

1. REALISM

American Realism was a reaction against Romanticism and Transcendentalism. Realism was not based on the experience that transcends human experience, rather it stresses the common and ordinary everyday life. Individuals possess free will and if they are not idealizing life and society, they can decide rightly. Realists concentrate on common characters living ordinary lives and having the same, or at least, similar experience as the reader. That is why realism reached wide audience and was largely democratic. Realists try to represent life as it is, the characters speak in a colloquial language and act according to understandable motives, and the writer captures the manners and values of his time. The realist writer is not always concentrating on a specific region, but often confronts characters of different race, gender, class, education, or environment.

The American Civil War, which caused great social changes, was not – with very few exceptions – directly reflected in the writing of that period. Henry James, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and William Dean Howells did not actively fight. The best novel describing the war appeared only after thirty years. It was Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Within a few years America developed the most progressive steel industry in the world and built the most extensive railroad system, connecting the East with the West.

The main changes in literature were visible on the level of language and style. There was a general shift to realism. The conflict between South and North was forgotten due to rapid industrialization and expansion to the West. One of the results was a rise of mass education and mass culture supported by the rapid development of magazines which gave the writers new and much wider audience. The same stories thus could be distributed throughout the whole America. American writers became concerned with common men and everyday life and they became dependent on their writing career. Literature was to describe life as it is. Realism introduced new settings, description of typical characters and ways of life in particular American regions. The characters also often speak in colloquial language with idioms, which had appeared only occasionally and solely in dialogues. As the father of American realism, William Dean Howells remarked: "The arts must become democratic... and then we shall have the expression of America in art."

Popular culture often reflected popular notions of "self-made man" and Darwinian theory of "survival of the fittest". The best-selling author of such stories was Horatio Alger (1834–1899). His cheap dime novels for boys were printed in many magazines and newspapers. Among his most popular stories belong *Ragged Dick* (1867).... MORE

The end of Civil War was also connected with rise of feminism. Many women had to take up various jobs during the war and after it was over, actively entered the booming economy. They mainly worked as telephone operators, clerks or assistants – or started to write. It was a period Mark Twain called "the gilded age".

One branch of realism is called regionalism or local color realism. At one point, these terms were used interchangeably. More recently the phrase "local color realism" has been distinguished from regionalism. Some critics believe that regionalism describes the characters with greater psychological insight and with greater sympathy than does local-color writing, which is often comic, racy, or burlesque. If a given text could not have been placed in any other place, or least not in the same way, then that is a

representative of regionalist or local-color writing. In other words, the text depicts specific manners, dialects, or legends of the place.

Generally, regionalism often renders characters as types representing the area, rather than individuals. Thematically, regionalist texts are often nostalgic, and looking back on America before the Civil War, yet at the same time, the writers try to re-create national identity.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS (1837–1920) was the editor of influential American magazines *Nation*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan*. writing a campaign biography for Abraham Lincoln in 1860 that helped him to gain a diplomatic position in Venice as the Civil War erupted. While his early writings brought him notice, he first truly rose to prominence with the publication of *Venetian Life*, a collection of his travel writings, in 1866; in the same year he became assistant editor of the influential *Atlantic Monthly*. He became editor in 1871, cementing his position in the New England literary establishment and as an arbiter of American literary taste. His book *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (1900) documents some of his many relationships with famous American writers. *My Mark Twain* (1910) tells the story of his lengthy and close friendship with the writer whose fame would outlast and surpass his own. A prolific writer even as his book sales began to lag during the early twentieth century, he produced countless reviews and essays, short stories, poems, and novels during his long career. He is perhaps best known now for his novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) and for his thoughtful, even passionate, defense of Realism in fiction. Howells opposed sentimental or idealistic narratives in favor of true depictions of daily life and the internal struggles of men and women. His interest in representing the lived experience of everyday citizens dovetailed with what were seen as his progressive social positions, including his defense of the Haymarket anarchists sentenced to death in 1886 and his opposition to the Spanish-American War in 1898.

He was the reviewer of Nathaniel Hawthorne and 20th century poet Robert Frost. He helped to promote and published the work of such influential writers as Mark Twain, Henry James, but also African American Charles W. Chestnutt or American Jewish writer Abraham Cahan.

CHARLES WADDELL CHESTNUTT (1858-1932) was the most successful African American fiction writer at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. At that time African American writers did not have access to mainstream audiences or major publishing houses. Yet Chesnutt's stories were published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and his work was praised by Mark Twain or Henry James. Chestnutt published two short-story collections, *The Conjure Woman* (1899) and *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899), and several novels: *The House behind the Cedars* (1900), *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) and *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). He also wrote a biography of Frederick Douglass. He was famous for writing in African American dialect and depicting black community and its racial solidarity.

