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Verisimilitude

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Author Bio
William MacLeod is a Senior English major who hopes that his humble little tale will besmerch the good name of the English department for ages to come. He wishes to thank Professor Cowan for making him write this story and he wishes to thank the Oxford English Dictionary for existing, for without the OED this story might not have ever existed...and the world very well may have been a happier place.
WILL MACLEOD

Verisimilitude

“Verasimilitude...Verasimilitude...Nothing?” I pondered this unfortunate event for a few seconds and then wondered if maybe I should just give up this stupid pursuit and maybe play some video ga---NO! This shit was important! I’ve got to prove that fucker wrong! Okay okay okay, why would the website not recognize the word, think now think!...Well, he said the word, so it must be real, because he’s got a PhD, which means he must be a little bit smarter than---“I spelled it wrong!” I exclaimed to the wall behind my computer. It didn’t answer back, and I always took silence as a sign of agreement. It was probably just trying not to hurt my feelings, good of it really, I should be nicer to it and not let my roommate put Bon Jovi posters on it anymore.

“Let’s see now....” I murmured as I delved into my orthographic quest, briefly wondering why I had used the word “let’s” when there was clearly only one of me there but then of course all of my being was there so I could theoretically be using the plural in a metaphorical sense to represent the amalgamation of my whole---“Stop that!” I ordered, giving myself a firm smack in the temple, just to show...myself that...I...wasn’t fucking around. My train of thought did stuff like that sometimes; my theory was that the hoboes had left their boxcars and overthrown the conductor, and no one had explained to them exactly the kind of relationship that trains and their tracks are supposed to have with one another.

Anyway, I wasn’t going to let that bastard get away with this! And the online Oxford English Dictionary was my first tool in smashing down his smarmy intellectual gates and planting a flag of victory upon his crown!...It then occurred to me that perhaps one can watch a bit too much of the history channel. It also occurred to me that “smarmy” might not be an actual word, maybe I should look it up while I’m here---NO! NO! “Focus,” I motivated myself, “Verisimilitude...wait! Ver-i! It’s an I!” Now to see if I was correct (no pun intended). I entered the new spelling into its cozy little text box on the screen. Now for the defining moment of my day...well, one of the minor ones at least. I hit the “enter” button, ignoring my brain’s attempt to get me to wonder why that button wasn’t called “return” anymore. That question was for another day and another life crisis. “Success!” My fist shot into the air with enough speed that in a movie it would have been accompanied by a whip-crack sound effect. I didn’t have a whip, neither did my roommate. That was a situation that would need to be remedied before the next time one of us needed a comic sound effect.

But that wasn’t important! My first step was complete! The spelling was correct! It was a word! Now I was going to find out what this word actually meant. There it was, in front of me. Meaning, etymology, related words, textual references. As I looked over all this with the same intensity that one usually saves for an arm-wrestling match with a muscle-bound frat boy to determine who gets the love of the beautiful campus maiden...
because that happens a lot...and people still use the word “maiden” a lot...I reflected on what had led me to this sordid point in my life.

“You’re papers are well-structured, but the points you try to make definitely seem to lack some verisimilitude.” That’s what he had said to me. That’s what my English professor had said—to me! That wrinkled old bastard (well okay, he’s not that wrinkled. But it wouldn’t be insulting if I said something like: “That old bastard who apparently takes care of his skin!”) had said my papers didn’t have verisimilitude, saying the word in a smarmy know-it-all way as if he thought that I didn’t know what it meant...I didn’t of course, but that’s beside the point! I had marched out of that classroom offended but not knowing why, and I had marched out of there with a purpose, and now that purpose was filled...or fulfilled...or maybe both! In fact definitely maybe both! And as the meaning sunk itself into the folds of my brain I realized that he was wrong. He was dead wrong! So wrong that it required italics to express! “I’ve got you asshole! You’re wrong!” I shouted to no one once again. Except that this time no one turned out to be someone, in fact it was very someone. My roommate had come back from... whatever the hell he does in the afternoon, to be welcomed into our room by my exclamatory...exclamation.

“Dude.” He said like someone trying to explain to a friend why rancid Jell-O does not belong in his underwear drawer, “You’ve got to calm down. I don’t know what happened, but all I know is that you’ve seriously got to stop dwelling on minor crap, because I know that’s what this probably is. Calm down and realize where you actually are and what you’re actually doing for once man.”

“I can’t calm down! Not with my verisimilitude at stake!” Fuck it, I knew what this word meant now and I was going to show it off! “This is personal! I need to show him, I need to show the whole world how verisim-atic. No, verisim-la-ton-ic...verisim-licious...Yes, that’s it, how verisim-licious I am! I need to show them all what kind of character I have. I need to...I need...I need to go to the bathroom!”

And that’s where I went!

A complete success! That’s what my trip to the bathroom was. I’d give it, oh say, a nine out of ten...hell, maybe even a nine and a half out of ten, I was feeling generous now that I knew that I was going to take down that slimy louse of professor that thinks he’s better than me just because he’s accomplished more in his life and probably has a higher IQ. Hah, he thinks that I don’t show verisimilitude? Yeah, well he doesn’t show...not-suck... isimilitude...yeah!

