
UNIT 10: NATURALISM/REALISM: THE CONCEPT

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the chapter is

- to inculcate the knowledge of realism and naturalism among the readers
- to know the reasons behind origin of the realism and naturalism movement and their effects on literature specially drama
- to be able to differentiate between realism and naturalism.

10.1 REALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Realism is an artistic movement which began in France in the nineteenth century. It came as a reaction to romanticism and idealism. Writers and artists started getting away from romanticism. They started looking forward to real or factual description of things. So, they tried to represent the things in real way as they are. Writers of realism painted the routine life without any fabrication or omitting anything which may be ugly or sordid aspect of life. Realists believed in showing the true picture of things without idealizing them. So, the realism movement came as an opposing idea to Nominalism and idealism. The followers of idealism theory presented the things in their ideal form. They were not true rather shrouded with an ideal cover. The followers of Nominalism believe that ideas are only names and do not have practical application. Reality is also a matter of verisimilitude: how

characters are determined by their environment, chronological narratives, psychological dimension of the characters, and presence of an omniscient narrator.

Realism stressed on the truthful treatment of the common and everyday life. Realism seeks a one-to-one relationship between representation and the subject. Realists are concerned with the effect of the work on their reader and the reader's life, a pragmatic view. It can be said that Realism is nothing but the reaction of the past, a true picture of life against the rosy picture of Romanticists.

10.1.1 Characteristics

- Emphasis on psychological, optimistic tone, details, pragmatic, practical, slow-moving plot
- Characters are more complex than that of real fictions
- Characters control their own destinies- they act on environment, rather than environment controlling characters
- Rounded, dynamic characters who serve purpose in plot
- Settings are more ordinary
- Themes are less obvious
- World as it is created in novel impinges upon characters. Characters dictate plot; ending usually open.
- Time marches inevitably on; small things build up. Climax is not a crisis, but just one more unimportant fact.
- Causality built into text (why something happens foreshadowed). Foreshadowing in everyday events.
- Realists—show us rather than tell us
- Depiction of local colour of regionalism
- Events make story plausible
- Insistence on experience of the commonplace
- Emphasis on morality, usually intrinsic, relativistic between people and society
- Scenic representation important
- Humans are in control of their own destiny and are superior to their circumstances
- Stresses the real over the fantastic
- Seeks to treat the commonplace truthfully and used characters from everyday life.
- Aims to interpret the actualities of any aspect of life, free from subjective prejudice, idealism, or romantic color.

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10.1.1.1 Definitions Of Realism According To Various Scholars

- According to Lillian Furst, Realism is “as an artistic movement realism is the product and expression of the dominant mood of its time (the

mid-to late nineteenth century): a pervasive rationalist epistemology that turned its back on the fantasies of romanticism and was shaped instead by the impact of the political and social changes as well as the scientific and industrial advances of its day.”

- According to M.H. Abraham, Realism is used by literary critics (1) to identify a literary movement of the nineteenth century, especially in prose fiction (beginning with Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America); and (2) to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras, of representing human life and experience in literature, which was especially exemplified by the writers of this historical movement.
- According to William Harmon and Hugh Holman, “Where romanticists transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists plumb the actual or superficial to find the scientific laws that control its actions, realists center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence” (*A Handbook to Literature* 428)
- Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action. Realism became prominent in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray. (Cole)
- Realism is not an object, to be identified, pinned down, and appropriated. It is rather a way of describing certain methods and attitudes, and the descriptions, quite naturally, have varied in the ordinary exchange and development of experience. (Raymond Williams)
- Edmund Duranty says that Realism bans the historical in painting, the novel, and the theatre so that no lie may creep in and the artist cannot borrow knowledge from others; Realism demands of artists only the study of their period.
- George Parsons Lathrop: “Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting, in order to extract from these their full value and true meaning. In short, realism reveals. Where we thought nothing worthy of notice, it shows everything to be rife with significance.” (*Atlantic Monthly* 34 (Sept. 1874): 313-324)

10.1.2 Reasons for Growth of Realism

- Advancement in science and technological field
- Growth in industry and commerce
- Exploding urban population base—immigration, removal from family farms/agrarian ways of life (partly because of Northern victory in Civil War)

Naturalism/Realism

- Need of accurate and scientific documentation
- Increasing desire of artists and readers for a realistic understanding of different social problems
- Rise in middle class influence and leisure time
- Increasing democracy and literacy
- Explosive rise of mass-circulation magazines and newspapers creates an unprecedented mass audience for authors
- Growth of investigative journalism, muckraking
- Rising influence of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer
- Rise of social sciences in academia—psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology
- Faith in human progress and the perfectibility of human institutions—schemes to solve social problems.