BRET HARTE is called "the writer of the West" as he laid the foundations of western. He moved to California when he was eighteen. He worked as a teacher and later as a

journalist. He was a chief editor of *Overland Monthly* where he started publishing his stories and poems. He introduced new characters of outlaws, prostitutes and gamblers. Yet he is describing them as innocent, warm-hearted people, almost as heroes. His most famous collection is *Outcasts of Poker Flat* (1868).

MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain was a prominent figure in the American Realist movement. Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910) adopted the pen name Mark Twain while a reporter for the *Virginia Territorial Enterprise* in 1863 and used the literary persona to explore an array of issues—social, political, aesthetic—that arose during the post–Civil War period. He began his career as a writer while still a typesetter for his brother Orion’s newspaper in Hannibal, Missouri, by composing short sketches and, later, as a correspondent during his travels east and west. His experiences as an itinerant typesetter and steamboat pilot, wildcat miner, reporter, and lecturer shaped his narrative voice and his practice of realistic writing. He left newspaper work after his first book, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), became a national success (it was his best-selling book throughout his life). He devoted the rest of his life to writing across genres, from novels to travel writing, from short fiction to essays, from lectures to political and social polemic. During his most prolific years (1870–1897), along with short fiction and essays, he published eighteen books including *Roughing It* (1872), *The Gilded Age* (with Charles Dudley Warner, 1873), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc by the Sieur Louis de Conte* (1896), and *Following the Equator* (1897). From 1900 until his death in 1910 Twain shifted his attention primarily to nonfiction with a series of anti-imperialism essays, a diverse collection of aborted manuscripts, and his autobiography.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was written from the late summer of 1876 through late 1884. The novel was begun as the sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and the opening chapters return to the picaresque design of the earlier novel as Huck and Tom engage in various kinds of play, most of which is dictated by Tom’s love of the romance. The immediate difference is the point of view from which the story is told. Instead of the omniscient narrator of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the new tale is told by Huck himself in a first-person tour de force that allows readers to see the world through the eyes of a disenfranchised and much-abused adolescent. Twain was clear about the value of Huck’s voice when he wrote to William Dean Howells that he had begun “Huck Finn’s autobiography” and that he had struck the right note when he decided to use Huck as the narrator. The decision grounds the novel within Huck’s experience, and his nofrills, vernacular language offers a deadpan description of his life.

That decision to have Huck tell his own story inspired Twain, and he quickly composed roughly the first eighteen chapters of the novel. He halted only after Huck and the runaway slave Jim, together on a raft, are run over by a steamboat and Huck finds himself among the Grangerford clan. In chapter eighteen, Huck asks Buck Grangerford, “What’s a feud?” and it is at this point that Twain put the manuscript away, a practice that he described as writing until the well ran dry and then setting work aside until the creative well filled up again. While Twain waited for the well to fill, he turned to other projects: during 1877 he wrote the first twelve chapters of *The Prince and the Pauper* and during 1878–1879 he

traveled in Europe and wrote *A Tramp Abroad*. The continual writing helped Twain work through the issues underlying *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, he saw the relationship between *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the story line and childhood experiences of Tom Canty and Edward Tudor in *The Prince and the Pauper* as so allied that his initial plan was to publish the two novels as a set, though the story of the prince and the pauper was published alone in 1881.

A visit to the Mississippi and its shoreline communities during 1882 (his first extended trip to the South since the Civil War) prompted Twain to write *Life on the Mississippi* and, more important, to complete the final chapters of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, including a drastic change to the end of the Sherburn episode: at first Twain was willing to have Sherburn spirited away by friends as the lynch mob approaches. In what seems a fit of frustration, Twain penciled in directions to let the mob hang the man, but instead he ended the episode with Sherburn's direct and sustained rant against mobs and mob mentality. Both the Wilkes episode and the final evasion chapters were written in a burst during the summer of 1883. The book was published in England in 1884 to preserve Twain's copyright; it was published in the United States in 1885. The novel is essentially the tale of a runaway, Huck, who teams with a runaway slave, Jim, on an improvised and ultimately failed attempt to find freedom. As the story begins, Huck is constrained by the social order and false piety of St. Petersburg and the Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson. When his father reappears (in chapter five) to claim Huck's part of the treasure found at the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he abducts Huck and brings him back to a life outside society. Because of his father's abusive ways, Huck decides to run away, which he does by designing his own murder (chapter 7). Huck's journey changes radically when he finds the runaway slave Jim on Jackson's island (chapter 8), and the two quickly become dependent upon one another as they make their way down the river. Jim's hope to escape to freedom and to rescue his wife and children from slavery form an underlying tension in the novel as Huck is forced to face the reality that he is helping a slave escape a system that is not and has not been a threat to him. As they are swept along by the river's current, soon the two have journeyed past the free state of Ohio and have been drawn deeper into the South. Along the way, Huck and Jim face their own demons as well as a series of external threats from a corrupt and parsimonious society, including the Grangerford and Shepherdson feud, the arrival of the con men the Duke and the King and their several scams, the Sherburn episode, and (with the aid of Tom Sawyer) an attempt to free Jim from bondage after he is imprisoned at the Phelps farm. Finally, after a harrowing and absurd escape plot, Tom Sawyer delivers the news that Jim has already been manumitted and Huck once again faces the possibility of social constraints from Aunt Sally Phelps, who wants to adopt him. He announces his intention to flee into the West, but it not clear in the novel about whether this is a real possibility.

STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900) was a journalist and a writer. He wrote tales, sketches, poetry, and journalism. Crane attended Lafayette College in Pennsylvania and then Syracuse University where, in 1891, he began writing his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, which he had privately printed in 1893. The story of a young woman who becomes a prostitute did not attract many readers, but was noticed by two prominent wirters and critics, W. D. Howells and Hamlin Garland. After reading the series on the

Civil War in *Century* magazine, Crane began work on *The Red Badge of Courage*. A shortened version of the novel was first published in syndication newspapers in 1894. It tells the story of Henry Fleming, a young man who volunteers to join the Union army, expecting to become a war hero. Yet, after a long winter in a war camp, he loses his enthusiasm. When he hears that his regiment will soon join a battle, he starts questioning his courage and is afraid he could run away. Even though he manages to stay during the first battle, the second he cannot stand. Since then he is running behind the lines. After many confrontations he is hit on the head and then brought back to his regiment, wounded. When he recovers, he starts fighting with animalistic frenzy and is praised by his commanders.

In the meantime he was still active as a journalist and wrote poetry. His first collection, *The Black Riders*, was published in 1895. One year later the complete version of *The Red Badge of Courage* came out. The book received good critical reviews and was highly successful. Crane wrote three more novels: *George's Mother* (1896), *The Third Violet* (1897), and *Active Service* (1899). When he was writing his fourth novel, *The O'Ruddy* (1903), he died of tuberculosis. In 1899 he also published another collection of poetry, *War Is Kind* (1899), and five collections of short stories.

HENRY JAMES (1843-1916) was born into a wealthy family in New York City. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, was his father's close friend. As a child his family traveled extensively in Europe, where his father hired private tutors for his five children. At the age of twenty-one young James abandoned formal study in science and law, deciding instead to become a professional writer. He also moved abroad, first to Paris, before settling in London in 1876. A key participant in the intellectual life of his day, he became acquainted with Henry Adams, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. He was a friend of William Dean Howells, and he knew many of the leading European writers of the time, including Ivan Turgenev, Émile Zola, George Eliot, and Matthew Arnold. His brother William James became a prominent Harvard professor of psychology and the leading pragmatic philosopher of his generation. Having lived as an expatriate in Great Britain for most of his life, Henry James became a British citizen in 1916, at least in part to protest the reluctance of the United States to enter World War I on the side of the Allies. He received the Order of Merit from King George V in 1916.

THE BEGINNING OF FEMINIST WRITING

Although there were women writers in America, after the Civil War, their writing became more radical and socially aware. There were a few successful writers and editors. Sarah Josepha Hale, an editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, refused to reprint British stories as the practise of that time and decided to publish only original American works for female readers. The writers mainly left their domestic themes and turned their attention to the position of women in the post-Civil War world. Concentrating on the themes of power, sacrifice, and independence, female authors such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Kate Chopin, or Louisa May Alcott explored race and class issues during the war. Much of women's writing concentrated on the conflict between the Victorian "angel of the house" ideal and ambitious, independent woman. Many works dealt with the incompatibility of marriage and maternity with free, often artistic life. Realism, with its emphasis on real situations and everyday life offered these writers to describe the experience they knew and had right at hand. They started to challenge the

ideals of a perfect passive wife and described the thoughts and actions of individual women. For most of these writers and their characters, marriage was not the ultimate goal of their lives.

Some female authors were publishing their stories in prestigious magazines, such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Century*, *Scribner's*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, while others published their stories and poems in ladies' magazines, which were less prestigious, but paid better.

Although it was mainly white women who became successful, there were a few influential ethnic writers. In her short stories Pauline Hopkins pointed out the need of social changes in African American Community; María Christina Mena described the Mexican community, and Native Americans Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, and Zitkala-Ša described their lives as women and Indians in a white American culture.

