

Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude Definition

In a literary work, verisimilitude is likeness to the truth, such as the resemblance of a fictitious work to a real event, even if it is a far-fetched one. Verisimilitude ensures that even a [fantasy](#) must be rooted in reality, which means that events should be plausible to the extent that readers consider them credible enough to be able to relate them somehow to their experiences of real life.

Origin of Verisimilitude

The theory of verisimilitude comes from a Platonic and Aristotelian dramatic theory called “mimesis.” According to this theory, a work of art should convince the [audience](#) by imitating and representing nature, and having a basis in reality. The playwright, conforming to the above-mentioned theory, had to draw themes from sources well-known to the common people of his time, and maintain the unities of action, place, and time. Besides, he had to bring a realistic union between the [style](#) and the subject.

Suspension of Disbelief

The theory of verisimilitude leads to the idea of “suspension of disbelief,” or “willing suspension of disbelief,” a term coined in 1817 by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He was of the opinion that, if a writer was able to fill his work with a “human interest and a semblance of truth,” the readers would willingly suspend or delay their judgment in relation to the doubtfulness of a [narrative](#). In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge says:

“... It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a

semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us ...”

Examples of Verisimilitude in Literature

Example #1: *Gulliver Travels* (By Jonathan Swift)

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver Travels* is a brilliant work of fantasy that may be considered as one of the best examples of Verisimilitude. It achieves verisimilitude due to the fact that it is one of the finest examples of political [satire](#) in English Literature. Readers find in it a resemblance to a reality, as they are aware of the fact that Swift satirizes contemporary politics, religion, and English culture. For instance, criticizing party politics in England, Swift writes:

“... that for above seventy Moons past there have been two struggling Parties in this Empire, under the Names of Tramecksan and Slamecksan from the high and low Heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.”

Two rival political parties, the Whigs and the Tories, dominated England's political scene during Swift's time. In his novel, the fictitious kingdom of Lilliput is dominated by two parties distinguished by the size of the heels of their boots. By relating the trivial disputes between the two Lilliputian parties, Swift relentlessly satirizes the insignificant disputes of the two English parties of his period. He achieves verisimilitude through this.

Example #2: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (By Mark Twain)

Mark Twain in his popular *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain used

Americans] talked in real life:

“I didn’t want to go back no more. I had stopped cussing, because the widow didn’t like it; but now I took to it again because pap hadn’t no objections ... But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick’ry, and I could’t stand it. I was all over with welts. He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in. Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome.”

Twain successfully achieves verisimilitude – or a resemblance to reality – by introducing [colloquialism](#) in his narrative. The use of double negatives is quite evident in the above passage.

Example #3: *Night Clouds* (By Amy Lowell)

Drawing analogies from real life gives a semblance of truth to even fantastic ideas. For instance:

“The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens.”

In the above excerpt, the poet constructs an [analogy](#) between clouds and mares. She compares the movement of the white clouds in the sky at night with the movement of white mares on the ground. Such comparisons give her far-fetched ideas an air of reality.

Function of Verisimilitude

A literary work throws a lasting impression on its readers if it presents the [theme](#) in such a way that readers can relate it to real life. Conformity to the theory of verisimilitude ensures the existence of reality in a literary work. Political satires are abundant with verisimilitude examples.