10.1.3 Dimensions of Realism

Realism is three dimensional – an independent life, characters and human relationships. There is no place for emotions and intellectual. All it opposes is the destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations through an excessive cult of the momentary mood. The struggle against such tendencies acquired a critical importance in the realist literature.

10.1.4 History of Realism Movement

The beginning of realism movement can be considered from 1700 onwards. By the mid 1800, it was developed into a dominant art form. A painter, Gustave Courbet from France conducted a show titled *Du Realisme*. Courbet led the realism movement in France which spread across the Europe. The chief exponents of Realism in France are Gustave Courbet, Jean-Francois Millet, Honore Daumier and Corot. Courbet challenged the traditional history painting and depicted a real picture of ordinary people from his naive place. Later, Champfleury published some critical essays titled *Le Realism* in which he stated that realism should be democratic without any idealization. Later on, Emile Zola led this movement in France. He published a series titled *Les Rougan-Macquart*, appeared between 1871 to 1893 which is basically the social history of a French family. This series contained twenty novels which depicted fifth generation of a French family in detailed manner. Zola depicted the true picture of lives of farmers, labourers, miners and others in his novels. The other prominent supporter of Realism from France was Balzac who published *La Comedie Humaine* which is a collection of hundred novels. Balzac's works are considered the most representative works of realist literature. In Italy, Ignazio Silone and Alberto Moravia led the movement of Realism. They depicted the sordid aspects of lives in their novels. The 18th-century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are among the earliest examples of realism in English literature.

George Eliot led the realist movement in England. Her pioneer work *Adam Bede* presents a true depiction of real picture of peasants of England and their problems. The interest in realism was sparked by a significant

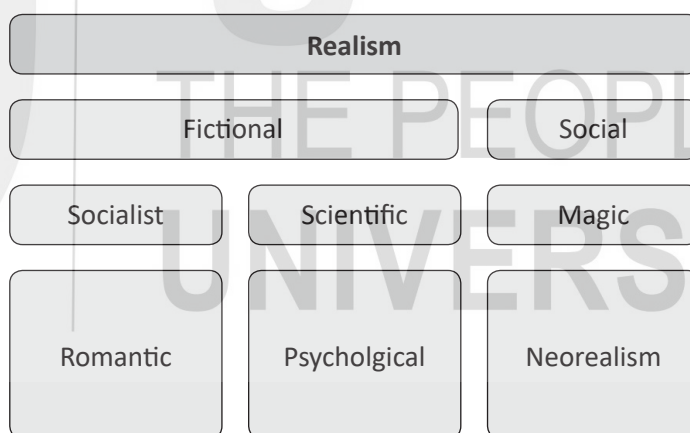
book, *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach, subtitled as *Represented Reality* in 1946. He puts forward the assumption that the essence of realism lies in its completeness and truthfulness. In America, the realist movement was pioneered by William Dean Howells. Howells describes American lives in a true sense in his novels like *Their Wedding Journey*, *A Traveller from Altruria* etc. Other writer such as Rebecca Harding Davis also depicts the story of everyday trials and tribulations of lives in his works.

10.1.5 Types of Realism

1. **Fictional realism:** This is combination of fiction and reality. The writer suffuses fiction into reality but it looks like real not as an imaginary character. The writer gives a comprehensive and candid portrayal of reality which is combined with imaginativeness. The work becomes more stirring and expressive by combining fact with fantasy. Thus facts are portrayed in an artistic manner. Indian novelist R.K. Narayan has used fictional realism in his novels.
2. **Social realism:** in this type of realism, ugly and painful realities of life are depicted. Problems prevailing in societies like poverty, sickness, disabilities, financial crunches and injustices related to caste, class and gender are depicted in social realism. For example, French novelist Balzac portrayed social problems prevailing among French society in his novel collection titled *La Comedie Humaine*. Flaubert also paints the sordid realities of French middle class family in his novel *Madame Bovary*. Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand also voices the agony and pain of downtrodden people.
3. **Socialist realism:** It basically deals with lives and problems of working class people. The novels of socialist realism depict the glorified communist values. Problems faced by workers and their struggle to get their rights through strikes are shown in these novels. Socialist realism means the depiction of the social reality not as it is but as it should be idealized. Maxim Gorky, Nexo, Fyodor Gladkov etc have centred their novels to depict the revolutionary aspects of the struggle of the labourers.
4. **Scientific realism:** it is related to the scientific theory which states the facts of life. It is a pragmatic approach to explain the visible and the invisible aspects of the universe or the physical matter. It holds a logical viewpoint with regard to the various speculations about matter. There is the existence of a body of ideas that regards scientific investigation of the seen and the unseen aspects of the universe. The phenomena that could be examined with or without the help of certain techniques and the phenomena that has to be perceived only with the aid of techniques. The facts that are based on scientific theories is scientific realism. Any scientific theory involves the facts of life.
5. **Magic realism:** It incorporates fantastical or mythical elements into realistic fiction. It paints the realistic view of the world with magical elements. It is also known as fabulism. The noted writers of magic realism are Gabriel García Márquez, Miguel Angel Asturias, Jorge Luis Borges, Elena Garro, Juan Rulfo, Rómulo Gallegos, and Isabel

