



A New Outlook towards Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and Surrealism

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ABSTRACT:

A literary movement is a general term for the specific works of literature which share a similar pattern of writing. It simply refers to a period of time in which different authors followed similar patterns of writing or approaches. Usually these authors are a part of the 'movement' because they have similar ideas about a number of things ranging from style, content, philosophy, sociological concerns, art, culture, etc. Broadly defined, literary movement is a trend within literary periods in which literature is unified by shared intellectual, linguistic, religious, and artistic influences. In short, literary movement describes a collective upsurge of an ideological or critical approach to literature. The major literary movements discussed in this unit are Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and Surrealism. These trends have importance in literary criticism as they represent the trends in literature.

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Realism

The term 'Realism' refers to any work that attempts to portray life accurately without romantic idealization. It is defined as "the science of exact presentation of many complexities, abstract and concrete factors in the work of art". In fact, realism is an artistic or literary movement characterized by the representation of people or things as they actually are. It is most often associated with the 19th century literary movement that aimed at honest portrayal of ordinary, contemporary life. The greatest novelists, such as Balzac and Flaubert, established the novel as a major literary genre to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality. George Eliot and William Dean Howells introduced the realistic novel in England and the United States respectively. These novelists depicted life and the social world in their works realistically. In short, their novels are the best examples of "objective reality without romantic idealization". So they are regarded as the originators of realism.

In literary history, realism is usually associated with the genre of the novel because it is uniquely capable of revealing the truth of contemporary life in society. It is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways: i) to identify a movement in the writing of the novels during the nineteenth century, and ii) to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature. As a literary movement, Realism is concerned with "objective reality". It represents everyday activities, primarily among the middle or lower class society. Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. The main difference between the realistic and romantic fiction is that while realistic fiction is said to represent life as it really is, the romantic fiction is said to present life more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic rather than actuality. Realistic fiction is written to create the impression that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader. So realism is defined as "the faithful representation of reality".

The realistic fiction represents life and the social world as it appears to the common reader. The major novelists who developed realism by representing human life and experience in literature are Balzac, Flaubert, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Daniel Defoe, Richardson, Henry Fielding, Arnold Bennett et al. These novelists attempted to represent life and society realistically in their novels. For example, Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* (1831; *The Wild Ass's Skin*), *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831; *The Unknown Masterpiece*), Louis Lambert (1834), and *The Quest of the Absolute* 1834 are the best examples of realistic novels. In all these varied works Balzac emerged as the supreme observer and reporter of contemporary French society.

In England, Samuel Richardson presented realistic fiction in the 18th century. His novel *Pamela* conveys realities about truth, morality, and vice. The reader learns the truth about morality and vice through the characters in *Pamela*. While Richardson's *Pamela* portrayed life of a lower middle class servant in aristocratic homes, Henry Fielding started with satiric intention and penned a realistic novel, *Joseph Andrews*. In America, Samuel Clemens was the early pioneer of realism. Writing under the pen name Mark Twain, he was able to reproduce vernacular speech pattern and vocabulary to focus the middle and lower class characters in his novels. His *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the best example of realistic fiction. However, the realistic novel during the Victorian period used journalistic techniques to make the novel closer to real life with facts and general stereotypes of human nature. For example, Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* was originally released weekly in newspaper publications and people enjoyed it so much that it was in high demand quickly, and eventually it was turned into one novel. The Victorian novel became popular because the characters in

the Victorian novel were lifelike and connected to the middle class life and community.

The realistic novel really developed in the nineteenth century with the work of Austen, Balzac, George Eliot, Tolstoy and others. The energizing principles of George Eliot's novels were accuracy in representation of things as they are and an honest representation of her feelings and perceptions. Her masterpieces *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Mariner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871), secured George Eliot's place high in the realistic fiction in English. Her realism extends from the external world to the world of individual consciousness like the psychological novelists. George Eliot was really committed to the faithful representation of commonplace things. Her *Adam Bede* is an early example of the realistic fiction for which she became celebrated. Eliot herself defined realism as 'the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature.' To her, realism did not mean a naive belief that writing can transparently represent the real world, but the conviction that writing should not falsify or romanticize it.

