

**THE EVOLUTION OF REALISM IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURE: SOCIAL CONTEXT AND LITERARY
TRANSFORMATION**

Iroda Egamberdiyeva Abdurahimovna

Associate professor of ASIFL

irodaegamberdiyeva 76@gmail.com

ORCID 0009-0006-2258-0570

Najimov Dilshodbek Hasanboy o'g'li

Student of ASIFL

Abstract

This article explores the development of realism in late nineteenth-century American literature, focusing on its social, cultural, and historical foundations. The study examines how realism emerged as a reaction against romanticism and idealism, emphasizing objective representation of everyday life. Special attention is given to the works of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells, who played a crucial role in shaping the realist tradition. The research highlights how industrialization, urbanization, and changing social conditions influenced literary themes and narrative techniques. The findings demonstrate that realism not only reflected society but also contributed to the formation of American national identity and literary independence.

Keywords: realism, American literature, nineteenth century, social change, industrialization, narrative techniques

The late nineteenth century marked a significant transformation in American literature, as realism emerged as a dominant literary movement. This period was characterized by rapid industrial growth, urban expansion, and profound social changes that reshaped American society. Unlike romanticism, which idealized life and human experience, realism focused on portraying everyday realities in an objective and truthful manner.

Writers such as Mark Twain and William Dean Howells sought to depict ordinary people, regional dialects, and social issues with accuracy and authenticity. Their works reflected the complexities of a changing society and challenged traditional literary conventions.

This study aims to analyze the evolution of realism in late nineteenth-century American literature, examining its historical background, key characteristics, and major contributors. The research also seeks to identify how realism influenced the development of American literary identity.

The concept of realism in American literature has been widely examined by literary scholars, particularly in relation to its emergence in the late nineteenth century as a response to romanticism. According to William Dean Howells, who is often regarded as the “father of American realism,” literature should reflect life as it is, without idealization or exaggeration. His critical essays and editorial work significantly shaped the development of realist aesthetics in the United States.

Scholars such as Henry James emphasized the importance of psychological depth and individual consciousness in realist fiction. James argued that realism should not only depict external reality but also explore the inner lives of characters, thereby expanding the boundaries of the movement.

The works of Mark Twain have also been central to discussions of realism. Critics highlight his use of regional dialects, humor, and satire to portray the social realities of American life, particularly in works such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain’s approach to realism is often described as a blend of social critique and literary innovation.

In addition, literary historians point out that realism was closely connected with broader socio-economic changes, including industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of the middle class. Researchers argue that these transformations influenced both the themes and narrative techniques of realist writers, encouraging a focus on ordinary people and everyday experiences.

Recent studies have also explored realism from interdisciplinary perspectives, linking it with sociology, cultural studies, and historical analysis. These approaches suggest that realism not only mirrored society but also contributed to shaping public consciousness and national identity.

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the development of realism in late nineteenth-century American literature. The research is primarily based on textual analysis of literary works and critical interpretations provided by prominent scholars.

The methodological framework includes a close reading of selected texts by key realist writers such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. These authors were chosen due to their significant contribution to the formation and development of realism in American literature.

In addition, the study applies a historical-analytical method to explore the social and cultural context of the period. This includes an examination of the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and socio-economic transformations on literary production. The research also incorporates a comparative approach to distinguish realism from preceding literary movements such as romanticism.

Furthermore, secondary sources, including academic articles, literary criticism, and historical studies, are analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the

topic. This combination of methods allows for a deeper exploration of both the thematic and stylistic features of realism.

The emergence of realism in late nineteenth-century American literature was closely linked to significant social and economic transformations. The rapid development of industrialization and urbanization created new social dynamics, which required a different literary approach to accurately represent reality. Unlike romanticism, which idealized life, realism focused on ordinary experiences and the complexities of modern society.

