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RESEARCH ARTICLE



THE RISE OF THE NOVEL, REALISM, AND THE REALISTIC VICTORIAN NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The realistic novel was quite different from what has been seen in earlier literature. Often stories were about the common man, the struggles of the lower class, and the challenges of attaining a higher socio-economic class. This is how the subgenre 'Social Realism' was created. Writing stories about everyday struggles helped increase readers' emotions and created a rise to realism and realistic Victorian novels during the 18th and 19th centuries. The central theme of these novels focused on the life of commoners, rather than that of the ruling class, and contributed to the popularity of one of the most famous realistic writers, Charles Dickens, since his stories were written about realism. As the English novel presented its ideas logically, one thing that stood out was its choice of words and writing style.



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THE REALISTIC NOVEL AND ITS FORMATION

The Realistic Novel was significantly different from what has been seen in earlier literature. The most popular form of literature has always been poetry. However, the realistic novel changed that popularity into a form of literature that would later be used as a journalistic technique, in order to make the literature something closer to real life with facts and general stereotypes of human nature. The attention to detail was made to just report the facts, not commenting or judging on the scene or character.

Realistic Novels were about the common man the struggles of the lower class and the challenges of attaining a higher socioeconomic class. This is how the subgenre Social Realism was created, as one of the most popular novels of this time is in the Social Realism genre. In Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the novel goes through a boy named Pip's life, as he unexpectedly comes into money and is asked to become a gentleman. The novel follows Pip's struggles and focuses on telling the whole truth about the character, both his good and bad actions and the reasons behind them. He was meant to be a very tangible person, one that the average person of this time could relate to. Pip was written to be very "real", with all his flaws and positive attributes. Stories such as *Great Expectations* helped in creating the rise of the novel.

THE RISE OF THE NOVEL

Prior to the Victorian Era, poetry had been the dominant form of literature. However, changes in class structure saw the novel rise in popularity. As the middle class expanded and more people became literate, the popularity of the novel exploded. These

works also became more accessible as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of newspapers and the periodical press. Most notably, the works of Charles Dickens were frequently serialized in newspapers or journals, his first being *Pickwick Papers* in 1836. As a result of this serialization and a focus on character rather than plot, Dickens' works are sometimes criticized for having weak plots. The subject matter of realistic Victorian novels also helped increase their popularity. Dickens particularly would portray the lives of working-class people, creating characters that the new rising middle-class audience could relate to. The realistic Victorian novel focused on characters and themes such as the plight of the poor and social mobility that was being afforded to a new middle class and the rising middle class was eager to consume these novels and the evolution of the

REALISTIC VICTORIAN NOVEL.

Realistic Victorian Novels were a literature that was being produced closer to the turn of the century and shared few characteristics with the earlier works of the Victorian Era during Queen Victoria's 1901. Those writers at the end of the Victorian Era such as Oscar Wilde and Thomas Hardy. The novelists at the turn of the century continued to explore the problems in English social life but explored other key themes as well. The greatest departure from the early Victorian era came from these authors' exploration of themes such as sexuality and a focus on the ways where science and technology would revolutionize the world in the upcoming century. A reader would find the following characteristics of the Realistic Victorian Novel.



- An emphasis on the here and now;
- Attention to specific action and verifiable consequences;
- Realists evoked common actions, presented surface details, and emphasized the minor catastrophes of the middle class;
- They employed simple direct language and wrote about issues of conduct; and
- Characterization was very important, as there is often an abundance of characters and social types.

The Realistic Victorian Novel was dedicated to the genre of realism. It identified what would be considered real and what was not real, but when realism in literature, the elements of its stories, plot, or its characters must be completely separate from, human thought or speech. Therefore, it is literature's responsibility to accurately interpret and represent reality. As literature attempts to do this, it simultaneously depicts the anxieties, desires, and achievements of the Victorian time period. While Realism certainly encompasses its own unique ideas, the genre continued to utilize the strengths of empiricism and romanticism. For example, the topic of nature is still focused upon, but realistic literature acknowledges the fact that the human mind is a separate entity from nature. Therefore, realistic literature aims to answer the question of how the mind can possibly know or understand nature accurately.

