

American literary realism

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In the journey of the History of Literature Genres and Literary techniques are only different vehicles of communicating the universal themes of beauty, morality, and the never-ending conflict between the right and the wrong. As the modes of transportation change with the terrain, so do the literary style and movements, which are more a representation of their times and the vehicles the greatest authors of the time, choose to convey and communicate their pain, anguish, joy, celebration or message to the mankind and posterity.

The U. S civil war (1861-1865) between the industrial north and slave owning south, as the cliché goes, was a watershed in American History. The sugarcoated optimism of a young and idealistic nation gave way after the end of the war to a re-orientation of the idealistic philosophy. America began to canonize the self made man. The industrialized north began making great strides and the concentration of the population in cities and the drift towards Industrialization began making more pronounced.

Survival of the fittest as Darwin proclaimed glossed over several unethical profiteering methods of Business tycoons who soon came to command a considerable clout in policy making and the governance. As has been seen in the natural course of History, growing Industrialization and rapid change in social fabric also fuelled the growth of Alienation. As America grew into a World power, the sections of the community that were left behind either because they could not make it or did not like it (as the case may be) started feeling lost in a society they did not identify with or particularly like living in.

These were the voices that resonate in the books of Realists like Mark Twain through Huckleberry Finn, Stephen Crane's Maggie: A girl of the states, or in <https://assignbuster.com/american-literary-realism/>

characters like Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. As had been overly simplified by William Dean Howells Realism is "nothing more or nothing less than the truthful treatment of material". American Realism is defined as "the faithful representation of Reality" or verisimilitude". There is a debate whether Literary Realism is a technique or some thing more important than that.

Though it started as a counter point to Romanticism and was nurtured in the American Literary scene as a product of the Civil war and the generations that either witnessed it first hand or those that were influenced by it, yet Realism is actually a differential quest for truth which spears to be a motif of all literature. Even that being the case, the basis on which American Realism is counted as a genre or a literary movement are its distinguishing features in the matter and the method in which the matter was approached or applied.

The principal differences that can be listed are Character being more important than the plot (though w can not equate it to Individualism as in the sociological sense) Insistence to depict and a tendency to defend the commonplace and the middle class (or in other words the generally happening and the plausible among events) The accent on morality understood and accepted as a result of self examination or as an end result of the travails undergone The concept of Realism being depicted as the closest to the ideal notion of and as a prerequisite for Democracy As one of the pioneers of Realism, Howell Last of the principal characteristics is the attack on the Romanticism The works that have had the most enduring effect on this genre have been written in the second half of the 19th century till the turn of the century.

William Dean Howells, Mark Twain and Henry James have been widely accepted as the first generation of Realists. Though they were the pioneers of a new vision in American Literature, their writing styles were very different from each other. This difference can be attributed to the varied structure of prose and voice that they assumed in their writing.

Diction was the natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact. This was the period when the most balladic of tones were being formalized in the published literature. The use of symbolism was controlled and limited; the realists depended more on the use of images. Mark Twain was a highly successful proponent of creating vivid and realistic images without overt sermonizing, yet conveying his thrust on the inherent deficiencies or the supremacy of human nature through highly entertaining works like *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important: overt authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses. The first generation as mentioned above did have to be a lot more direct than those who succeeded them in authorial intrusions into the story line. Having discussed the in detail the backdrop for American Literary Realism, it is important to observe in some more detail the most influential works of the most prominent authors of the time and the genre. Howells published realistic local color writing by Bret Harte, Mark Twain, George Washington Cable, and others.

For many years, the editor of the important *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, William Dean He was the champion of realism, and his novels, such as *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and *A Hazard of*
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New Fortunes (1890) mark a departure from romanticism and the primacy of the middle class. In "Daisy Miller" by Henry James, the changing face of America and America in its global context was first brought to the notice of the readers. He was also fascinated by the poignant innocence of the American national character, with its emphasis on earnestness rather than artifice.

The character attributes of the heroine who dies are - Young, fresh, ingenuous, clueless, naive, innocent, well meaning, self-centered, untaught, scornful of convention, unaware of social distinctions, utterly lacking in any sense of propriety, and unwilling to adapt to the mores and standards of others. These traits have no fixed moral content, and nearly all of them can be regarded as either virtues or faults. This was how the newly emerging Superpower was looked up with, part confusion and part admiration.

"I haven't the least idea what such young ladies expect a man to do. But I really think that you had better not meddle with little American girls that are uncultivated, as you call them" For being one of the most celebrated authors of his time and exponentially to have grown in popularity and relevance till today, it would not be unjust to only briefly mention Twain. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain remarks (1884 p. 258) "All right then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up" This famous quote is a direct attack on the religious sanction for slavery in U. S.

The contrast of people carrying shotguns to attend a church sermon on brotherly love is an apt symbol of people interpreting social justice and spirituality to match their own idiosyncrasies. The individualistic people of the southern states are brought alive in colorful contrast In Twain's previous

process. The resentment towards the big-brotherly attitude of the pseudo-socialite worshipping of the Industrialized and “cultured” North is aptly summed in the following quote, which seems to say that all people need not necessarily like a set of behavior being standardized without popular consent.

“But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before.” Apart from the novelists the most influential influence in the literary sphere was that of Stephen Crane who could, through his words bring out the underlying philosophy, which was that the choices of Human were limited by external circumstances (contrary to the Romantic view point that the mankind is the king of his own destiny.) Besides Crane repeatedly and habitually pokes fun at the point that Human beings are the center of the Universe.