

Lecture 2: Realism in Great Britain

Literature During the Victorian Age

The literature of the Victorian age refers to the body of works written during the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. It was a period of significant social change and economic prosperity in the country. The literary works of the period depicted issues like industrialization, class struggle, technological advancement, and the role of women. The reflection of struggles during the time of rapid industrialization required a journalistic style to allow the author to detail every aspect of the lives of the middle classes, which made realism the best movement to represent the period. The growing rate of literacy also led to the rise of a large number of male and female authors who best represented their thoughts in novel writing, like Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Thomas Hardy, and others.

Such realities were depicted by authors like Charles Dickens who, using satire, focused his works on moral issues, social inequalities and phenomena like crime, poverty, child labor, materialism, the impact of industrialization on workers, in his different novels *Hard Times*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*. This form of realism is known as **Social Realism**.

The Realist Novel

Realism as a term was first used as an opposition to the idea of idealism. It is a form of writing that represents "low life", related to poverty and greed. This tradition had started earlier in literature but marked its climax with the novelists of the eighteenth century led by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. Yet, by reflecting the low life, realism obscures the most interesting feature of the novel, which is its ability to represent all the forms of human experience, good and bad. Thus, the beauty of the realist novel does not reside in its ability to show harsh realities, but the way it represents life (faithful rendition) (Watt 9-10).

The principles of the realist novel are:

- A detailed representation of events
- Faithful representation and imitation of reality
- Emphasis on reporting events rather than commentary. The novel's function is to report what happened rather than laying opinion about the events.
- Depth and complexity of characterization, the realist novel devotes special attention the inner thoughts and conflicts of the character.

Social realism

It is a movement that appeared in the nineteenth century as a result of the rapidly changing lifestyle of the industrialization age. It concerned itself with the representation of the everyday lives of ordinary people, with focus on their hardships, in an attempt to depict a truthful account of their conditions. The goal of such writing is to raise awareness and to create change in society. Social realism included: social critiques, poverty, labor exploitation, humanistic values, empathy, political engagement, class struggle.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Baghli-Berbar, Souad. British Realism. Unpublished Handout. University of Tlemcen. (2022)

Kheladi, Mohamed. "Literary Studies". L2 Literary Studies, 2022, University of Tlemcen. Handout. [https://faclettre.univ-tlemcen.dz/assets/uploads/DOCUMENTS/cours%20en%20ligne/2023/Polycopi%C3%A9%20kheladi%20\(facult%C3%A9\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://faclettre.univ-tlemcen.dz/assets/uploads/DOCUMENTS/cours%20en%20ligne/2023/Polycopi%C3%A9%20kheladi%20(facult%C3%A9)%20(1).pdf)

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1957.

British Literature Wiki, "The Realistic Novel in the Victorian Era". *University of Delaware*. Date: N/A <https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/the-realistic-novel-in-the-victorian-era/>