There are two main theories that assist in answering that question. Realism began as a literary movement in response to and as a departure from the idealism of the Romantic period. Realism emerged in literature in the second half of the 19th

century, most predominantly in novels. Realism was characterized by its attention to detail, as well as its attempt to recreate reality as it was. As a result, the plot was no longer the central focus of the author, but rather creating interesting and complex characters is what took precedence. Realism also placed an emphasis on describing the material and physical details of life, as opposed to the natural world as characterized by the Romantic period. Many Realistic novelists veered away from the softer aspects of Romanticism, such as intense tenderness and idealism, because they believed those characteristics misrepresented the harsh realities of life. Realism emphasizes accurate descriptions of setting, dress, and character in ways that would have appeared inappropriate to earlier authors. Realism, which emphasizes the importance of the ordinary person and the ordinary situation, generally rejects the heroic and the aristocratic and embraces the ordinary working-class citizen.

CRITICISMS OF REALISM

The Realistic novel was very bold compared to the literature before its time. The realistic novel was meant to be like real life, so the literature would hold things in it that were taboo before, such as masturbation. It also showed a lot of the unfortunate events. Critics complained that authors only focused on the negative and that focusing on the things that were falling apart was too unpleasant. Realistic novels, like real life, didn't always have a happy ending. It was also noted that not much really happened in the plot of the novels. The attention to detail of the character led to little plot development and payoff.



REPRESENTATIONAL VS. REVELATION THEORIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD "IDEA"

Representational theories are specifically concerned with what separates the mind from the world surrounding it. Revelation theories are more interested in the immediate knowledge of what is considered real, invoking either perception or intuition to achieve that knowledge. Moreover, in this light, it is equally important to acknowledge the word "idea." To genuinely understand Victorian Realism, it is almost necessary to first acknowledge that nothing is "real." Following that understanding is the comprehension of the paramount concept of representation: nothing is real until the human mind perceives it and assigns it valuable meaning.

Victorian realists of this time period admitted to being quite overwhelmed by the idea of a gap existing between the human mind and the rest of the world, or reality. One of the most famous realistic writers, Charles Dickens, directed his attention more towards revelation theories. On the topic of reality being understood as what is immediately available to one's senses, Dickens further highlighted the importance of memory, which he described as a kind of vision or way of seeing the world. Moreover, in his narrative-style novel *Great Expectations*, memory is a key concept in the story, as Pip recalls all of the events from memory. Some readers complain about the fact that the novel does not offer anyone's perspective other than Pip's, but it is highly likely that Dickens chose to do this on purpose. He viewed memory and revelation theories as very important to realistic literature, and a narrative could be described as a kind of "written memory." To write the novel from such a perspective

begs an important and highly relevant question from the readers: How do we know that Pip's descriptions and thoughts are accurate representations of reality? The honest answer is that we simply do not, and this kind of ambiguity leads to very interesting discussions about Victorian Realism.

NARRATIVES AND SUSPENSE

Narratives were an extremely popular style of writing for Victorian Realism, as they easily invoked all the theories described above. Along with challenging the notion of what is real and what is not, comes the impression of suspense experienced by the readers. By suspense, the obvious interpretation of the word means that the reader experiences tension and anxiety throughout the story, but rather an attractive one that motivates him to read further. At the same time, though, suspense also refers to the action of actually suspending judgment as both a Victorian reader and writer. It is only human nature to judge a piece of literature as one reads it, but in the topic of Victorian Realism, the judgment that should be suspended actually refers to the judgment of what the speaker in a narrative is portraying as "real." Moreover, the reader is expected to take what the narrator says at face value. Additionally, judgment must also be suspended as a reader makes assumptions based on his unique beliefs. Doing so brings us back to the earlier definition of suspense, in which the reader is meant to feel anxious about the rising action in a narrative. If a reader refuses to suspend his judgment in his assumptions, beliefs, and subjective interpretations of reality, he will not experience the pleasures of suspense that are meant to be felt.



