

Satire in an age of realism

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Abstrak

As nineteenth-century realism became more and more intrepid in its pursuit of describing and depicting everyday life, it blurred irrevocably into the caustic and severe mode of literature better named satire. Realism's task of portraying the human became indistinguishable from satire's directive to castigate the human. Introducing an entirely new way of thinking about realism and the Victorian novel, Aaron Matz refers to the fusion of realism and satire as 'satirical realism': it is a mode in which our shared folly and error are so entrenched in everyday life, and so unchanging, that they need no embellishment when rendered in fiction. Focusing on the novels of Eliot, Hardy, Gissing, and Conrad, and the theater of Ibsen, Matz argues that it was the transformation of Victorian realism into satire that granted it immense moral authority, but that led ultimately to its demise.