

Realism and realistic approach in Literature

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Literature is the mirror of our soul and life. It is an art of imagination. Literature has lots of threads which can weave the beautiful piece of art. And each thread has its own importance in the creative work. In the same way, there are lots of different narrative techniques for the narration of literature. Among the narrative techniques, realism in literature is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity. According to the history of literature about the appearance and development of realism, realist movement first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century, and then spread to England, Russia, the United States of America and whole the world.

Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. George Eliot introduced realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States.[1:41]

In our point view writers of different times and places tried to open the eyes of people with the help of literature. Especially, realist writers showed a real life and criticized some political people by their novels. Actually they used magazines to agitate their idea against the injustice in their country. Many writers agitated for improvements conditions in workplace, social life and politics. Realist literature is best represented by the novel, including many works widely regarded to be among the greatest novels ever written. "In England, the foremost realist authors were Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. In the United States, William Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Dean Howells were the foremost realist writer." [1:43] All these realist writers tried to reflect an actual way of life in their literary works.

Realist writers sought to narrate their novels from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the story.

They became masters at psychological characterization, detailed descriptions of everyday life, and dialogue that captures the idioms of natural speech. The realists endeavored to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. Thus, realist writers often addressed themes of socioeconomic conflict by contrasting the living conditions of the poor with those of the upper classes in urban as well as rural societies. [2:654]

We are agree with this opinion of literary scientists. So we can notice that everyday life described in details with some socioeconomic conflict by contrasting rich and poor families in some realistic works of American realist writer Theodore Dreiser. One of such kind of his works is “American tragedy” where he shows the differences between two social classes, cruel attitude of life and how society itself changes people in its way. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications in literature, an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces. Realism, a style of writing that gives the impression of recording or reflecting faithfully an actual way of life. The term refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favor of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life. Particularly, American writer Mark Twain was realist author who showed a real life with eyes of child. Indeed, he could show actual problems of life in a long adventure of little child in both his novels: “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and “The adventures of Tom Sawyer”.

Near the beginning of Mark Twain’s “Huckleberry Finn”, Huck reports of Twain’s earlier book “Tom Sawyer”: “That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain. He told the truth mainly. There were things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.” [3:255] The claim of realism in literature is mainly, to tell the truth, brushing away fantasies and wishful idealized versions of the world. The world of common people, their hard life, and injustice of society is the subject of realism.

Realism depicts the life of common people, it is not as romanticism which depicts only ideal, rich and handsome heroes. “Realism, then, is allied to what Freud called the reality principle, the acceptance of the hard facts of life. But in nineteenth-century writers like Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, realism also involves a redemption of the world through wish fulfillment, with the aid of fabulous romance motifs: the triumph of the underdog, the happy marriage.”[3:255]

Realism was criticized by many literary critics and politics too. Their opinion about this genre was different. Their attitude to this genre depended on their social status and time. Some of them criticized this genre positively. But some representatives of social and political sphere criticized negatively. Main reason was that they didn't like their reflection in the book.

Modern criticism frequently insists that realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality (a ‘slice of life’) but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader. In its methods and attitudes, realism may be found as an element in many kinds of writing prior to the century ago. It was also found in theater. Realism established itself as an important tradition in the theatre in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the work of Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and others; and it remains a standard convention of film and television drama. In the drama, realism is most closely associated with Ibsen's social plays.[4:78]

Our point of view differs a little from this idea with some concrete reasons. We think that realism in literature is a reflection of life. Every story is set on real events which happened with people in life. Writer even can take some historical events for the fundament of his literary work.

Realism in literature is the theory or practice of fidelity to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealization of everyday life. The 18th-century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are among the earliest examples of realism in English literature.[4:78]

Realism in the eighteenth century was marked by a confluence, or confusion, between the novel and journalism, between fiction and the news. The subtitle of Balzac's "Père Goriot" is "all is true." Earlier, novelists like Daniel Defoe had masqueraded as reporters of factual accounts. The novel in its early days presented itself at times as a quasi-legal deposition.[3:255]

We consider that in different time and place realism developed in connection with each other. It means literature of different countries influenced to each other. As realism first appeared in France, and then spread to the Europe and America.