I do admit that my almost perfect score at the toilet had calmed me down a bit and my brain was in the midst of the Herculean task of dragging me kicking and screaming back to my senses; but I wasn’t going to let that bullshit stand in my way! No! I was on a mission! I was on an epic mission to go to the dining hall and get something to e---wait, no; there
was something else. Something I was going to do before that...think now, it
was only two seconds ago that I was pissed about it...it had something to do
with a professor, or maybe a lawyer, or a doctor...no wait, go back to profes-
sor...nothing? Okay, maybe we should try lawyer, hmmm, lawyers are rich,
they say "your Honor" a lot, they---hold the phone! "Honor!" I was defend-
ing my honor! And not in the weird English way with the O-U-R at the end.
English! The dictionary! My professor! My Verismility! That's it! It's all
coming back to me now, and not in the stupid Celine Dione way either, it
was in the real, non-French Canadian way!

"Dude, my stream of consciousness totally works!" I exclaimed as I
turned into my room. Of all the things I could have said when I returned
from the bathroom, apparently this was one of the things that no part of
my roommate's brain had even considered beginning to make contingency
plans for. He eyed me with a look of puzzlement reserved for people who
have just been told that a carton of pancake batter had been elected presi-
dent of Venezuela.

"..." He said. I didn't know ellipses could be spoken, but he managed
it somehow. "That's...that's wonderful Mark." Was all he could manage in
actual English. Apparently he then decided that pulling out an enormous
textbook and doing some extraordinarily tedious homework reading was
preferable to having any further conversation with me. I'm sure if suicide by
glass shard hadn't been against his religion, that would have taken the place
of homework at this point. It seems that he had resigned himself to the fact
that, like every other time I had gotten into this mood, he was just going to
have to wait it out until my burning passion for revenge manifested itself in
me killing stuff on my Playstation and I became pacified enough to actually
carry on some sort of normal human interaction. He hadn't even changed
out of his gym shorts yet, as if he knew that I was going to be tacking another
workout onto what he'd already done that day just by making him be in the
same room as me. I silently applauded him for this choice as it made for a
delightful little metaphor.

"Look Sean, I know I've gotten like this a few times before." I addressed
him from my computer chair, reflecting on the fact that if "Understatement
of the Year" was an actual award then there would officially be too many
award shows...oh, and that I probably would have won it for that last statement.
"But this time, I've really been offended; this isn't like the time when that
kid told me that my socks didn't match."

"That's not what he said Mark." Groaned Sean, planting his face into
his open textbook, "I believe his exact words were 'Hey! You just rode your
bike over my girlfriend's foot!' I don't think the word 'socks' ever really
came up Mark! I think the words 'you're a dipshit' came up a little more
frequently."

"Yeah, well he was thinking about my socks." I shot back with enough
power that even I thought I had sort of justified it. "Those dipshit comments
only compounded the matter. I bet that wasn't even his girlfriend either.
The way she was just hopping up and down in apparent pain like that. That’s way too unappealing to attract any mate really. And anyway, like I said, this is different. I never got my revenge on that bastard. I had a plan too...”

“Whatever.” He replied...which was really the only wise reply to ever use on me. Delving any deeper than that was just asking for a deep seeded desire to repeatedly slam your head into a desk. “I don’t know what the hell you’re pissed about this time; I don’t care, and it doesn’t matter because you’ll just forget about it and move on in a few hours anyway. In fact, I bet those video games are just calling too you now...” He trailed off, again “interested” in his reading.

He was kind of right too...maybe if I just play for a little whi---No! I must plan. I must plan my victory over the falsities of that bourgeois faculty dog!...I don’t actually like Marxism, but hey, fuck it. If his bullshit rhetoric can give me decent insults for people I hate then I’m game. Anyway, no was the time for action. I began to drum my fingers on my desk in the way that makes you wonder if the natives are attacking, and I had a brief moment when I truly felt sorry for Sean, my roommate. Because I knew that I was about as far from acting rational at that point as a biplane is to being to being a herring. But I’m not always like this. Most days I’m a sort of congenial guy, and I’m generally considered likeable by most people around me...I think. But of course for every couple of those days when I’m normal, there was one of these when he had to use all his will-power to not forget that battle-axing someone to death was illegal in our society. Yes, I often had moments when I felt bad for poor Sean for getting me as a roommate. But then I remembered that the roommate selection was random, and as such he had been stuck with me by chance. Therefore I didn’t have to feel bad, because getting stuck with me meant that the universe probably hated him, and therefore I was really only like, forty percent to blame for him hating his life.

