

Morrison (2)

JAMES'S REALISM

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life...

The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits...helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist.

Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" (1882), in *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1894; Internet Archive), 384, 390. archive.org/details/partialportraitsoojameiala.

MORRISON'S REALISM

I also want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people. That is, I want my books to reflect the very practical, shrewd, day to day functioning that black people must do, while at the same time they encompass some great supernatural element. We know that it does not bother them one bit to do something practical and have visions at the same time. So all the parts of living are on an equal footing. Birds talk and butterflies cry, and it is not surprising or upsetting to them. These things make the world larger for them. Some young people don't want to acknowledge this as a way of life. They don't want to hark back to those embarrassing days when we were associated with "haints" and superstitions.

Nellie Y. McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison" (1983), in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor Guthrie (UP of Mississippi, 1994), 153.

REALISM PRINCIPLES

- 5.4 In fiction, *realism* is a literary mode, used in a variegated family of fictional (especially novelistic) genres. It has been the novelistic norm since about 1750.
- 5.4.1 Realism's conventions include: few or no improbable events, no supernatural interventions, "ordinary" (prototypically, middle-class) rather than heroic or noble protagonists, the possibility of seriousness alongside comedy, and denotative reference to particularized details of everyday life rather than allegorical reference.
- 5.4.2 None of these characteristics are necessary or sufficient conditions for realism, which is a loose, historical category.
- 5.4.3 When the bar on the supernatural is lifted but the other principal features of realism are conserved, especially in relation to postcolonial literatures incorporating indigenous or folk traditions, we speak of *the marvelous real* or *magical realism*.