One of the defining characteristics of realism is its emphasis on everyday life and common people. Writers sought to portray characters from various social classes, particularly the emerging middle class, in a truthful and objective manner. In this regard, Mark Twain played a crucial role by introducing regional realism. His use of vernacular language and depiction of life along the Mississippi River reflected authentic American experiences. Through satire and humor, Twain exposed social inequalities and criticized hypocrisy within society.

Similarly, William Dean Howells advocated for a truthful representation of life, emphasizing moral and social responsibility in literature. His works often focused on middle-class life and ethical dilemmas, presenting characters in realistic social situations. Howells believed that literature should serve as a mirror of society, reflecting both its strengths and its flaws.

In contrast, Henry James contributed to realism by exploring the psychological dimensions of characters. His narratives focused on internal conflicts, consciousness, and perception, which added depth to the realist tradition. This shift toward psychological realism marked an important development in literary techniques and narrative structure.

Another important aspect of realism is its rejection of exaggerated plots and heroic characters. Realist writers preferred open-ended narratives and complex character development, which reflected the unpredictability of real life. The detailed description of settings, social environments, and everyday interactions further strengthened the authenticity of literary works.

Moreover, realism played a significant role in shaping American national identity. By focusing on local settings, dialects, and cultural diversity, realist writers contributed to the creation of a distinctly American literary voice. Their works moved away from European influences and established a unique national perspective in literature.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that realism was not only a literary movement but also a reflection of broader societal changes. It transformed narrative techniques, expanded thematic scope, and redefined the role of literature in representing reality.

In conclusion, realism in late nineteenth-century American literature emerged as a significant and transformative movement shaped by profound social, economic, and cultural changes. The rapid processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of new social classes created a need for a more truthful and objective representation of reality in literature. As a result, realism replaced the idealized visions of romanticism with a focus on everyday life, ordinary people, and authentic social experiences.

The contributions of Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James highlight the diversity within the realist tradition. Each writer approached realism from a unique perspective: Twain emphasized regionalism and social criticism through humor and vernacular language; Howells focused on ethical realism and the accurate depiction of middle-class life; and James introduced psychological depth and narrative complexity. Together, their works expanded both the thematic and stylistic boundaries of American literature.

Furthermore, realism played a crucial role in redefining the purpose of literature. It encouraged writers to engage with real social issues such as inequality, moral conflict, and cultural transformation. By doing so, literature became not only a form of artistic expression but also a means of social reflection and critique. Realist writers challenged readers to confront reality as it is, rather than as it is imagined.

Another important outcome of realism was its contribution to the formation of a distinct American literary identity. By focusing on local settings, regional dialects, and diverse social environments, writers moved away from European literary traditions and established a unique national voice. This shift marked an important step in the development of American literature as an independent and mature field.

In addition, the influence of realism extended beyond the nineteenth century and continued to shape later literary movements, including naturalism and modernism. Many contemporary writers still rely on realist techniques to explore complex human experiences and social realities, demonstrating the lasting relevance of the movement.

Overall, this study confirms that realism was not merely a literary style but a powerful intellectual and cultural force. It transformed narrative techniques, broadened thematic concerns, and strengthened the connection between literature and society. The legacy of realism continues to influence both literary scholarship and creative writing, making it a fundamental component of American literary history.

REFERENCES

1. Bell, M. (1993). *The problem of American realism: Studies in the cultural history of a literary idea*. University of Chicago Press.
2. Berkove, L. I. (Ed.). (2005). *A companion to Mark Twain*. Blackwell Publishing.
3. Howells, W. D. (1891). *Criticism and fiction*. Harper & Brothers.
4. James, H. (1884). *The art of fiction*. Longmans, Green and Co.

5. Kaplan, A. (Ed.). (1988). *The Cambridge history of American literature* (Vol. 6). Cambridge University Press.
6. Pizer, D. (1984). *Realism and naturalism in nineteenth-century American literature*. Southern Illinois University Press.
7. Twain, M. (1885). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Charles L. Webster and Company.
8. Watt, I. (1957). *The rise of the novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. University of California Press.
9. Lehan, R. (2005). *Realism and naturalism*. University of Wisconsin Press.