In *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, a great deal of suspense arises from the fact that Pip does not know, for the majority of the novel, who his benefactor is. The pleasure of reading the novel comes from readers' guesswork about the identity of the benefactor. In general, when a secret emerges in Victorian fiction, and the suspense is lifted, things often turn out to be entirely different than what was expected. This realization is meant to be enjoyable for the reader, as it has most likely kept his attention while he has read the story. Also, in *Great Expectations*, the very fact that there are two different endings to the novel serves to create suspense for readers and further promotes more thought-provoking discussion.

THE END OF REALISM

The end of Realism was characterized by a non-realistic view of what readers had come to imagine from the novel. It gave an explanation that Realism seemed to focus largely on any negative views about life. Things "falling apart" was a large captivation to most, however, it was quite the opposite for others. In some cases, readers were complaining about how in realistic fiction, there wasn't much interest happening. Their concern was also about how everything seemed to be more about talking and there wasn't enough action to back anything up. Henry James, as a prime example, was criticized for his loquaciousness.

Realism later turned to Naturalism towards the end of the 19th century. With Naturalism, writers defined their characters using their heredity and history. Qualities that people found distasteful in Realism, which were the fixation with character and the thoroughly dull plots, were intensified by

Naturalism. The impact was unique because Charles Darwin's theory of evolution inspired other writers to branch out into something that differs from Realism. Whereas Realism seeks only to describe subjects as they really are, naturalism also endeavors to govern scientifically the underlying forces, like heredity and history, to manipulate all of the actions of the subjects.

HISTORY OF THE RISE OF THE REALISTIC VICTORIAN NOVEL

The most popular novels of the Victorian age were realistic, thickly plotted, crowded with characters, and long. Describing contemporary life and entertainment for the middle class. According to Merriam-Webster, popularity is the "state of being liked, enjoyed, accepted, or done by a large number of people". So the popularity of realistic Victorian Novels would be entirely dependent on the people who read them. Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* was originally released weekly in newspaper publications and people enjoyed it so much that it became in high demand quickly, and eventually it was turned into one novel. The realistic Victorian novels became popular because it was the first time characters in a novel were similar and connected to the people of the middle class.

NEWSPAPERS, PRESS, AND PUBLISHING

One of the most important sources of information on the realistic novel's popularity is the newspapers that wrote about it. In the *Penny Illustrated Paper* and *Illustrated Times*, there are two different instances, with two different articles, where Charles Dickens's popularity and worth are celebrated, years after his death. The number of periodicals that were produced



were greatly increased during this time period. By the early 19th century, there were 52 London papers and over 100 other titles. There was a massive growth in the overall circulation of major events, information, and weekly publication of literature. In 1802 and 1815 the tax on newspapers was increased. Unwilling to pay this fee, hundreds of untaxed newspapers made their appearance. The development of the press was greatly assisted by the gradual abolition of the taxes on periodicals. Both of these developments made the newspaper more affordable to a greater percentage of the population.

The book publishing industry grew throughout the 19th century. There was a dramatic increase in literacy along with the growth of libraries and public schools. This provided a rapidly growing market for books. The introduction of technological advances allowed more volume at less cost. During the 19th century, big publishing firms emerged and some of these companies remain active in the industry today. The practice of paying authors also began to standardize, where publishers paid a percentage based on the price of the book and the number of books sold. During the Victorian period, the communication industry including publishing and printing of books accelerated the processes of economic, social, and cultural change by dramatically increasing the volume and speed of which information, news, and entertainment flowed through society.

NEO-VICTORIANISM AND THE NEW REALISTIC NOVEL

The Neo-Victorian movement began as a revival of the social and literary elements of the Victorian Era. A Neo-Victorian Novel is a novel written in modern

times that takes place in the 19th century and usually puts a spin on the characteristics of the Victorian Era. More often than not, these novels will point out and bring to light some of the follies of the Victorian Era. Another quality of Neo-Victorian writing is that it often tells the intimate stories of those who were not the center of Victorian novels because of social constructs, such as women and servants.