It was consciously adopted as an aesthetic program in France in the mid-nineteenth century, when interest arose in recording previously ignored aspects of contemporary life and society. The realist emphasis on detachment and objectivity, along with lucid but restrained social criticism, became integral to the novel in the late 19th century.[3:255]

We are sure that French writers not only put the foundation of realism, but they contributed much to the progress of this genre too. In some cases we can say that English realist writers investigated realism genre on French literature.

In its classic nineteenth-century form, realism requires the detailed recording of characters' sensory impressions, their styles of dress, and their visual or auditory perceptions, as well as the look of the houses and streets they inhabit. Such detail makes up what Henry James in "The Art of Fiction" calls "solidity of specification." In this respect, Joyce's "Ulysses", with its endlessly rich panoply of real-life details, fulfills the realist genre. Erich Auerbach's "Mimesis" presents an innovative and influential theory of the birth of realism from the Christian gospels, as well as a survey of realistic fictional style through the centuries.[3:255]

Time by time realism spread whole the world both in literature and art. And some aspects of realism changed too. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality. Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind. Despite the radical attempts of modernism to displace the realist emphasis on

external reality, realism survived as a major current within 20th century fiction, sometimes under the label of neo realism.

The word has also been used critically to denote excessive minuteness of detail or preoccupation with trivial, sordid, or squalid subjects. The twentieth century, prevailing models of literary criticism drew a line between realist and anti-realist literature, placing realist works on one side of the line and fantastic works on the opposite side. Despite this inherent questioning of the boundaries and construction of reality, the international literary scene has been largely uniform in its placement of magical realism in the anti-realist category, thereby opposing it to realist fiction. Furthermore, the current critical climate furthers the division between realism and magical realism in the premium that it places on magical realism at the expense of the earlier social realist tradition, which is defamed for producing artistically stunted narratives without any enduring aesthetic value.

Samuel Johnson, in his *Rambler* essay no. 4, writes, “The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind.” For Johnson, such realism proves itself by its contrast to the fables of romance, which involve such adventurous motifs as “a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck.”[3:255]

The theme of realism genre was different, but they were actual themes of social life. One of the major themes addressed by realist writers is socioeconomic class conflict. Many realist writers, in their efforts to depict characters from all levels of society, highlighted differences between the rich and the poor. In *David Copperfield* by Dickens, the protagonist experiences the suffering of impoverished children forced to work in urban factories. Many realist novelists sought to depict various aspects of life in the rapidly industrializing nineteenth-century city. Dickens set much of his fiction in London, describing specific streets, buildings, and neighborhoods in his novels.

Realist novelists often address the related themes of religion, philosophy, and morality in their works of fiction. While realist novels are known for their accurate descriptions of various physical details, many of them are also highly theoretical in their presentation of various religious and philosophical debates.[2:654]

Realist novelists often focused on the dynamics of marriage and family life in different sectors of society too.

The literary genre realism divides into several movements as transcendental realism, critical realism, social realism, and magic realism. All these movements are the varieties of one big genre as realism. And each of these movements somehow connects with each other. Because all of them appeared from one foundation. Transcendental realism is a kind of literary movement which implies individuals have a perfect understanding of the limitations of their own minds. Critical realism combines transcendental realism with critical naturalism to describe an interface between the natural and social worlds. Social realism writers tried to depict everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor. And magic realism writers are writing about supernatural event of common people's life. As we noticed all these contemporary literary trends are near to each other and their main theme was humanism and truth.

Thus realist fiction often has a documentary quality to the extent that these writers have accurately reported the facts of a specific historical era in details by their realistic literary works. With the help of realist writers' such kind of literary works we can know the truth of history without any idealization and feel their emotions.

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