

Realism and Naturalism

1860

Origins

- ▶ Began in France and England, but soon spread worldwide.
- ▶ Due to new methods of transportation and communication, including the steamship and telegraph, literary movements spread quickly.
- ▶ This movement is best represented by the novel, presented from an objective, non-biased position.
- ▶ Many artists in the 19th century felt the need to give a realistic representation of the world.
- ▶ Realist writers lost faith in Romanticism and the ideal of nature. They wanted readers to see the gritty, often ugly view before them.



The middle class

- ▶ Realism is mainly concerned with the representation of middle-class characters and their interaction with others, especially the poor.
- ▶ Some writers emphasize psychological reality.
- ▶ Realist writers used plain diction and usually tried to convey the many ways of speaking used by the social groups they represented.
- ▶ Characters were often put in believable social situations where they faced ethical dilemmas.
- ▶ Many Realists wanted to present the world so readers could change it.



Realism in Drama

- ▶ We get an attempt at a faithful depiction of the contemporary world—with a focus on the middle class.
- ▶ Ruthless objectivity about subject matter—dramatist tries to create a “laboratory”
- ▶ The stage design changes to become a proscenium arch stage, functioning as an invisible fourth wall. We become voyeurs.
- ▶ The sets are meticulous recreations of middle class drawing rooms.



Themes

- ▶ Class conflict: The differences between the rich and the poor were often a subject for investigation.
- ▶ The city: The rapidly industrialized 19th century city was often represented in literature.
- ▶ Philosophy and morality: Many characters grapple with complex questions regarding Christian faith and the meaning of life.
- ▶ Marriage and Family: the dynamics of marriage and the family, including extramarital affairs and other marital dynamics were represented.



Styles

- ▶ The narrative voice refers to the way a story is told. Many Realist writers narrate their story from an omniscient, objective voice. This way they try to create an objective representation of reality.
- ▶ Setting is important to Realist literature. Writers sought to document every element of their own contemporary cultures, including working conditions for servants and serfs.
- ▶ Characterization is perhaps where the Realists succeed the most. They are celebrated for their unforgettable characters and impressive psychological detail.



Naturalism

- ▶ This is an offshoot of Realism, although their differences are minimal.
- ▶ Naturalism extended and intensified the tenets of Realism in that the naturalist writers sought to apply the evolutionary principles of Darwin to their fiction.
- ▶ Naturalists believed that the course of each person's life is determined by a combination of his/her hereditary traits and the historical and sociological environment into which he/she is born.
- ▶ Thus, each character is a victim of circumstance and has little power to change his/her life.

