

## THE INFLUENCE OF FOLK CULTURE ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

*Eshmamatov Artur Bekmamat o'g'li*

*Tel nomer: +998939045104*

*A Student of Chirchik State Pedagogical University*

*Scientific Advisor*

*Abduramanova Diana Valerevna*

*A teacher of Chirchik state pedagogical university*

**Abstract.** *The influence of folk culture on American literature is a profound and intricate phenomenon that mirrors the nation's diverse cultural heritage. This article explores how folk traditions, oral narratives, and regional customs have shaped literary expressions from the early colonial period to contemporary works. By examining key literary figures such as Mark Twain, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes, we highlight how elements of folklore—such as storytelling techniques, dialects, and themes of community and identity—have been woven into the fabric of American literature. Additionally, the article discusses the role of folk culture in preserving historical narratives and fostering a sense of place, illustrating how these influences contribute to a deeper understanding of the American experience. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the significance of folk culture as a vital source of inspiration and authenticity in shaping the literary landscape of the United States.*

**Key words:** *folk culture, American literature, oral traditions, storytelling, regional customs, identity.*

### INTRODUCTION

American literature is a vast and diverse field that reflects the myriad voices and experiences that have shaped the nation. One of the most significant influences on this literary landscape is folk culture, which encompasses the traditions, stories, and customs passed down through generations within various

communities. Folk culture serves as a repository of collective memory and identity, offering insights into the values, struggles, and aspirations of different groups. This article examines the ways in which folk culture has influenced American literature, focusing on key authors and their works that embody these rich traditions.

Folk culture's impact on literature can be traced back to early American settlers who brought their oral traditions from Europe, Africa, and indigenous cultures. These traditions evolved over time, integrating diverse elements that reflect the changing social and cultural dynamics of the country. As American writers sought to capture the essence of their experiences and surroundings, they turned to folk narratives and motifs that resonated with their audiences.[1]

### **1. Influence of Folk Culture on Key Literary Figures**

#### **1. Mark Twain:**

Mark Twain is often regarded as one of America's greatest writers, and his works are deeply rooted in the folk culture of the Mississippi River region. Twain's use of vernacular language and regional dialects in novels such as "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" exemplifies how folk speech can convey authenticity and character depth. The novel's exploration of themes like race, identity, and moral conflict reflects the complexities of American society during Twain's time while drawing heavily on the oral storytelling traditions of the region.[2]

#### **2. Zora Neale Hurston:**

Zora Neale Hurston's contributions to American literature are inseparable from her deep engagement with African American folk culture. Her seminal work, "Their Eyes Were Watching God," incorporates elements of African American folklore, including proverbs, folktales, and musical forms like spirituals. Hurston's use of dialect not only authenticates her characters' voices but also celebrates the richness of their cultural heritage. Through her work, she preserves the oral traditions of her community while addressing broader themes of gender and autonomy.

### 3. Langston Hughes:

As a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes drew heavily from African American folk culture in his poetry and prose. His work often reflects the rhythms and cadences of jazz music, which itself has roots in folk traditions. Hughes's poems, such as "The Weary Blues," illustrate how folk music influences literary form and content. By incorporating African American vernacular speech and themes of struggle and resilience, Hughes captures the spirit of his community while contributing to a larger narrative about race and identity in America.[3]

## **2.The Role of Folk Culture in Preserving Historical Narratives**

Folk culture plays a crucial role in preserving historical narratives that might otherwise be forgotten. Through oral traditions, communities pass down stories that encapsulate their experiences, values, and struggles. These narratives often serve as a counterpoint to dominant historical accounts, providing alternative perspectives that enrich our understanding of American history.

In literature, authors who draw upon folk culture often highlight marginalized voices and experiences. By weaving these narratives into their works, they challenge prevailing stereotypes and offer a more nuanced portrayal of American life. This interplay between folk culture and literature fosters a sense of place and belonging, allowing readers to connect with the lived experiences of diverse communities.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of folk culture on American literature is both significant and enduring. Through the works of authors like Mark Twain, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes, we see how folk traditions have shaped literary expression and provided a means for communities to articulate their identities. As we continue to explore the rich tapestry of American literature, it is essential to recognize the vital role that folk culture plays in preserving history, fostering connection, and inspiring creativity. By embracing these influences,

contemporary writers can continue to draw from the wellspring of folk culture to enrich their narratives and reflect the complexities of the American experience.

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