Allende. In English literature, its chief exponents include Salman Rushdie, Alice Hoffman, and Nick Joaquin.

6. **Romantic realism:** It combines elements of romanticism and realism both. Fyodor Dostoyevsky could be said to be a romantic realist. Novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand described herself as a romantic realist, and many followers of Objectivism who work in the arts apply this term to themselves. As part of her aesthetics, Rand defined romantic realism as a portrayal of life “as it could be and should be.” She wrote: “The method of romantic realism is to make life more beautiful and interesting than it actually is, yet give it all the reality, and even a more convincing reality than that of our everyday existence.” (Wikipedia)
7. **Psychological Realism:** it works on the mental process and interior motives of the characters. It does not only tell the story rather includes characters’ mental narratives. The authors who use psychological Realism are Henry James, Arthur Miller and Fyodor Dostoevsky.
8. **Neo-Realism:** - Any revival of REALISM in fiction, especially in novels and stories describing the lives of the poor in a contemporary setting. The term is associated especially with the dominant trend of Italian fiction in the 1940s and 1950s, led by Cesare Pavese, Alberto Moravia, and Elio Vittorini, and with the parallel movement in Italian cinema of the same period, led by Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica. (The Concise Oxford *Dictionary of Literary Terms*)



10.1.6 Realism in Theatre

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Realism entered in theatre. Many dramatists like Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw started using realism in theatre and now it remains a standard convention of cinema. Henrik Ibsen staged social plays in which he showed the external reality of the society. Later on, Henry James used psychological realism in which he examined the complex working of the mind.

Realist dramatists portray real life on stage. Characters and events are presented in such a way which depicts a real human experience unlike conventional drama and sentimental comedies of the previous era. Societal values, attitudes and morals are shown in realist drama. Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov were highly influenced by realism. Their plays mirrored the real society. People from all walks of life were given proper space be it the

poor, the rich and all. The beginning of social realism plays is considered from 1930s. They depicted the harsh reality of poor people. GB Shaw, Arthur Miller presented problems and solutions of the poor people.

American Dramatists imitated British writers until the early twentieth century. So the effect of realism was seen on American drama and they were moving towards realism, illuminating the rough or seamy side of life and creating more believable characters. The most prolific of pre-war playwrights with a social agenda was Rachel Crothers, who addressed such issues as society's double standards for men and women in *A Man's World* (1909). *The New York Idea* (1906), a social satire by Langdon Mitchell managed to entertain while commenting meaningfully on divorce. The American family and its development and disintegration was a recurring theme of playwrights at this time and it would dominate much of American playwriting for the rest of the twentieth century.

More detail can be found on the following link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrIsTzcq5O8>.



Scene from Doll's House, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_\(theatre\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_(theatre))

10.2 NATURALISM

Naturalism is an imperative movement of late 19 century which continues to influence the literary scene of early 20 century. It has been designated as having close paradoxical relationship with Realism. Naturalism is an extreme form of literary realism, based on the belief that science could explain all social phenomena, and was to provide the method for the creation of literature. In literature, 'naturalism' is an approach that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. It is a theory which believes that literary composition should be based on an objective empirical composition of human beings. The naturalistic writers regard human behaviour as controlled by instinct, emotion and a social and economic condition, and reject free will. It adopts in large measure, the biological determinism of Charles Darwin and the economic determinism of Karl Marx. This affinity to science becomes clear from the definition offered by Paul Alexis, Emile Zola's closet ally, who summed up naturalism as: "A way of thinking, of seeing , of reflecting, of

studying, of making experiments, a need to analyse in order to know, rather than a particular style of writing.”

Contrary to realism, which was a rather loose movement, it constituted a real school of thought around its founder, the Frenchman Emile Zola. The foremost spokesman of the naturalist school was Émile Zola, who expressed these ideas in two works, *The Experimental Novel* (1880) and *Naturalism in the Theatre* (1882).