The fiction of REBECCA HARDING DAVIS (1831–1902) and ELIZABETH STODDARD is a turning point from sentimental women writing. The realists felt the sentimental novel was not reflecting the complexity of life and were determined to realistically capture the life, speech and values of their time. Davis's most influential novel was *Life in the Iron-Mills* (1861), where she depicted the everyday struggles of mill workers. Hugh Wolfe is a Welsh immigrant who works in West Virginia iron mill together with his cousin Deborah. He is a talented sculptor

KATE CHOPIN was the pen name of Katherine O'Flaherty who was born on 8 February 1850, in St. Louis. She grew up in a slave-owning Southern family. Her father, an Irish-Catholic immigrant, died in a railway accident when she was only five, and she spent her childhood and adolescence with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who were all widowed. After her husband died, Chopin started to publish her stories to support her children. She was publishing her short stories in such well-known periodicals as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Century*, and *Vogue*. She often dealt with the Creole culture in Louisiana that established her reputation as a local color realist. Chopin appealed to a wide readership, as can be seen in her short story collections, *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night At Acadie* (1897), which were well received. Yet Chopin was mainly interested in women's roles and needs. She often wrote stories that were considered controversial or inappropriate. She openly described unhappy marriage, adultery or racism. Her main work dealing with these themes is her novel *The Awakening*. The book received controversial reviews. The *St. Louis Republic* labeled the novel "poison" and "too strong a drink for moral babes."

The Awakening tells a story of Edna Pontellier, who starts to question and re-evaluate her life during summer vacation on Grand Isle. Her husband Léonce often travels to New Orleans on business and Edna befriends Adele Ratignolle (the model mother), Mademoiselle Reisz (an unmarried musician), and Robert Lebrun (son of the resort owner). He teaches her to swim and the experience liberates her. In love with Robert, she decides to leave her husband's house and starts a new free, independent life. When she finds out that Robert does not want to spend his life with her, she goes to the Mexico Gulf and swims until she drowns.

After the bad reception of her novel, Chopin did not write much; she even cancelled her third short-story collection, *A Vocation and a Voice* and died soon after.

SARAH ORNE JEWETT (1849–1909) was born in South Berwick, Maine, and much of her writing depicts life in this area and in New England generally. When she was a child, she suffered from rheumatoid Arthritis. Consequently, she often missed school and traveled with her father, who was a doctor, to local farms. These experiences became the basis for *A Country Doctor* (1884). She never married, as many women of that time. Instead, she concentrated on her career. Her first short story was published when she was eighteen, and she managed to publish approximately seven or eight short stories a year for the rest of her life. These were later collected, e.g. *A White Heron and Other Stories*. She became one of the first professional female writers in America. She started writing didactic and moralistic stories for children under the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Later she concentrated on depictions of local life from a neutral point of view. Her fiction and way of life influenced many American feminist writers, mainly Willa Cather.

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN (1860–1935) was born in a distinguished family. Her great-aunt was Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her parents separated and Gilman received only four years of formal education, yet she was studying at home. Her father paid her a Rhode Island School of Design which enabled her to become financially independent. She married Charles Walter Stetson and soon after their daughter was born, Gilman suffered a mental breakdown. She was sent for a cure to the most famous neurologist of that time, Weir Mitchell, who practised a so called rest cure, which prescribed complete rest. Yet, Gilman almost went insane as she needed to occupy her mind and express herself in writing. To persuade Mitchell to change her cure she wrote her most famous short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” and after several rejections she managed to get it published in 1892. Since then the story became one of the most successful American short stories was adapted to opera, film and television.

She was also interested in social issues and published essays on....

EDITH WHARTON (1862–1937) is best known for her intimate and detailed portraits of class conflict, she concentrates on the traditional and hypocritical social mores and practices, and complex and complicated relationships between and among men and women. Wharton often travelled to Europe. She was mainly influenced by Henry James.” She published several novels, the most famous being *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The House of Mirth* (1905), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), for which she won the Pulitzer Prize and an autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934).

Ethan Frome depicts a love triangle of Ethan Frome, his wife, Zenobia and her young cousin, Mattie. Ethan married Zeena after she cared for his mother. Only after marriage does he realize that his wife is often sick and dependent. To make her life easier, Zeena’s cousin comes for help. Mattie is the opposite of Zenobia and Ethan soon falls in love with her. When Zeena finds out, she sends Mattie away. Ethan and Mattie are desperate and decide to commit suicide together. Unfortunately, both survive, Ethan becomes disfigured and limping and Mattie is paralyzed. They both are taken to Zenobia’s house, who becomes their caretaker.

Her best known short story is “Roman Fever”. It depicts the travels of wealthy Americans tourists in Europe, and also the power games of individual female characters, who are fighting one another for better social position.

MARY WILKINS FREEMAN

MAY LOUISA ALCOTT

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