*Hon 11: Notes-* Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism

Romanticism

**Romanticism 1830-1865:** Romanticism is more concerned with emotion than rationality. It values the individual over society, nature over city. It questions or attacks rules, conventions and social protocol. It sees humanity living IN nature as morally superior to civilized humanity: glorification of the "noble savage." It conceives of children, essentially innocent by nature, as being corrupted by their surroundings. Although romanticism tends at times to regard nature as alien, it more often sees in nature a revelation of Truth, the "living garment of God," and a more suitable subject for art than those aspects of the world sullied by artifice (ruined by man-made things) . Romanticism seeks to find the Absolute, the Ideal, by transcending the actual, whereas realism finds its values in the actual and naturalism in the scientific laws the undergird the actual.

Many works emphasize the emotional aspects excessively, moving the piece toward Dark Romanticism and the [Gothic](http://www.luc.edu/faculty/cschei1/teach/rrn4.html#gothic). Romantic literature places an emphasis on the individual and on the expression of personal emotions. Literary Romanticism should not be confused with [romance literature](http://www.luc.edu/faculty/cschei1/teach/rrn4.html#romance). Romanticism was evident not only in literature, but also in [art](http://www.zeroland.co.nz/romantic_art.html), [music](http://www.uh.edu/engines/romanticism/music.html) and [architecture](http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/findaid/Suydam/rarchitecture1.html).

**The American Period of Romanticism** **(1830-1865)** was "an age of great westward expansion, of the increasing gravity of the slavery questions, of an intensification of the spirit of embattled sectionalism in the South, and of a powerful impulse to reform in the North" (Harman 454).

**Conditions that influenced American Romanticism:**

Frontier promised opportunity for expansion, growth, freedom; Europe lacked this element.  
Spirit of optimism invoked by the promise of an uncharted frontier.   
Immigration brought new cultures and perspectives  
Growth of industry in the north that further polarized the north and the agrarian south.  
Search for new spiritual roots.

**Literary Themes:**  
Highly imaginative and subjective  
Emotional intensity  
Escapism  
Common man as hero  
Nature as refuge, source of knowledge and/or spirituality

**Characteristics:**

* Characters and setting set apart from society; characters were not of our own conscious kind
* Static characters--no development shown
* Characterization--work proves the characters are what the narrator has stated or shown
* Universe is mysterious; irrational; incomprehensible
* Formal language
* Good receive justice; nature can also punish or reward
* Silences of the text--universals rather than learned truths
* Plot arranged around crisis moments
* Plot demonstrates
  + romantic love
  + honor and integrity
  + idealism of self
* Supernatural foreshadowing (dreams, visions)
* Description provides a "feeling" of the scene

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| **American Romanticists:** |  |
| James Fenimore Cooper  Emily Dickinson  Frederick Douglass Ralph Waldo Emerson  Margaret Fuller  Nathaniel Hawthorne  **Washington Irving** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  Herman Melville  **Edgar Allen Poe**  Henry David Thoreau  Walt Whitman |  |

Realism

**Realism 1861- 1914 (American Realism 1865-1890):**An artistic movement begun in 19th century France. Artists and writers strove for detailed realistic and factual description. They tried to represent events and social conditions as they actually are, without idealization.

This form of literature believes in fidelity to actuality in its representation. Realism is about recreating life in literature. Realism focuses on the immediate, the here and now, the specific actions and their verifiable consequences. Realism seeks a one-to-one relationship between representation and the subject. Realists are concerned with the effect of the work on their reader and the reader's life, a pragmatic view. Pragmatism requires the reading of a work to have some verifiable outcome for the reader that will lead to a better life for the reader. This lends an ethical tendency to Realism while focusing on common actions and minor catastrophes of middle class society.

Realism aims to interpret the actualities of any aspect of life, free from subjective prejudice, idealism, or romantic color. It is in direct opposition to concerns of the unusual, the basis of Romanticism. Stresses the real over the fantastic. Seeks to treat the commonplace truthfully and used characters from everyday life. This emphasis was brought on by societal changes such as the aftermath of the Civil War in the United States and the emergence of Darwin's Theory of Evolution and its effect upon biblical interpretation.

**Characteristics:**

* Emphasis on psychological, optimistic tone, details, pragmatic, practical, slow-moving plot
* Rounded, dynamic characters who serve purpose in plot
* World as it is created in novel impinges upon characters. Characters dictate plot; ending usually open.
* Time marches inevitably on; small things build up. Climax is not a crisis, but just one more unimportant fact.
* Realists--show us rather than tell us
* Events make story plausible
* Insistence on experience of the commonplace
* Emphasis on morality, usually intrinsic, relativistic between people and society
* Scenic representation important
* Humans are in control of their own destiny and are superior to their circumstances

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| **American Realists:** |  |
| **Kate Chopin**  Henry James  Rebecca Harding Davis  Sarah Orne Jewett **Mark Twain**  William Dean Howells Ambrose Bierce |  |

Naturalism

**Naturalism (1890 - 1915):** The term Naturalism describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Unlike, Realism which focuses on literary technique, naturalism implies a philosophical position: for naturalistic writers, since human beings are, in Emile Zola's phrase, "human beasts," characters can be studied through their relationships to their surroundings. The Naturalist believed in studying human beings as though they were "products" that are to be studied impartially, without moralizing about their natures.

Naturalistic writers believed that the laws of behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood through the objective study of human beings. Naturalistic writers used a version of the scientific method to write their novels; they studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. This is a logical extension of Realism. The term was invented by Emile Zola partially because he was seeking for a striking platform from which to convince the reading public that it was getting something new and modern in his fiction. Naturalism is considered as a movement to be beyond Realism. Naturalism is based more on scientific studies. Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a basis for the Naturalist writer. Natural selection and survival of the fittest help to depict the struggle against nature as a hopeless fight.

**Characteristics:**

* Objective
* Darwinistic--survival of the fittest
* Detached method of narration
* Language--formal; piling on of images ("wretched excess")
* Human beings unable to stand up against enormous weight of circumstances.
* Deterministic--natural and socioeconomic forces stronger than man.
* Heredity determines character
* Violence--force against force
* Taboo topics
* Animal imagery
* Attention to setting to the point of saturation
* Characters--lower socioeconomic class
* Static characters
* Naturalists observe, then write. Often about the black, darker side of life.
* "Pessimistic materialistic determinism" (Pizer)
* Characters conditioned or controlled by environment, heredity, instinct or chance but they have a compensating humanistic value that affirms the significance of the individual (Pizer).
* Characters do not have free will (determinism)

**Themes:**

* "The conflict in naturalistic novels is often 'man against nature' or 'man against himself' as characters struggle to retain a 'veneer of civilization' despite external pressures that threaten to release the 'brute within' " (Campbell).
* Nature is indifferent to man
* The universe is deterministic

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| **American Naturalists:** |  |
| **Jack London**  Frank Norris  Stephen Crane Theodore Dreiser Edith Wharton Ellen Glasgow **John Steinbeck** Richard Wright |  |

Source: Loyola University, Chicago. <http://www.luc.edu/faculty/cschei1/teach/rrn3.html>