In short, realism was a movement that represented everyday activities in various contexts, primarily among the middle or lower class society. The major reasons for the emergence of realism in literature in the nineteenth century were the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, a relative rise in middle-class and reader's interest in understanding the rapid shifts in culture. The major characteristics of realism are:

- a) Objectivity in presentation
- b) Selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on authenticity,
- c) Characters appear in their real complexity of temperament and motive,
- d) The realistic novel served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.
- e) Character is more important than action and plot,
- f) Insistence on the experience of the commonplace) Avoidance of the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels.
- h) Emphasis on morality
- i) Diction of the realistic novel is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone is comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact.

In short, realism is a style of writing that aimed at the honest portrayal of ordinary, contemporary life. As an artistic or literary movement developed in the nineteenth century, realism attempted to depict life accurately without idealizing or romanticizing it. So it is regarded as the science of exact presentation of many complexities in the work of art.

Naturalism

The term Naturalism is generally applied to literature which attempts to reproduce details from life without selection. It was a mainly unorganized literary movement that sought to depict believable everyday reality, as opposed to Romanticism as well as Surrealism. Naturalistic writers often believed that certain factors, such as heredity, social conditions and environment had inescapable force in shaping human character. They exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, violence, prejudice, disease, corruption, prostitution, and filth. As a result, naturalistic writers were frequently criticized for focusing too much on human vice and misery. Naturalism was regarded as a logical outgrowth or a specialized variety of literary realism in the first half of the 19th century. However, it was more explanatory than Realism by identifying the certain causes for a person's actions or beliefs. It displayed some specific characteristics that delimited it from the contemporary realistic literature. Instead of developing plot structure, naturalistic writers focused on the social environment in their works.

Naturalism was a relatively short-lived philosophical approach. Very few writers experienced real success in the naturalistic style of writing. The major writers who developed Naturalism were Emile Zola (1840-1902), Frank Norris (1870-1902), Stephen Crane (1871-1900) and Edith Wharton (1862-1937). The works of Emile Zola and Frank Norris provided inspiration for many of the Naturalist authors. They conceived of their work as experiments in which characters were subjected to various stimuli in order to gauge reactions. For example, Emile Zola's works had frankness about sexuality along with a pervasive pessimism. His most famous contribution to Naturalism was *Les Rougon-Macquart*, a sweeping collection of 20 novels. It is believed that he sought a new idea to convince the reading public of something new and more modern in his fiction. He argued that his innovation in fiction-writing was the creation of characters and plots based on the scientific method. His concern is not with character as such, but how characters react to circumstances. His often grim subject matter is coupled with a sober and scientific narration of details. There is a clinical aspect to his craft that is echoed in his descriptions of novel-writing as a form of science. Later writers would concur, citing Zola as their major inspiration in pursuing the Naturalist aesthetics in literature. The most potent expression of Naturalism is found in the works of Frank Norris.

His chief concern was with how the civilized man overcame the brute, animal nature that still lived inside of him. His most famous novel *McTeague* (1899) is a depiction of the savage side of humanity. It tells the story of a couple's courtship and marriage, and their subsequent descent into poverty, violence and finally murder as the result of jealousy and greed. The novel examines the idea that our actions and traits are not entirely determined by our conscious decisions. We are influenced by our actions and by a power that is larger than our existence.

One of the first truly Naturalist works of literature, and certainly the first in America, was Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. It is a story about a virtuous girl who becomes ruined by forces larger than her. Crane's most celebrated novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was set during the Civil War, and follows one young soldier's experience of that war. His descriptions and scenery were inspired by war and history magazines. Edith Wharton often produced novels that just as rightly belong in the category of Naturalism. Unlike the bulk of her contemporaries in the Naturalist vein, Wharton's novels dealt almost exclusively with the concerns of the upper crust of society. Her novels *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Age of Innocence*, *The Custom of the Country* etc. present the changing scene of New York City, the foibles of its fashionable elites and the ambitions of the "new people". Her characters often fall from grace through their own mistakes, miscalculation, and sometimes for no apparent reason at all.

