

# Two dominate aspects of american realism

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



There are two dominate aspects of Realism (Social Rules & Morality), and two dominate laws of Naturalism (Environment & Determinism), that comes into play in the American Literature stories of Daisy Miller , Frank James, and Jack London. According to one authoritative source (Britannica), realism in its basic form in Literature is a literary style in which the author describes the reality of persons (people) in detail to resemble their actions, emotions, and environment. The strengths and weaknesses are blended in with the characteristics of their flawed personalities by not being completely good or evil, weak or strong. The characters in the stories attempt to make their way through their social environment often coming into conflict with moral and governing rules. The term naturalism “ describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings.” according to The World Encyclopaedia. In many cases the laws of Nature and the Environment portray a dominate presence. In Frank Norris’ Daisy Miller the narrator didn’t sit in the Seat of Judgement nor stand in the Jury Box (E. Poloe Dockery). He instead allows the reader to witness a building atmosphere of contention between Daisy and Europe’s ruling class. The Old Money Elite along with American Patriots established what was acceptable and moral of that era. Mrs Costello became the face of high society with a voice of concern and outrage when Daisy decided to be the free spirit she was.

Oh the shame! For a woman seen walking in the night without a female escort with men was applauding. Here the author clearly shows dispute against societal norms, another aspect of realism, which is the conflict in relationship between Daisy and the exclusive social order. This rebellion

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Daisy did by choice and constantly without any reluctance. It was more enjoyable to choose one's way and be happy than to follow the social rules and be damned. Daisy began to walk a thin line between Lady and Tramp in the eyes of the gentlemen from Geneva, Mr Winterbourne, who was from an incredibly disciplined Calvinistic background. In his eyes he was being practical and hesitant to bring moral condemnation on the beautiful and expressive Daisy Miller. The Judges of High Society, to include Mrs Costello, decided to pass ethical judgement when Daisy's number of male associates began to climb. Furthermore, the élite bore more proof to condemn; they had "Gossip", and a woman of that day was to carry herself in such a way as to avoid such claims. This is an example of the doctrine of realism, when one goes against the grain of the philosophy of the day.

Daisy blew off the warnings of Mr. Winterbourne that she would be soon shunned by all the élite class. When Daisy refused to come out the dangerous night air of shame and disgust, Mrs Costello signed her moral death call for. In her eyes this flaunting young whoring flirt could not be saved. Yet, it was Daisy's choice to enjoy the moon, the night air, and her friend in spite of the consequences to come. This was an example of the novel of manners that produced moral tensions. Why should she leave her friend and ride in judgement and appeasement? This was not rational. Realists are pragmatic and in this instance so was Daisy.

In Jack London's *To Build a Fire*, we have multiple examples where the environment brought the cold of "extreme realism" through the harsher aspects of life in the Yukon Valley. The cold being the most dangerous

deterent of survival, as the old man's warnings to not travel alone echoes throughout the traveller's mind. The frozen terrains of unbroken white, which hid the snake-like river rolling beneath three feet of ice, could bite at any time. One of the laws of determinism, as we learned in class, was the "lawless jungle". Though not a jungle this environment took present stage as it prepared the destiny for predetermined death for any traveller who might challenge the jagged-edge science of Mother Nature. The water mockerson of nature does bite, when the man believes he can walk on frozen water and pays the price while falling through nature's false floor. This was an example of the environment limiting the choice of the traveller and also guiding his destiny. The Law is " We were born to suffer and die, as Nature provides the road and logic behind it".

As with much Literature of that day (which took on the Naturalist's aspects), proper names were not given just pronouns for individuals and animals. The main character is He, and his companion is Dog. The words in his head, after self-doubt, are those of the Old-Timer. However, the names of his surroundings were given proper names throughout the story. The Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, Dawson, Nulato, St. Michael, Bering Sea, and the Henderson Creek were all capitalized and heavily influenced by the levies of Nature.

We saw similarities in Stephen Crane's The Open Boat, where we had a Captain with no name, the Oiler, the Correspondent, and the Cook. The oiler who remained steadfast throughout the story was given the name Billy, only because the author wanted us to remember his nature and how Nature took his beloved friend.

Another example where the environment influenced the destiny of the two-legged beast is when the men were shipwrecked. In the boat what choice do the four men really have? The ocean took their vessel; therefore, limiting their choices for survival.

As we returned to *To Build a Fire*, we learned that the dog's instinct was more "truer" and reliable than that of the man's judgement. It was the dog that wanted to stay by the fire. It was the dog that hesitated to travel in the seventy-five below zero weather. It was the dog through natural instinct which outwitted the man "who was not given to much thinking". When the dog wet his forefeet he immediately began to break the ice from his paws. The author makes the point that the dog did not know this "but obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being".

In *The Open Boat*, the seagulls gathered together to watch the show offshore. They were not "moved" by the majestic waves that continued to buffer the men's attempts at salvation. The grey ugly birds even mocked the men by sending one to fly right in the face of the captain. It was Nature's way of sticking out her tongue through the mask of deceit and despair.

That hope was teased with every wave that denigrated their efforts to breakthrough an unyielding sea of solitude. The white crest the waves displayed were crowns of defiance and a reminder why they were shipwrecked in the first place. The "Why" was calculated and forced the proud men of a great ship to now use a primitive row dingy to survive as long as nature said so.

This was also the case of the Man in To Build a Fire, who used primitive methods to live. The man needed elements of nature itself to survive its onslaughts. He needed birch-bark, matches, and seasonal twigs to light his fire-wood.

Here we saw the gifts of the environment dictating his survival. Later in the story we saw how Mother Nature gave and then took away, when he started the fire and an avalanche of snow fell from her trees putting out the fire without as well as within. His internal drives and stresses were being pulled on the strings of life by an environmental puppet master.

The man had no choice but to abide by the laws of nature. Nature said, “ If your fire goes out in the winter, then so does your life.” We saw his futile attempt to start one last fire with frozen fingers. He succumbed to this harsh scenery, predetermined to die where he last fell.

The men on the dingy could no longer rely on the man-made dingy. They needed to rely on their physical makeup and to tread death all the way to shore. They were cold, hungry and anxious. Why had they made it this far to just die!? Why had the seven mad gods of the sea rebuked them so harshly!? Who had played such a vicious game that they couldn't win!? “ The Game was fixed” and nature was rolling the dice. For Billy “ the oiler” the dice came up snake-eyes, the rest lived because of Mother Nature.

It was obvious that both Jack London and Stephen Crane portrayed the plight of the men in their story as Emile Zola would say “ human beasts”. The deductive reasoning of Naturalist would have made a scientific

determination. Men of both stakes were surrounded by harsh vast wildernesses of nature.

Daisy Miller's choices would also steer her destiny. She had more control over her life than the ruling class had over their happiness; however, the ruling class hindered her happiness as they attempted to bring her spirit into obedience.