



AMERICAN REALISM AND ITS PECULIAR FEATURES

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Abstract: Realism was born in the middle of the XIX century. As all movements realism also has its special peculiar features. American realism differs from others with its numerous characteristics. In this article we will show America's realistic period with its wide range of examples.

Key words: Depiction of life, realistic movement, human existence, everyday scenes, real society.

The artistic movement of realism first emerged in France during the 1840s, particularly around the time of the 1848 revolution. Realism arose as a reaction against the dominant artistic style of the time, Romanticism, which emphasized emotionalism, imagination, and the idealization of subjects. Realists sought to reject the exaggerated emotional tendencies of Romanticism and instead focused on portraying the world as it truly appeared.¹ Realists were motivated by a desire to depict the everyday realities of life, especially the lives of the working class and the ordinary people. They believed in presenting an objective and accurate representation of the world, reflecting the social, political, and economic conditions of the time. Realism aimed to capture the truth of human existence and shed light on the social issues and inequalities prevalent in society. In contrast to the idealized and often fantastical subjects of Romanticism, realist artists turned their attention to ordinary people, landscapes, and everyday scenes.² They embraced a naturalistic approach, paying meticulous attention to details, and often depicted subjects in their natural settings without embellishment or idealization. Realist painters used techniques such as precise brushwork, careful composition, and the use of light and shadow to create an illusion of reality. Realism also extended beyond the visual arts

¹ Cady, Edwin H. *The Light of Common Day: Realism in American Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1971.

² Sundquist, Eric, ed. and introd. *American Realism: New Essays*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1982.



and influenced literature, theater, and other forms of artistic expression. Writers and playwrights like Gustave Flaubert and Henrik Ibsen embraced the principles of realism, crafting narratives that explored the social realities and psychological depth of their characters. The realist movement had a profound impact on the art world, challenging established conventions and paving the way for future artistic developments. It opened up new avenues for artists to engage with contemporary issues and sparked debates about the role of art in society. Realism's emphasis on social critique and its rejection of art for art's sake laid the groundwork for subsequent movements such as naturalism, social realism, and later, modernism. While the realist movement originated in France, it quickly spread to other European countries and beyond, leaving an indelible mark on the trajectory of art history. Its influence can still be seen in the works of artists today who continue to explore themes of social realism and the depiction of the human condition in an unvarnished and truthful manner. However, it is important to note that realism itself is not a monolithic or homogeneous movement, as it encompasses various subgenres and approaches across different time periods and cultural contexts. Realism can be seen as a reaction against the idealism and romanticism that dominated earlier literary movements. It sought to move away from the fantastical and exaggerated elements of romantic literature and instead focused on portraying the world as it truly is, with all its complexities, flaws, and mundane aspects. Realist writers aimed to present a more accurate representation of society and human experiences, often delving into the harsh realities of life, social issues, and the struggles faced by individuals. One of the key characteristics of realism is its emphasis on detailed and meticulous observation of the external world. Realist authors sought to provide vivid descriptions of settings, characters, and events, relying on careful observation and research to create a sense of authenticity. By incorporating precise and specific details, realist writers aimed to immerse readers in the world they depicted, allowing them to connect with the story and its characters on a deeper level. Realism also placed a strong emphasis on the portrayal of believable and relatable characters. Instead of idealized or exaggerated figures, realist writers created characters who were ordinary, flawed, and representative of the diverse range of individuals in society. These characters often faced everyday challenges and dilemmas, allowing readers to see themselves reflected in the literature and enabling a deeper understanding of the human condition.



³The realistic movement in America emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and experienced significant influence from the Civil War towards the end of the nineteenth century. This artistic and literary movement sought to depict reality in a truthful and accurate manner, focusing on ordinary people, everyday life, and the social and political realities of the time. The roots of American realism can be traced back to the mid-1800s when writers and artists began to reject the romanticized and idealized portrayals of the world that were prevalent in literature and art. They sought to represent life as it truly was, reflecting the complexities and hardships of society. However, it was the aftermath of the Civil War (1861-1865) that had a profound impact on the development of the realistic movement. The war brought about immense social and economic changes, leaving a lasting impact on American society. These changes, along with the nation's collective trauma, created a fertile ground for artists and writers to explore themes such as the effects of war, racial tensions, industrialization, urbanization, and the struggles of ordinary people. In literature, authors like Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James emerged as prominent figures of American realism. Their works delved into the realities of post-war America, presenting nuanced characters and complex social issues. Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1884), for instance, tackled racial inequality and the moral contradictions of society through the eyes of a young protagonist. Howells' novels, such as "The Rise of Silas Lapham" (1885), examined the effects of industrialization and capitalism on individuals and communities. Realism also found expression in the visual arts. Painters like Thomas Eakins and Winslow Homer captured scenes of everyday life, portraying ordinary people in their natural environments. Eakins' "The Gross Clinic" (1875) depicted a surgical operation in a realistic and unidealized manner, challenging traditional notions of beauty in art.

During the American Realistic period, which spanned from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, a group of writers emerged who sought to depict everyday life and the complexities of human experience in a truthful and unembellished manner. In addition to the authors mentioned in the initial paragraph, several other prominent writers contributed significantly to this literary movement, further defining its major

³ Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1957.



features. ⁴**Henry James:** An influential figure in American Realism, Henry James delved deeply into the psychological complexities of his characters and explored the clash of European and American cultures. Works like "The Portrait of a Lady," "The Ambassadors," and "The Wings of the Dove" exemplify his masterful use of intricate character studies and exploration of social mores.

Stephen Crane: Known for his vivid portrayal of the Civil War, Stephen Crane's novel "The Red Badge of Courage" captured the fear, chaos, and heroism experienced by soldiers during the conflict. His realistic depiction of battle and the inner turmoil of the protagonist set a new standard for war literature.

Frank Norris: Considered one of the pioneers of naturalism, Frank Norris focused on the deterministic forces shaping human lives. His novel "McTeague" is a prime example, revealing how environmental influences can lead to tragic outcomes for the characters.

Upton Sinclair: Though primarily known for his exposé on the meatpacking industry, "The Jungle," Sinclair's work also embodies the tenets of American Realism. He sought to shed light on social injustices and reveal the harsh realities of working-class life in industrial America.

Conclusion: to conclude we can witness the specific peculiarities of the American realistic literature. There were lots of writers who wanted to reflect the real, unfaithful everyday events to the readers. That's why the writers of this period escaped and stand against the true love or ideal life of the people of their society. The American realist writers mostly relied on their regional knowledge because they always observed and lived with their characters of works. What they have seen in their society they depict it to their books.

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⁴ James Davidson and Mark Lytle, "The Mirror with a Memory," *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).



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