

Realism

1865-1880

Realism is...

- **Realism** arose as an opposing idea to **Idealism** and **Nominalism**.
 - **Idealism** is the approach to literature of writing about everything in its ideal form.
 - **Nominalism** believes that ideas are only names and have no practical application.
- Realism focused on
 - the truthful treatment of the common, average, everyday life.
 - the immediate, the here and now, the specific actions and their verifiable consequences.
 - the effect of the work on their reader and the reader's life, a pragmatic view.
 - **Pragmatism** requires the reading of a work to have some verifiable outcome for the reader that will lead to a better life for the reader.
 - This lends an ethical tendency to Realism while focusing on common actions and minor catastrophes of middle class society.

The **East Coasters** asked what is at the end of those railroads?

- The **Western** regionalists answered:
 - Fantastic deserts
 - Mile deep canyons
 - Mountains high enough to bear snow the year round
 - Forests with trees as wide as man can stretch
 - Wild villages where the only woman was the town harlot
 - Camps where the only currency was gold-dust.

- Writers of the **South** told of
 - swamps where the cypress grew out the green-scummed water and the moss grew down into it
 - cities where the obsessive blood-consciousness of its inhabitants testified to the mingling of the races.

- **Mid-western** authors narrated the tales of the
 - plains where a man could be lost in the dust or ruined by hailstorm
 - cities where fortunes were made or lost in a day's trading on the beef or grain exchanges.

Realistic Complexity And Multiplicity

- **Complexity** refers to the interwoven, entangled density of experience
- **Multiplicity** indicates the simultaneous existence of different levels of reality or of many truths, equally "true" from some point of view.

Elements of Realistic Storytelling

1. Emphasis on **optimistic** tone, details, **pragmatic**, practical, slow-moving plot
2. Settings thoroughly familiar to the writer
3. **Rounded, dynamic** characters who dictate the plot
4. Show us rather than tell us (In characterization and description)
5. Climax is not a crisis, but just one more unimportant fact.
6. **Ending/Resolution** usually open.
7. **Foreshadowing** in everyday events, a natural causality
8. Representative people doing representative things
9. Insistence on experience of the plausible and commonplace
10. Emphasis on **intrinsic** morality, **relativistic** between people and society

Realistic Characterization and Imagery

In most stories

- Characters
 - control their destinies
 - act on their environment rather than simply reacting to it.
 - are superior to circumstance.

Their use of **symbolism** is controlled and limited; they depend more on the use of **imagery**.

Citations

"American Realism: 1865-1910." *American Realism: 1865-1910*. Web. 1 Mar. 2015. <[http://www.westga.edu/~mmcfar/worksheet on American Realism.htm](http://www.westga.edu/~mmcfar/worksheet/on%20American%20Realism.htm)>.

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