It was Charles Dickens who was discussed thoroughly throughout Victorian Realistic Novelists. The "Girl in A Blue Dress" by Gaynor, a Neo-Victorian Novel, represents the reimagining of the Victorian Era because Dicken's life is the subject of it. "Girl in a Blue Dress" was written in 2008 and takes place in 1870. It is inspired by the life and marriage of Catherine and Charles Dickens; represented by Dorothea and Alfred Gibson in the novel. This novel reimagines the mistreatment and eventual exile of Catherine at the end of her and Charles's marriage. However, this novel sets Catherine, or Dorothea, as the narrator and protagonist of the story; giving us the inner thoughts and feelings of this devoted woman. Each of these novels brought to light the fact that women were sexual and powerful beings, during a time period where that was not believed.

THE NOVEL TODAY

The novel today is considered one of the most important art forms in the English language. This is because it affects grand aspects of the language and is now considered an integral part of the art. However, the rise of the English novel occurred primarily in the 18th century; this does not mean that there was no form of a novel before this time. It only means that there was an increased release of novels and novelists during this period.



The English novel is an integral part of English literature. It has evolved to date in varied modifications and genres. The novel is a prosaic work of art that deals with the imagination to explore the diverse experiences of humans through interwoven events of select people and settings. It is also a genre of fiction that has been a medium of entertainment, information, or a blend of both. In this light, any fictive art piece that is long enough to be adapted as a book can be said to have achieved "novel hood." Since the inception of the novel, it has grown to be adapted in forms of romance, thriller, science fiction, historical, picaresque, psychological, Gothic, and the novel of manners. The English novel gave readers a perspective on life through numerous essays, inventions, books, laws, scientific discoveries, revolutions, and wars; as the major revolutions, the American and French Revolutions, were influenced by the 18th century, since it was symbolic of the development of the 19th-century, otherwise known as The Romantic Era or Romanticism.

The Romantic Era gave insight into the drama that had begun from a decline in England. There was a tilt that no longer sated the theatrical audience but seemed to wet the parched thirst of the rapid novel audience. The growth of the English novel can also be attributed to individuals' need to create something new, something different. The social and intellectual circle longed for something completely new yet individualized. Many readers wanted stories that mirrored their own lives, stories that had a recognizable nature to theirs, and this need made the novel popular since the rise of the middle class in the 18th century had directly affected the rise of novels.

The novel was in a large measure the product of the middle class, appealing to middle-class ideals and sensibilities, a patterning of imagined events set against a clearly realized social background and taking its view of what was significant in human behavior from agreed public attitudes. Some characteristics of the English novel are as follows:

- Novelty

Firstly, apart from the novel being a break from the norm, its novelty attracted a lot of traction. People's curiosity was peaked; not only that, it delivered the satisfaction of a craving that was hitherto non-existent.

- The Print Press

A second factor responsible is the Print Press. The teeming popularity of newspapers in the 18th century and the growth of periodicals and bulletins gave people something tangible to look forward to. These reads held reforms that were rational even though not yet implemented. By this, there was something new to learn, a cause to propagate, or some pioneer movement to look forward to, since many of the subjects were written during this period. This brought it close to home and increased the emotions of readers. The central theme of these novels focused on the life of commoners, rather than that of the ruling class. As commoner stories were written, it brought to light their list of issues just because it was brought out in the open for all to read. Although the English novel tried to present its ideas logically, one thing that stood out for it was its choice of words and writing style. It was unique in its simplicity; nothing grandiose or exaggerated, just a



play on words to better express one's logical reasoning regarding the topic in question.

The English novel paved the way for individualization in a way nothing else would. One's ability to share a story now, in the language most common and widely accepted, English, means that it will be able to seep into the cultures that you never thought existed. A language that is unwavering in its constant evolution now embraces concepts that never existed years ago while still in the grasp of society's focus.

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