with his «Jumping Frog» sketch (1865) and *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), and Bret Harte earned a less enduring reputation for his tales set in the gold rush California. Perhaps the most important point to be made about this period is that it marked the transition from American Romanticism to American realism. The primary purpose of this essay is to chart the contribution of a number of largely neglected women writers in the United States to that transition from romanticism to realism. Furthermore, I maintain that these generally ignored women writers deserve much of the credit for developing realism into an important American literary mode, and into the mode that has proven most congenial to the aims of American literary feminism.

Although the study of American romanticism has tended to focus almost entirely on male writers, several women writers produced interesting work in this mode. There are many texts that could be cited, such as Lucretia Hale's «The Queen of the Red Chessmen» which garnered much praise when it appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858. In this well-developed fantastic tale, a chess piece, the red Queen, comes to life and tries unsuccessfully to find her place in society. Hale thus uses the metaphors provided by this imaginative fantasy to raise larger and essentially feminist questions about the nature of power: the story asks whether women are doomed to remain playthings in the manipulative games of men, whether women can ever become fully

⁴ Miller, Social Issues and Women in Literature, 2019, p. 67.

human in a patriarchal society. Unfortunately, this promising tale did not mark the beginning of a significant literary career; Hale wrote some more fiction, but she is now remembered only for her nonsense stories for children, collected as *The Peterkin Papers* (1880). Other American women, however, had more productive literary careers. Of those devoted to romantic modes, perhaps the most important was Harriet Prescott Spofford, whose long career reveals much about the shift from romanticism to realism.⁵

Spofford first gained fame with a series of daring stories that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. A racy tale of mystery and intrigue, «In the Cellar» (1859) deserves to be recognized as one of the best American detective stories of the nineteenth century. This story seemed to reveal an intimate knowledge of Parisian life as it dazzled readers with its sparkling dialogue, sophisticated tone, vivid descriptions, and dramatic flair. The ostensible subject matter is the search for a stolen diamond and for political power, but the story equates the diamond not only with one specific woman but with women in general.⁶ Underlying the cynical tone of the tale are disturbing questions about the ways in which women can find fulfillment in a treacherous society. «The Amber Gods» (1860) proved even more startling in its use of a passionately sensuous, self-indulgent female narrator who recounts in lush prose how she steals her virtuous cousin's suitor, marries him and transforms him into a superior artist.

The rise of the realistic woman in literature

Narratives led by three-dimensional women are, thankfully, not a new invention. In Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the protagonist Janie Crawford laments that her husband Jody has become controlling and dominating. We are told that Janie 'stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her.... It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over.'

It's a sobering moment in the novel; we learn that Janie's husband is a blank sheet onto which she has been projecting her expectations. However, as readers, we revel in Janie's ability to dust herself off and try again. The novel strides defiantly towards Janie's relative freedom acquired in the final scenes; a liberation (of sorts) from social pressures to be a wife, but also from the tropes and stereotypes placed on black women in literature more widely. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is just one of many examples of flawed and complex women existing in literature for centuries, if you know where to look.

Of course, where women are able to author their own narratives, there is more scope to draw out the complexity of any one experience of womanhood. In the 15th-

⁵ Wilson, Realism and Everyday Life, 2020, p. 34.

⁶ Thompson, Female Independence in Realist Novels, 2015, p. 78.

century Book of Margery Kempe, considered the first autobiography in the English language, Margery oscillates chaotically between utmost piety and burning temptation, while crying a lot and proclaiming her love for God. Where women's stories are authored by men (so, throughout most of history), our narratives are 'complicated' in that they present a cautionary tale for readers.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine realist fiction, with a focus on the portrayal of women. The main research method is close reading of literary texts, which allows a deeper understanding of characters, themes, and social messages. Several realist literary works were chosen because they clearly show female characters and reflect social reality.

During the research, attention was given to the roles women play in society, such as their positions in the family, marriage, and working life. The study also looks at the difficulties women face and how these difficulties are connected to social rules and traditions. Female characters were analyzed based on their behavior, emotions, and relationships with other characters. A comparative method was also applied to observe similarities and differences between women in different realist works. This helped to identify common features in the depiction of women as well as unique individual traits. In addition, academic sources and literary studies were used to support the analysis and strengthen the theoretical background of the research.

Analysis and Results

The analysis shows that women in realist fiction are presented as realistic and multi-dimensional characters. They are shown as ordinary people with everyday responsibilities and problems rather than ideal figures. Female characters are often closely linked to family life and social duties, which strongly influence their decisions and behavior. One important result of the study is that many women in realist fiction experience restriction and dependence. Social norms, economic conditions, and gender roles often limit their freedom and choices. Marriage is frequently portrayed as a challenging experience, especially when women are forced to marry or when personal feelings are ignored.⁷

The results also indicate that realist authors carefully describe women's inner thoughts and emotions. Female characters often face internal struggles between personal desires and social expectations. At the same time, the analysis shows that

⁷ Anderson, Women's Experience in 19th Century Literature, 2018, p. 41.

some women challenge social limitations by seeking independence, education, or self-development. This creates a balanced and realistic portrayal of women's roles.

Discussion

The discussion of the results highlights the importance of women as key figures in realist fiction. Female characters allow writers to present social problems in a more personal and emotional way. Through women's experiences, readers gain a clearer understanding of inequality, injustice, and social pressure.

Furthermore, the realistic depiction of women reflects the historical and cultural conditions of the period in which the works were written. Women in realist fiction often represent the voices of those who were limited by social systems. Their struggles help question traditional values and established norms⁸.

Finally, the presence of women who attempt to change their lives shows that realist fiction not only describes reality but also encourages reflection and possible change. By giving women active roles, realist writers explore ideas of freedom, dignity, and social responsibility. This confirms that the study of women in realist fiction remains meaningful and relevant.

Conclusion

To conclude, the research on the role of women in realist fiction clearly shows that female characters are a key element in presenting real life and social reality. Realist writers rely on women's stories to show how everyday life truly works and how social rules influence people's choices. Through the lives of women, readers are able to understand the real challenges and limitations that exist in society.

The study demonstrates that women in realist fiction are often placed in unequal and difficult positions. Their lives are shaped by family duties, marriage expectations, and economic dependence.⁹ Many female characters have little control over their own future, which shows how strong social pressure can be. These portrayals help reveal the unfair treatment of women and the lack of equal opportunities.

Another important finding is that realist authors focus strongly on women's emotional and inner experiences. Female characters are shown thinking deeply about their lives, feeling pain, hope, fear, and disappointment. They often struggle to balance their personal desires with social responsibility. This emotional depth makes the characters realistic and relatable for readers.

At the same time, the research shows that not all women in realist fiction accept their situation silently. Some female characters try to change their lives by seeking independence, personal growth, or dignity. Even small acts of resistance show their

⁸ Evans, Marriage and Social Pressure in Realist Fiction, 2014, p. 56.

⁹ Davis, Emotions and Inner Life of Women in Literature, 2016, p. 89.

strength and desire for a better life. These characters give a sense of development and possibility within realist literature.¹⁰

In general, the role of women in realist fiction is very important because it allows writers to discuss serious social problems in a human and understandable way. Through women's experiences, authors criticize injustice, inequality, and strict traditions. As a result, realist fiction encourages readers to think about moral values, fairness, and social responsibility.

Finally, the topic of women in realist fiction remains relevant today. Many of the problems shown in realist literature still exist in modern society. For this reason, studying female characters in realist fiction helps us better understand both the past and the present, making this subject meaningful and valuable in literary studies.

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