Realism and Naturalism (America)

By: Kristina Green and Maddie Oberle
Historical

- 1880-1940
- Civil War sparked the beginning
- Immigration
- Industrialization
- Theodore Roosevelt
- World War I
- World War II
Philosophical

- Realism exists independently of whether or not they are being perceived
- Philosophers: realist and non-realist
- Naturalism identified underlying causes of one’s actions or beliefs
Philosophical

- Big thinkers
  - Political
    - Thomas Hobbes and Hans Morgenthau
  - Secular
    - Thales
    - Protagoras
    - Epicurus
  - Religious
    - Henry David Thoreau, Samuel Alexander, Santayana, Dewey, Mordecai Kaplan, Ralph Burhoe, Wieman, Meland, and Bernard Loomer
Scientific Contributions

Darwinism
Fate
~Heredity
~Social Conditions
Scientific Gains in Genetics
Technological

Transcontinental Railroad
Telephone, Telegraph, and Electricity
Industrial Revolution
~Poor Working Conditions
~Low Wages
Monopolies
~Small Group with Wealth and Power
Farming
Literature- The Type

Antiromantic
Prose Fiction
Some Poetry
Roots in Journalism
Literature- The Style (Realism)

Lives of Poor or Morality of Wealthy
True Representation of the Lives of Americans
Subjects May Not Have Been Pleasant
Sad, Depressing, Life Altering
Reality
Adaptation from Realism
More Emphasis on Inability to Control Future
Environment Plays Large Role in Course of Story- Specifically Social Environment
Plot Structure is Secondary to Characterization
Emilie Zola- “The most important figure in the development of literary naturalism”
Stephan Crane- Maggie, a Girl of The Streets (1893)
Mark Twain- Pudd’nhead Wilson (1894)
Theodore Dreiser- An American Tragedy (1925)
Maggie, a Girl of The Streets (1893)

~Maggie grows up in poverty with abusive alcoholics for parents
~Siblings and Everyone Else Follows Same Fate
~Maggie Has Relations with a Wealthy Man
~Thinks He is a Way Out
~In the End He Leaves Her and She Has No Family to Return to
Literature - Theodore Dreiser

An American Tragedy (1925)

~Clyde Griffiths- Impoverished Son of Street Missionaries
~Aspires for Better Life
~Works as Bellhop and Enjoys Lavish Life
~Involved in Accident Which Kills Girl (Must Flee)
~New Opportunity in Wealthy Uncle's Factory
~Gets Poor Girl Pregnant (Roberta)
~Wants to Marry Upper Class Woman (Sondra)
~Roberta Threatens to Reveal Pregnancy
~Clyde Kills Roberta and is Sentenced to Death
More simply, we might ask ourselves: Why do we take pleasure in imitations and reproductions of the things of our world? Why do we from childhood on like to play with toys that reproduce in miniature the objects amid which we live? The pleasure that human beings take in scale models of the real—dollhouses, ships in bottles, lead soldiers, model railroads—must have something to do with the sense these provide of being able to play with and therefore to master the real world. The scale model—the modèle réduit, as the French call it—allows us to get both our fingers and our minds around objects otherwise alien and imposing. Models give us a way to bind and organize the complex and at times overwhelming energies of the world outside us. Freud suggests that the infant’s play with a spool on a string—thrown out of its crib and pulled back—presents a basic scenario in mastering reality through play. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss speculates that the hobbyist’s building of the scale model figures intellectual process in general, a way to understand through making. And Friedrich von Schiller long ago argued that art is the product of a human instinct for play, the Spieltrieb, by which we create our zone of apparent freedom in a world otherwise constricted by laws and necessities.”
"Merry Christmas, Marmee! Many of them! Thank you for our books. We read some, and mean to every day," they all cried in chorus. "Merry Christmas, little daughters! I'm glad you began at once, and hope you will keep on. But I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a little newborn baby. Six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there, and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?"

They were all unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour, and for a minute no one spoke, only a minute, for Jo exclaimed impetuously, "I'm so glad you came before we began!"

*The excerpt shows the harsh reality of the time.

*Realism
Excerpt on Naturalism

To Build a Fire- Jack London

"But all this – the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all – made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a 'chechaquo', and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head."

*Weather being superior to man is a common concept in naturalism.
*Weather is something which cannot be overcome or controlled much like a person’s fate.
“Books are the weapons in the battle of ideas.” These were the words spoken by William Warder Norton, who created his firm 90 years ago. The three-person company he once ran from his living room is now the oldest and largest publishing house owned entirely by its employees. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. has, over the past 90 years, continually expanded its publishing program, entering such fields as philosophy. In 1940, Norton broadened its history texts, including those specific to the Realism era.

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The Literature Network offers searchable online literature for students, educators, and enthusiasts, including thousands of books, poems, and quotes from over 260 authors. One section references periods and movements, including the Realist and Naturalist literary periods. Each page describes the ideas, leaders and critics of the movement.