According to Zola, the artist must bring the scientist’s objectivity to the depiction of his subjects. The motives and behaviour of characters are determined by heredity and environment. The artists’ task is to reveal the role of these factors in the lives of the characters. The basic effort of naturalism lay in the attempt to produce a scientifically accurate depiction of life even at the cost of representing ugliness and discord. He had published his novel *Thérèse Èse Raquin* in 1867, which was highly criticized to which he replied “The group of writers *Naturalists*, To which I have the honor of belonging, has the courage and the activity to publish strong works, carrying with them their defense.” Naturalism is preceded by Romanticism and realism and followed by symbolism.

“Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection of subject matter and a special way of rendering those materials; it is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis...that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher order animal whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment.” (Abrams: 2003,261).

10.2.1 Characteristics of Naturalism

- **Determinism:** The naturalists were remarkably influenced by Darwin’s theory of Evolution, as they believed that self of being is determined by one’s heredity and social environment determine one’s character. According to it, all events in human history are determined by the conditions that produce them. People have the power to choose and make decisions. In 19th century, scientific determinism played a key role in the formulation of naturalism.
- **Pessimism:** The naturalists tend to depict the darkest or negative aspects of human life such as vices, follies, violence, disease, disability etc. Though, naturalist writers try to keep a balanced degree of scientific objectivity in their work but they cannot escape from pessimism.
- **Rejection of Romanticism:** The naturalists portray situations as they occur not as they could not be. Romanticists focused on ideals, the best of everything whereas naturalists portrayed as it is not in ideal form.
- **Darwinism:** Charles Darwin’s book *The Origin of Species* was published in 1868 which propounds a theory that the population evolve over course of generations and their evolution is determined for struggle for the survival.

- **Belief in heredity and human nature:** Naturalists had a strong belief in heredity and human nature. They explored that how heredity determined the future of one.

Naturalism according to various scholars

- Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection of subject matter and a special way of rendering those materials; it is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis. (M.H. Abraham)
- Naturalism is a more deliberate kind of * REALISM in novels, stories, and plays, usually involving a view of human beings as passive victims of natural forces and social environment..... The term naturalistic in drama usually has a broader application, denoting a very detailed illusion of real life on the stage, especially in speech, costume, and sets. (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms)
- NATURALISM, writing that depicts events as rigidly determined by the forces of heredity and environment. Stephen Crane has been called a naturalist because his writing expounds the philosophy that the world can be understood by examining cause – and -effect relationships and that all events are determined by antecedent causes.

10.2.2 Naturalism in USA

In U.S.A. ‘naturalism’ is closely linked to social and economic problems. The struggles of the poor and the machinations of the capitalists are the theme of naturalistic writing. For instance, such a world is reflected in the novels of Dreiser or the short stories of Stephen Crane, or in Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* which shows how the large powerful combines took over the small holdings, leaving the tenants destitute and homeless. American naturalism owes more to local factors than to outside influences. Darwin, Marx, Comte and Spencer made an impact, but not with the same immediacy as across the Atlantic. The effect of Zola in U.S.A. is not easy to assess partly because of the conflicting statements made by some of the American naturalists such as Dreiser and Crane. As American naturalism arose out of social and economic problems, it presented a different aspect from the European Naturalist movement. There were no groups united by common aims and manifestos. It was more a matter of successive waves of writers which are as follows:

1. The First wave: it spanned from mid 1880s to the closing of the century. The prominent writers from this group are Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris.
2. The second wave: It started after the 1900 included an assorted group of writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, Sherwood Anderson and James T. Farrell.

Naturalism in the U.S.A. was a view of man in society and a style of writing in consonance with the age and this is why it appears in so many diverse writers over such a long period.

10.2.3 Naturalism in Drama

The founder of the naturalism movement, Emile Zola, though was a novelist but emphasized the use of Naturalism in theatre too. Naturalism brought revolution in the field of theatre. Zola was not in favour of distortion of psychology which was necessary to create sympathy for a character in the well-made arrangement of exposition, intrigue, complications and satisfying resolution. Instead, he advocated plays without any complications which existed in plays of that time.

We have studied that the naturalists dealt mainly with darker aspects of life, including poverty, disease, racism, sex, prostitution and impurity. They dealt with uncouth or sordid subject matter. In naturalist theatre, attempts were made to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies like comprehensive settings, rejection of metaphysical action, an exclusive focus on subjects that are contemporary and native, the emphasis on characters from relatively common class, and a realistic acting style against that of the popular melodramatic one. Zola urged that theatre be brought closer to social reality- and called for the creation of individualized, lifelike characters. To support such an objective of naturalism, Styan says

“The scientific naturalist tried to show that powerful forces governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control...His play bore witness to the instinctive behavior of men and women, and his characters and their situations had to seem representative of their class or age group, sex or economic group, with the consequent loss of that essential individuality we know to be characteristic of life.” (Styan: 1981,6).