Now, how to show this professor who’s boss...well, actually I don’t really want to show him that I’m his boss, because being his boss would require me to do way more work than I’m really qualified for at this point in my life, I mean it would probably involve a lot of spreadsheets and board meetings and...AH HA! My mind exclaimed. It’s amazing how cavernous the inside of you skull can sound when your thoughts start shouting like that. AH HA! A dramatic speech. That’s the ticket. A well-planned dramatic speech with appropriate background music. That’ll show him what’s what...meaning I guess that it’d show him that the word “what” was in fact “what”...I guess...whatever that completely obvious point has to do with Verisimilitude. Anyway, I was proud of myself for coming up with this idea completely out of nowhere while thinking about something else. It’s the kind of thing that Ben Franklin used to do, coming up with ideas in the bathtub and jumping up and screaming “Eureka!”...Of course Ben Franklin also contracted syphilis at least a couple of times so I probably shouldn’t draw too much of a parallel there.
“I’ve got it!” I said out loud, more to the ceiling than anything else. As usual, the ceiling was more distant than the wall. “He has office hours in two hours, that’s when I’ll hit the bastard, that’s when he’ll get a face full of my verisimility...and maybe a face full of my sass too...” I began muttering as I opened up Word on my computer and started pounding away on the keyboard with an inspired furor that would make Joan of Arc blush...of course she was burned at the stake, so I’m pretty sure her cheeks were red by the end anyway...What? Too soon?

My roommate let out a mighty sigh from across the room. This was no ordinary exhalation of breath. This was a professional sigh. This was the sigh of a man who was used to audibly breathing his displeasure. But even that wasn’t going to stop me now. No, nothing short of being smacked in the skull with a fist made of logic could put an end to my plans now...well maybe that or some really good ice cream.

What the hell happened? I was there. I stood right there in front of him, with my boombox, the CD of cheesy background music ready to go. I had it all prepared. I had written my entire speech in the two hours beforehand. I’d even given myself time to memorize most of it. I was there. I’d looked him in the face, ready to go ahead with the plan...but then...something occurred. It didn’t go as planed, not as all. No, it had all backfired on me...What the hell happened?

I tried to give my little speech as planned (I forgot to turn on the music) but...somehow it just came out all wrong. I suppose I’d been a bit intimidated when I walked in there, what with all the thick volumes and professional looking books stacked up in the room. Plus the fluorescent light shimmering off the bald spot on his head had been quite impressive. I suppose that all blinded me to my purpose...what was my purpose again? That had all been lost to me as soon as I walked in there. “Pr...professor Horwitz.” Is all I’d been able to gasp out at first. But then...well, it’s not like I had forgotten my little speech. I remembered it all...eventually...and I guess I said it all, but it wasn’t at all in the energetic, brave way that I’d intended. No, it was delivered with lots of stops and starts, and fragments of thoughts, and I had gone back to the word “um” so much that it could practically be considered my home country. So basically it was delivered in the style of a politician whose speechwriter has suddenly gone on strike.

I suppose you’d actually have had to be there to truly understand the look he gave me when I had finished, but it was somewhere between “wow, there’s something really interesting on my desk that requires the attention of both eyes and the vast majority of my medulla oblongata” and “I wonder how much damage I’ll actually sustain if I just throw myself out this window right now...” In the end he took off his glasses, wiped them off, and invited me to sit down and actually chat with him. At that point I had to. Never underestimate the suggestive power of an old man taking off his glasses. At the end of our huge little talk about 15 minutes later, he asked me what the CD player was for. I told him “It’s part of a...Latin...experiment...I’m doing...yes...”
The walk back to my dorm consisted of long, meandering thoughts that almost ran me face first into at least a couple of trees. The worst thing about it all was that...he was probably right. Everything he had told me about the papers I had written was more than likely right on the money. Maybe I really didn’t show any verisimilitude in my writing. Maybe I wasn’t being truthful at all. I had written those papers in a way that was meant to show my true slant on the issues, but maybe by being too personal and truthful, I had shown even less of what was really going on. Maybe I had made the papers ridiculous by putting my personal thoughts so literally into them. Maybe I had obscured the real meaning of what I was saying by incorporating far too much of my own silly thought pattern. Maybe by being too real I had ruined everything I had been trying to say. Eh, I suppose in the end he was right about it all. I had been defeated. My papers did, indeed, lack verisimilitude.

I sat in my bed thinking well into the night, my brain slowing down its pace with every moment. Sean had gone out somewhere while I was gone, and, despite his best efforts, he had eventually had to come back to his own room around midnight. I was lying down, pretending to be asleep by that point anyway. I heard Sean get into bed, pulling back the blankets tentatively, as if he expected to be interrupted at any second. Then there was the sound of him lying down, getting the comforter over him. I didn’t know that the simple act of covering oneself in blankets could carry emotions, but this one certainly seemed relieved. It seemed Sean thought he was getting to sleep without any further incident, and I just simply couldn’t have any of that nonsense.

“Well,” I announced to the air molecules around me “at least I learned a new six syllable word today. That ought to make my brain-penis that much more impressive than everyone else’s.” Sean then groaned the groan of a man who has suffered from ultimate disappointment. At last, I knew my day was done.