



What makes a work of journalism “realistic”?

Well, to be sure, re-telling direct witnessing, or having us identify with a tale of initiation and return, are very much a part of the authority we are liable to grant such a report. Recounting being initiated or immersed is the way a reporter tells us--or, really, claims-- he or she has gotten inside the meaning of an event. That is, even though such events are necessarily filtered through memory, this form of witnessing is very liable to persuade us, especially since memoirs—from Stephen Crane’s famous “War Memories” (1899), to Ernie Pyle’s books about World War II, to Dexter Filkins’s memoir of reporting on Afghanistan and Iraq, *The Forever War* (2008)--are often re-composed out of dispatches written in the moment itself. Journalism’s “first draft of History” becomes the first draft of these nonfiction narratives.

However, it’s going to be more helpful if you start to use the terms “*realism*” or “*realistic*” to describe ***the effects of certain conventions and literary techniques rather than simply the content of reportage, or the fact of direct witnessing.*** (Likewise, we use these “ism” words rather than “reality” or “the real,” which is ostensibly what journalists are trying to describe). The point in making that distinction is that, while we often think we are moved or persuaded by the “what” that is being reported, or “how” it was, there is often something more at work in creating the *feeling* of actually witnessing something or believing a text is realistic—something more connected to *how* such a journey is recounted, or again to claims that are embedded in the *literary* effects in the story-form.

What are some of those “**Reality effects?**”

- Effects of **perspective and “depth”** of character
Making some characters “round” and having interiority/ and some that don’t/ or “**focalizing**”/ a character as a lens to action and meaning
- **Retrospection:** Being able to see back and forth in time
In nonfiction, “foreshadowing” is actually created by looking back in time.
- Controlling (and sometimes eliminating) **attribution**
Instead of “According to the General Shaw, the weather was...” you might write: “The weather was...” (Some might say you’re making an opinion look like a fact.)
- Reading Minds?/ **Free Indirect Discourse** as implied Attribution
The process by which the narrator’s summaries “mingle” with what characters feel or think, and which we gather were gained by interviews, collaboration, and more.