The most prominent representatives of naturalism, except Zola, were Ludwig Anzengruber, Henri Becque, August Strindberg and Gerhart Hauptmann. Anzengruber’s plays were (are) considered important forerunners of Naturalism. His famous naturalistic plays are *The Kirchjield Priest* and *The Fourth Commandment*. Strindberg produced some naturalistic tragedies like *The Father*, *Miss Julie*, *The Creditors*.

In drama, naturalist classics include Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin* (1873), Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* (1902), and Eugene O’Neill’s early plays, such as *The Long Voyage Home* (1917).



(The Long Voyage Home (1917) - <https://screengrabsaz.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/the-long-voyage-home/>)

10.3 REALIST AND NATURALISTIC THEATRE

	Realist Theatre	Naturalistic Theatre
Characters	Believable	Believable (working class or lower class)
Style		Extreme and heightened form of realism
Stage settings and props	Indoors and believable (ordinary)	Historically accurate and documented
Dialogues	Everyday speech, not heightened (use of vernacular)	—
Playwrights were influenced by	Henrik Ibsen	Emile Zola

10.4 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (QUESTIONS)

Q1. Differentiate between classicism and realism.

Ans. Classicism shows life as being more rational and orderly than it really is while Romanticism shows life as being more emotionally exciting and satisfying than it normally is. While it was an attempt through realism to present life as it is. This 'life as it is' is what realism is.

Q2. Differentiate between romanticism and realism.

Ans. Realism is nothing but the reaction of Romanticism and Classicism. It is a kind of presentation of life as it is. The difference between Romanticism and Realism is like the difference between painting and photography.

Q3. Why Realism became so popular?

Ans. Realism became popular as it presents the emotion of mass and every member of the mass relate the subject matter with himself. Realist writers in fiction always take the most important burning problems of the community for their starting point; their pathos as writers is always stimulated by those sufferings of the people which are the most acute at the time; it is these sufferings that determine the objects and direction of their love and hate and through these emotions determine also what they see in their poetic vision.

Q4. What are the major traits of Naturalism?

- Ans.
- Naturalism was highly influenced by Darwin's natural selection and Freud's psychological theory.
 - Life is presented as deterministic and mechanistic since heredity and environment control human actions rather free will.
 - Characters belong to lower socioeconomic classes.
 - Characters exhibit strong animal drives such as greed and sex drives.
 - The tone is mostly non-judgemental, emotionless and scientific.
 - Diction may be offensive.

Naturalism/Realism

- Lack of artificial or optimistic plot structures
- Naturalistic works are mostly character driven rather than plot driven.
- They present their subject with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation.

Q5. Differentiate between Realism and Naturalism.

- Ans.
- Realism sought to be a faithful representation of life, while naturalism was more like a “chronicle of despair.” In a way, naturalism proceeded from realism, and can be seen as an exaggerated form of realism; it shows humans as being determined by environment, heredity, and social conditions beyond their control, and thus rather helpless to escape their circumstances.
 - While in realism the main focus was on the middle class and its problems, naturalism often focused on poorly educated or lower-class characters, and on themes involving violence and taboo activities.
 - While in realism, faithful representation of reality including the details of nature is important, in Naturalism, nature itself is a force, generally a powerful, indifferent mechanism.
 - Naturalism tends to have a rather bleak and pessimistic view of the human condition, which is by a large absent in realism.

Q6. What difference does naturalist plays have than that of realist play?

- Ans. Against the traditional methods of portraying imaginative and romantic aesthetic visions of life on the stage, these naturalists preferred the use of naked facts of life to be performed in non-romantic manner. However, this type of theatre poorly revealed the social character of phenomena. Naturalism was also projected in theatre as antirealist, biological approach to life. Its most typical features were a biological interpretation of actions and a heightened interest in the morbid phenomena of the human mind. The term “naturalism” also became associated with a fondness for excessively detailed depiction of extreme reality, especially scenes of cruelty, violence, and the repulsive details of sexuality. Such excessiveness can be justified in a concluding manner as a derivative of transforming aesthetic romanticism into realistic stagecraft.

10.5 SUMMING UP

Realism and Naturalism have both affected the literature, art and cinema of each country. Both the movements have brought about changes in every genre of literature be it poetry, drama or novel. It has paved the way for the writers to express their emotions/feelings freely or independently.

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