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THE DIALECTICS OF FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH REALISM

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Abstract. This study examines the dynamic interplay between freedom and determinism in nineteenth-century English realist literature. The century witnessed industrial expansion, scientific development, and the rise of social awareness-all of which influenced the perception of human agency. By analyzing the works of major realist authors such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, the research investigates how the tension between individual choice and external constraints shaped literary expression. Using historical-literary and analytical approaches, the paper explores how realist fiction portrays the individual's struggle to preserve moral autonomy within a society governed by deterministic forces.

Key words: freedom, determinism, realism, Victorian literature, social context.

INTRODUCTION

English literature and culture. Industrialization, the growth of capitalism, and the emergence of new philosophical ideas brought major changes in how writers perceived human life. English realism, as a literary movement, aimed to depict reality truthfully, focusing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people. One of the central philosophical questions of this era was the opposition between freedom and determinism-whether human beings could exercise free will in a world shaped by social class, gender roles, and economic systems. Realist authors attempted to capture this complexity by showing characters caught between their moral aspirations and the external circumstances that define them. This conflict produced some of the most profound moral and psychological explorations in English literature.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

The theme of freedom and determinism has been explored extensively by literary theorists including Raymond Williams, Georg Lukács, and Ian Watt. Williams (1973) regarded realism as a product of historical material conditions, emphasizing how social structures shape human consciousness. Lukács (1962) saw the realist "typical character" as representing both the individual and society as a whole. Watt (1957), meanwhile, linked realism to the rise of individual experience and moral responsibility. This study employs





a dialectical-critical method, combining close textual analysis with historical interpretation. Three major works-Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72), and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891)-serve as the basis for analysis. The research process includes:

1. Evaluating the industrial, social, and moral background of each novel.
2. Analyzing character development and plot structure to uncover moral dilemmas.
3. Interpreting the philosophical and ethical ideas that reflect Victorian notions of will and causality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, the idea of freedom is restricted by the mechanized, utilitarian values of industrial society. The novel portrays individuals whose lives are controlled by education systems and class boundaries. Despite this, Dickens introduces figures like Sissy Jupe, whose compassion and humanity serve as symbols of moral resistance and emotional freedom. In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the relationship between freedom and necessity becomes more subtle. Eliot emphasizes moral responsibility within a network of social relations. Through Dorothea Brooke, she suggests that freedom is not rebellion but moral awareness-achieved through understanding oneself and one's social duties. For Eliot, human will is limited but still meaningful within the bounds of ethical life. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* presents perhaps the darkest vision of determinism. Tess is trapped by the combined forces of heredity, society, and fate. Hardy's concept of the "Immanent Will" conveys an indifferent universe where human suffering is inevitable. Nevertheless, Tess's purity and endurance express a kind of spiritual defiance, showing that even within tragedy, moral integrity survives. Across these texts, nineteenth-century realism emerges not simply as a mirror of society but as a dialectical reflection-a form that explores how individuals experience both constraint and choice. The writers engage deeply with the philosophical tension between personal agency and social determination, turning it into the moral foundation of their art.

CONCLUSION

Nineteenth-century English realism presents freedom and determinism as two forces in constant dialogue. Realist authors sought to show how human beings navigate between moral will and social inevitability. Dickens's reformist optimism, Eliot's ethical rationalism, and Hardy's fatalism reveal different stages of this debate. In all cases, human freedom is portrayed as limited yet resilient-a moral energy that resists the pressures of class, tradition, and destiny. The dialectic between freedom and determinism thus defines the intellectual and emotional depth of English realism.

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