

Realism

Definition of Realism

Realism is a movement in art, which started in the mid nineteenth century in France, and later spread to the entire world. Realism entered literature at almost at the same time. Its real objective was to root out what is called *fantastic* and *romantic* in literature and art, to insert what is real.

In literature, writers use realism as a literary technique to describe story elements, such as [setting](#), characters, themes, etc., without using elaborate [imagery](#), or [figurative language](#), such as similes and metaphors. Through realism, writers explain things without decorative language or sugar-coating the events. Realism is something opposite to romanticism and idealism. Read on to learn more about *realism* in literature.

Examples of Realism in Literature

Example #1: *The Cherry Orchard* (by Anton Chekhov)

VARYA. There's been an unpleasantness here while you were away. In the old servants' part of the house, as you know, only the old people live – little old Efim and Polya and Evstigney, and Karp as well ... Then I heard that they were saying that I had ordered them to be fed on peas and nothing else; from meanness, you see. ... So I call Evstigney. ... [Yawns] He comes. "What's this," I say, "Evstigney, you old fool." ... [Looks at ANYA] Anya dear! [Pause] ... My darling's gone to sleep!"

This [monologue](#) looks like a rambling and an idle complaint. However, it reveals many things about Anya, Varya, and their situation at home. It presents a perfect example of social realism, as it exemplifies old feudal

order slowly giving way to a rapidly growing mercantile and capitalistic middle class.

Example #2: *The Rape of the Lock* (by Alexander Pope)

“The Rape of the Lock” reflects cultural and social realism of the aristocratic society during the eighteenth century. The people of that aristocratic society were mainly urban, with flow of money gained from commerce and trade. They spent a great deal of time in back biting, idle gossip, love games, and playing card games.

Pope has presented details of daily routine of such gentle men and women in an amusing way. Belinda and Lord Peter are representatives of that society. Pope describes Belinda’s preparation in front of a dressing table in an amusing and ironic way. Many people consider her dressing table a sacred place of worship. He gives minute details of how ladies are concerned to enhance their beauty by artificial methods.

Example #3: *Adam Bede* (by George Eliot)

“Adam Bede” is one of the best examples of Victorian literature that aims to highlight social realism. Victorian society was rigid and afflicted with prejudices and bigotry against women. This realism includes the elements of realistic presentation – highlighting the poor people, and reflecting on their problems by setting them in the rural background, and presenting their religious and the [moral](#) sense.

Social gap was another issue in that society. As in the novel, the remnants of feudalism were still alive in Hayslope society. Hetty belonged to the working class and was madly in love with Arthur Donnithorne, who belonged to a feudal class. This held a certain charm for the people of the working class. She wanted to marry him, to be the wife of an honorable feudal man. However, her [fantasy](#) was destroyed, as it lead to a tragic end. This left a deep mark on the psyche of Hayslope inhabitants. Hetty’s personal accident suggests the harsh reality of a society that faces two unequal and different classes, as they try to unite due to emotions rather than reason.

Example #4: *The Crucible* (by Arthur Miller)

In his play, “The Crucible,” Arthur Miller presents realism, which is based on making his [character](#) appearing lifelike figures. Miller has created a chain of events to demonstrate iconic realism by using [characterization](#), language, and [dialogue](#). He has chosen a story of human interaction to describe his own concern for the cultural future of the United States, and humanity at large.

It is true that the witch trials in Salem actually happened, and people such as Rebecca and John Proctor were killed. The murders of these innocent people have a powerful impact on readers, not because of the author’s [style](#), but because of the horrifying subject matter. Miller’s use of language is also very powerful, especially where the judges and the accusers twisted ideas and words to create contrasts and paradoxes from which the accused could not escape. This was the reality of life at that time.

Function

Realism attempts to illustrate life without romantic subjectivity and idealization. It focuses on the actualities of life, and truthfully treats the commonplace characters of everyday life. The purpose of using realism is to emphasize the reality and morality that is usually relativistic and intrinsic for the people as well as the society. This sort of realism makes the readers face reality as it happens in the world, rather than in the make-believe world of fantasy.