

INTRODUCTION TO UNITS 4, 5 & 6

HERMAN MELVILLE, AMBROSE BIERCE & STEPHEN CRANE

I. TRANSFORMATION OF A NATION

America west of Appalachians and Alleghenies peopled & exploited.

Americans, to Pacific coast, displacing Indians and Spanish settlements.

Herds of buffalo --> cattle, sheep, farms, villages, and cities.

Technology = natural resources --> industrial products.

From rural, agrarian, isolated republic (idealistic, confident, and self-reliant)

that believed in God --> to World War I: world power, industrialized,

urbanized, continental nation (Darwin's theory of evolution) & profound social & cultural changes in institutions & values.

Technological development: transcontinental railroad, 1869; industrial output & agricultural productivity increased, electricity, new communication (phone).

End of XIX century: imperialist expansion.

Industrialization: manufacturing centers (Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago). (Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller). -->

America's cities grew --> incalculable suffering: independent farmers "under the lion's paw" of land speculators and absentee landlords + danger & discomfort for men, women, and children for scarce jobs.

No labor organization till 1880s. Legislators served interests of business and industry + scandals of Grant's administration --> "Molly Maguires", terrorism in Pennsylvania, labor organizations "illegal conspiracies" & public enemies.

Development of national literature of variety & "literature of argument": sociology, philosophy, psychology.

Translation of leading European figures(Tolstoy, Ibsen, Chekhov, Zola, Galdós). (*Harper's Weekly & Harper's Monthly, North American Review*)
Writers earn money, fame & change the world.

II. LOCAL COLOR, REALISM AND NATURALISM

1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species & Descent of Man*, 1870.

--> Émile Zola (*The Experimental Novel*)

Many American writers pessimistic form of realism --> fertile ground for naturalistic ideas and realistic literary technique.

II.1. LOCAL COLOR (REGIONAL WRITING)

Desire to preserve distinctive ways of life before industrialization & avoid harsh realities ---> "local colorist" (Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp*).

Before Civil War --> Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), bucolic landscape; Harriet Beecher Stowe *Old Town Folks*, 1869, novel, *Pearl of Orr's Island*, 1862.

II.2. REALISM AS ARGUMENT

Description, analysis & critique of social, economic, and political institutions & unsolved social problems consequence of rapid growth and change of times.

Women's rights, political corruption, economic inequity, business deceptions, exploitation labor.(Adam's *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918).

"Negro problem".(Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 1900, essay on Washington, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, W. E. B. DuBois).

Shocked recognition of human consequences of radical transformations -->

(a) shock is expressed in recoil and denial: nostalgic poetry, sentimental and melodramatic drama, and swashbuckling historical novels;

(b) come to terms with individual and collective dislocations and discontinuities (closing out frontier, urbanization, secularism, immigration, surge of national wealth unequally distributed, revised conceptions of human nature and destiny, reordering of family and civil life, & pervasive spread of mechanical and organizational technologies).

II.3. REALISM AS LITERARY TECHNIQUE

Balzac, Flaubert & Zola in France + Turgenev & Chekhov in Russia <-->

idealized vision of Romanticism (Poe, Hawthorne & Melville + sentimental escapists & ideal/transcendent -mystery, terror, ideality & sublimity)

Empirical Darwinism --> positivistic factualism (careful observation & depiction of outer world + concern with mundane lives of common people + concentration of modern & regional + dramatic presentation that distanced author from scene of work + mimetic dialogue + transparent narrative style

American = Hamlin Garland, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Henry James, John W. De Forest, Harold Frederic, Bret Harte & Sarah Orne Jewett
Crane = early: "Later I discovered that my creed was identical with the one of Howells and Garland and in this way I became involved in the beautiful war between those who say that art is man's substitute for nature and we are the most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth, and those who say -well, I don't know what they say" -> uneasily a realist

Characters seldom common men + rarely ordinary experiences

Pervasive irony + symbolistic techniques + narrative ambiguities & deterministic/nihilistic view of natural/social universe => fiction beyond Realism

II.4. NATURALISM

[William Dean Howells = leading American exponent + Realism stressed "the truthful treatment of material" with focus on commonplace & objective view of human experience (-> objectivity)]

Naturalists = emphasized aberrant/abnormal + violence/passion & excessive
The Experimental Novel (1880), Zola => free will & moral = illusions

+ novelist to place characters in well-defined, adverse, social circumstances & observe effects of hereditary/social contingencies on behavior (scientist)

US = Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser & John Dos Passos, Richard Wright, James T. Farrell & John Steinbeck ==> own distinctive artistic methods & individual philosophical approaches

Henry Fleming (*The Red Badge of Courage*) & correspondent ("The Open Boat") survive = develop mental & physical resources to comprehend/struggle

Crane far from doctrinaire pessimistic determinist --> individual struggle to acquire internal capabilities (sense of selfhood for survival in chaotic world)

Style = impressionistic technique + ironic tone + symbolism ==> indeterminacy

III. IMPRESSIONISM

-- static, preconceived reproduction of reality (painting) <--> + immediate & fluctuating sensory impression of light & color on eye

Impressionist = experience as subjective & fleeting deposit of moment

Eye cannot rest on two things simultaneously ==> detailed treatment of only specific portion of scene (<--> foreground/background filled with shadow or confused color = shadow)

H. James, F. Madox F., J. Conrad: (*The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, 1897): "All art...appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses"

Crane exposed to literary aesthetics of Hamlin Garland: impressionistic stress on individual sense experience = "veritism" (impr.) --> Crane's early writing --

> *Maggie* = series of short, dramatic episodes + incidents filtered through limited p.o.v. of characters & distorted sense impressions of flux of reality

"The Open Boat" = painterly scenes + terse dialogue + detached narrator (ironic perspective juxtaposed to fearful preoccupation of men in dinghy)

Objective narrator <--> apprehensive, fearful characters (subjective) + episodic structure + fragmented dialogue = "The Blue Hotel"/"Death and the Child"

Crane as war correspondent ==> away from Impressionism --> pictorially conceived, disconnected structure --> sustained chronological narrative

Later war stories = + ascertaining nature of reality <--> -- perceiving it ==> resemble newspaper dispatches = -- intense & careful executed than *Badge*