In fact, realism and naturalism are two similar literary movements of the 19th and 20th century that deal with the real, cruel world. Realism most straightforwardly is "the truthful treatment of material." The realistic Writers like Mark Twain, George Eliot, Dean Howells etc. focused mainly on every day, natural incidents involving ordinary people, nothing too extreme or out of the ordinary. However naturalism is based on a very different philosophy in which people are prisoners of their inheritance and social environment. In naturalism, life is viewed more as a machine; man is

simply just another animal on the planet earth driven by his chemistry and environment. Spirituality has no part in this literary movement; it is all scientifically based. The Naturalistic writers believed that the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood through the objective study of human beings. They studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as forces of heredity and environment.

The main features of naturalism or naturalistic literary works are:

- a) Detached method of narration
- b) Deterministic--natural and socioeconomic forces stronger than man.
- c) Characters--lower socioeconomic class
- d) Naturalists observe, and then write and their writing is often about the darker side of life.
- e) Characters do not have free will. They are conditioned or controlled by environment, heredity, instinct or chance
- f) Language is formal and style is Darwinist--survival of the fittest
- g) Pessimistic approach
- h) Surprising twist at the end of the story

In short, Naturalism was a literary movement or tendency from the 1880s to 1930s that used detailed realism to suggest that social conditions, heredity, and environment had inescapable force in shaping human character.

Symbolism

Symbolism is an artistic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestion to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind. It is mainly a French Movement in art and literature. It gives a writer freedom to add double levels of meanings to his work: the literal and the symbolic. The main object of symbolism was to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols and symbolized language. Symbols are endlessly suggestive. They are often images which gradually reveal a special mood, or even an intimation of something deeper than life normally reveals. In short, symbolism is 'representation of ideas by the use of symbols'.

Etymologically, the term 'symbolism' is derived from the word 'symbol' which means a sign of recognition. It exists literally within the world of the story but which comes to have an abstract meaning beyond itself. For instance, a 'rose' given by one character to another may function as a symbol of their love. A 'caged bird' might be a symbol of the longing for freedom. The 'conch shell' in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* symbolizes the rule of law; while the 'pig's head on a stick' symbolizes the human impulse to savagery. In the broadest sense, a symbol is anything which signifies something. Some symbols are conventional or public. For example, 'the Cross', a 'swastika', or a 'nation's flag' have meanings that are widely recognized by the concerned society or culture. Writers use conventional symbols to reinforce meanings. In short, symbol is an object, character, or action that suggests meanings, associations, and emotions beyond what is typical of its nature or function.

The symbolist movement originated in the late 19th century in France to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols. The Symbolists believed that art should represent absolute truths that could only be described indirectly. Thus, they wrote in a very metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. Jean Moreas published the symbolist manifesto in *Le Figaro* in 1886. It names Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Verlaine as the leading poets of the Symbolist Movement. They attempted to communicate the underlying mystery of existence through a free and highly personal use of metaphors and images. Their experimental techniques greatly enriched the modern poetry of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot and the modern novel as represented by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. They also attacked the descriptive tendencies of the Realist theatre and the Naturalistic novels. So the symbolist movement is regarded as a reaction against Realism and Naturalism. The symbolist writers were concerned with expressing various elements of the internal life of the individual. They explored the tension in their lives between the sensual love of women and the spiritual idealization of women. They also described the quests as metaphors for internal explorations into the inner consciousness of the individual. For example, Baudelaire's poem "The Voyage" describes a journey as a symbol of the quest for meaning and satisfaction in life. Many symbolists focused on subjective mental impressions, internal moods, delicate emotional states, and spiritual sentiments in reaction against objective, external and concrete realities.

