

American Realism: Historical Development and Major Contributors

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Abstract. *This article explores the rise and development of American realism, focusing on its major figures and their distinctive literary methods. It traces the origins of the movement, linking its growth to the social and economic transformations of the period, and outlines its defining traits. The works of leading realist authors are examined to demonstrate their roles in shaping and advancing the movement. Furthermore, the study considers how realism paved the way for subsequent literary trends, including naturalism and modernism.*

Key words: *American realism, literary tradition, Mark Twain, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Kate Chopin, Stephen Crane, psychological depth, social critique, naturalism, modernism.*

Introduction. Realism is an artistic movement that emerged in European and American literature in the mid-19th century, based on depicting life as close to reality as possible. This movement rejected idealization and romantic fantasies, aiming instead to portray human living conditions, social issues, and moral conflicts in a realistic manner.

The formation of realism was greatly influenced by the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, scientific progress, and socio-political changes. During this period, society underwent rapid transformations, and industrial development intensified social stratification. The lives of ordinary working people and the fundamental problems of society became one of the central themes of literature [8]. Therefore, realist writers sought to depict all aspects of life as truthfully and accurately as possible.

Realist literature is distinguished by its deep analysis of human nature and its precise reflection of personal experiences and inner emotions. One of the key characteristics of this movement is the detailed and accurate depiction of everyday life, with a focus on social conflicts, economic problems, and the transformation of moral values. Realist writers paid special attention to the connection between their characters' psychological experiences and the social environment, striving to portray all aspects of life truthfully [7].

Realism found expression not only in literature but also in various fields of art. By reflecting the true state of society, this movement significantly influenced not only readers but the entire cultural environment. Later, realism laid the foundation for the development of naturalism, modernism, and other literary movements, contributing to the elevation of literature to new stages.

Main Characteristics of Realism:

- Objective depiction of reality – in literature, portraying life impartially holds a central place.
- Addressing social issues – writers sought to depict problems such as social stratification, poverty, and injustice.
- The ordinary person as a hero – while romanticism focused on idealized heroes, realism placed ordinary workers, the poor, and servants at the center of the narrative.

- Psychological depth – realist works explore the inner world and emotional experiences of characters in depth [10].

Literature Review. Realism in American literature began to develop in the mid-19th century and has been widely studied by numerous scholars. The following literary critics have conducted significant research on American realism: Donald Pizer, Amy Kaplan, and William Dean Howells. Since American realism is closely tied to social and cultural changes, its literary study has often been carried out in parallel with social research [1-2].

Research Methodology. This study is both analytical and descriptive in nature. It provides information on the main characteristics of realist literature, its representatives, and its historical development.

Results and Analysis. American realism developed in the second half of the 19th century and was closely connected to the economic, political, and social changes taking place in society. During this period, the Industrial Revolution, the Civil War, and the expansion of the western territories offered American writers new themes to truthfully portray social life.

The following main trends can be observed in American realist works:

- Objective depiction of reality: American realism rejected idealization and romanticism, focusing instead on portraying the real aspects of human life. The complexities of life, the struggles of ordinary people, and societal problems were expressed with much greater clarity compared to earlier literary portrayals.
- Impact of social and economic changes: With the Industrial Revolution and the growth of cities, realist works more often told stories about workers, laborers, the poor, and the lower strata of society. Issues of race and gender also became key themes.
- Psychological analysis and character development: Realist authors studied the inner world of their characters, their emotional experiences, and the factors influencing their actions in depth. This style later became the foundation for the literary movements of naturalism and modernism.

Analysis of Authors and Works that Contributed to the Development of American Realism:

Mark Twain. Works: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: Portrayed life in the American South with great authenticity; Poverty, racial inequality, and the worldview of children were central themes in his works; His satirical and critical style became one of the hallmarks of realism [5].

Henry James. Works: The American, Daisy Miller, The Bostonians, The Eyes of the Mind: Explored the complexities of human character through psychological analysis and interior monologue; The clash between European and American cultures was one of the main themes of his works; In line with realist principles, he connected his characters' decisions to their personal experiences and their place in society [4].

William Dean Howells. Works: The Rise of Silas Lapham, A Hazard of New Fortunes, A Woman's Reason: Widely promoted and theoretically developed the principles of realism in American literature; Analyzed social change, the effects of capitalism, and family relationships; His characters were usually ordinary people who made decisions based on their life experiences [3].

Kate Chopin. Works: The Awakening, Bayou Stories, Madame Oteleine, At the 'Cadian Ball: Focused on women's rights and gender inequality: Depicted women's inner worlds, their place in society, and family relationships as central themes; Her novel The Awakening is considered one of the most vivid examples of feminist realism [6].

Stephen Crane. Works: The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, The Open Boat: A representative of realism associated with naturalism, depicting human vulnerability and struggle against life's conditions; War, poverty, and personal tragedies were central themes in his works [7].

American realism differed from classical literature by portraying the real problems of society. The idealization of classical literary characters declined, and instead, the lives of ordinary people, their daily struggles, and social conflicts were depicted.

Works were closely connected with historical and social processes: Mark Twain portrayed racism and social inequality in the South; Henry James explored the clash between European and American cultures; Kate Chopin emphasized the theme of women's rights and gender inequality [9].

Psychological analysis became more prominent: The inner experiences of characters were studied in depth, and their actions were linked to psychological and social causes.

Realism influenced the formation of naturalism and modernism: The works of Stephen Crane and Henry James laid the groundwork for the later development of naturalistic literature; The method of psychological analysis was later widely used by modernist writers [8].

Conclusion. American realism, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, initiated a new stage in literature. This movement sought to depict life as close to reality as possible, serving to reveal the real world to the reader and shed light on the complex aspects of human psychology. Realist writers aimed to portray significant social and economic changes in society, as well as personal experiences and inner emotions, with accuracy and authenticity [15].

The formation of this literary movement was greatly influenced by historical processes such as the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, internal migration, and the intensification of class conflicts. In realist literature, the idealism that had previously dominated romanticism was abandoned, and life's real, often complex and problematic aspects were depicted. One of the main characteristics of realism was the truthful representation of human psychology and social life, which later laid the foundation for the emergence of new literary movements such as naturalism and modernism [11].

Among the prominent representatives of American realism are writers such as Mark Twain, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Kate Chopin, and Stephen Crane, whose works left a profound mark on American literature. Mark Twain stood out for his use of vernacular language, his realistic portrayal of the lives of ordinary people, and his satirical approach to social issues [13]. Henry James focused on deep psychological analysis of the human mind. William Dean Howells authentically reflected social stratification and economic problems in society. Kate Chopin realistically revealed women's rights and gender issues, while Stephen Crane, approaching naturalism, emphasized the harsh and dramatic aspects of life [12].

Realism became not only a descriptive style in literature but also its philosophical foundation. By uncovering human psychology, societal conflicts, and the bitter truths of life, this movement made a significant contribution to literature [14]. Its influence served as the basis for the development of naturalism, modernism, and later other literary trends in the early 20th century. American realism left a lasting mark not only on literature but also on art and culture in general, exerting a great influence on the progress of world literature.

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