Charles Baudelaire's masterpiece, *Flowers of Evil*, and his important collection of prose poetry *Little Prose Poems*, embody the central ideals of the Symbolist Movement. Paul Verlaine captured the musicality of the French language in his masterpiece, the poetry volume *Songs without Words* (1874). Stéphane Mallarmé who developed the literary ideals of Symbolism was interested in exploring the relationship between everyday reality and an ideal world of perfection and beauty. His *Afternoon of a Faun* is a major work of symbolist poetry. The young generation of writers who developed the Symbolist Movement regarded Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé as the founders of the Symbolist Movement. The main characteristics of symbolism are as follows:

- a) Symbolism was largely a reaction against Realism and Naturalism.
- b) It sought to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of symbols and the symbolized language.
- c) The Symbolist poems attempt to evoke, rather than primarily to describe
- d) Symbolism was against plain meanings and matter-of-fact description.
- e) Symbolic imagery was used to signify the state of the poet's soul.
- f) Symbolism was in many ways a reaction against the urbanization and materialism of the Victorian Age
- g) The Symbolists thought that art should express more absolute truths which could only be accessed indirectly, using metaphorical imagery and suggestive forms containing symbolic meaning.
- h) The symbolists wished to liberate the techniques of versification to allow greater room for free verse.
- i) Symbolism was concerned with expressing various elements of the internal life of the individual.
- j) The Symbolist writers describe various journeys, voyages, or quests as metaphors for internal explorations into the inner consciousness of the individual.

Surrealism

Surrealism was a revolutionary movement in literature and the other fine arts. It was started as a firm and precise artistic movement in France by Andre Breton's Manifesto on Surrealism in 1924. This manifesto highlighted the importance of the dream state in art and writing. Andre Breton was explicit in his assertion that surrealism was, above all, a revolutionary movement. He defined surrealism as 'Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought'. The Surrealists wanted to replace conventional realism with full expression of the unconscious mind, which they considered to be more real than the 'real world of appearances'. The expressed aim of Surrealism was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity, including logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms. Surrealism developed out of the Dada activities during World War I. The most important center of the movement was Paris. Its founder and chief spokesman, Andre Breton, played an important role in Dada experiments. Dada activists reflected a sense of dissolution and uncertainty of the age. They protested with the anti-art gatherings, performances, writings and art works. However, Surrealism propounded its own coherent antidote to both nihilism and optimism.

The Surrealists believed that excessive rational thought and bourgeois values had brought the conflict of the war upon the world. Andre Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault started the literary journal *Literature* and began experimenting with automatic writing and published their writings, as well as accounts of dreams, in the magazine. Breton and Soupault explored deeper into automatism and wrote *The Magnetic Fields* (1920). They believed that automatism was a better tactic for societal change than the Dada attack on prevailing values. They believed that Surrealism would advocate the idea that ordinary and depictive expressions are vital and important, but that the sense of their arrangement must be open to the full range of imagination.

The Surrealist Movement was influenced by the work and research of Sigmund Freud who founded psychoanalysis. Freud had significant influence on the belief and practices of the Surrealists. Freud's work with free association, dream analysis, and the unconscious was of utmost importance to the Surrealists in developing methods to liberate imagination. They embraced idiosyncrasy, while rejecting the idea of an underlying madness. They wanted to free people from false rationality, and restrictive customs and structures. Breton proclaimed that the true aim of Surrealism was "long live the social revolution". The main aim of Surrealism was to change the world, partly through social revolution but more centrally through a revolution in consciousness. It proposed the release of the imagination and stood as an implicit criticism of a restrictive rationalism in society and realism in literature. Though international in scope and influence, Surrealism is more firmly rooted in France. Its major writers and artists tend to be French viz. Breton, Soupault, Eluard, Aragon, Masson, Tanguy, Delvaux and others. Its impact in England came late (1936) and was largely ineffectual. But the United States benefited from the wartime presence of some of the leading European Surrealists, and its literature and art bore the marks of this cultural transfusion. The main characteristics of Surrealism are:

- a) The importance of the dream state in art and writing
- b) A pure psychic automatism
- c) The incorporation of chance and spontaneity
- d) Free expression of the most basic drives: hunger, sexuality, anger, fear, dread, ecstasy, and so forth.

Conclusion:

Literary movement is a general term for the specific works of literature which share a similar pattern of writing. It simply refers to a period of time in which different authors followed similar patterns of writing or approaches. Usually these authors are considered part of a "movement" because they have similar ideas about a number of things ranging from: style, content, philosophy, sociological concerns, art, culture, etc. while studying these literary works it is necessary to have thorough knowledge of the trends in literary writing. The major literary trends such as Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and Surrealism are very useful to analyze and interpret works of literature.

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