

## Lecture Notes (Age of Realism/Huck Finn)

### *Historical Context*

1835-1845—setting of Huck Finn

1863—Emancipation Proclamation

1865—Civil War Ended (see literary context I below)

1885—Huck Finn published (American edition)

End of 19<sup>th</sup> Century—Industrial Revolution

\*\*people left rural homes for opportunities in urban cities

\*\*U.S. economy more focused on factory production (not farming and agriculture) [see literary context II below]

### *Literary Context*

- I. Period of Upheaval (literary civil war)
  - A. Writers used character and plot development to state his/her philosophy about how much control mankind had over his own destiny:
    1. Emerson—celebrated the ability of the human will to triumph over adversity (individual as a god)
    2. Twain—humanity’s freedom of choice was limited by the power of outside forces (individual as a person)
- II. Concentration of Writing
  - A. Realists concentrated on writing of select groups:
    1. factory workers
    2. stories of black life
    3. views of marriage and women’s roles\*\* “Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material” (William Dean Howells)
  - B. Writing Became Regional
    1. people feared loss of local folkways and traditions
    2. Realists set stories in specific regions (to capture the “local color”)
      - a. showed the breakdown of traditional values
      - b. plight of the urban poor
      - c. included regional dialects/extensive dialogue
      - d. plot built around ordinary lives\*\*Readers were attracted because they saw their lives in print  
\*\*Writing communicated the complexity of the human experience  
\*\*Demonstrated the lack of patience with allegory and high symbolism and slow paced narratives seen in Romantic writing (this parallels the historical changes, i.e., the modern scientific revolution /industrial revolution

- III. Basic Tenets of Realism and Literary Genre—see online notes
- A. Plot and Character
  - B. Structure of Prose
  - C. Other Important Aspects

***Comparison/Realism Vs. Romance Tradition***

**Romance:**

- Renders reality in less volume and detail
- Tends to prefer action to character (characters may be two-dimensional or stock characters)
- Characterization tends to be more abstract and ideal than complex and three-dimensional
- Melodramatic, sensational and dramatic elements
- Astonishing events may occur, and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological connotation, rather than a realistic or plausible one
- Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality, the romance will veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms of meaning

**Realism:**

- Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail
- Tends to prefer character over action and plot
- Characterization appears in real complexity of temperament and motive; complex ethical choices are often the subject
- Pragmatic—purpose of writing is to instruct and entertain
- Events will usually be plausible
- The use of symbolism is controlled and limited; the realists depend more on the use of images
- Diction is in the natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comical satirical, or use matter-of-fact
- Realism has specific social, political, and artistic characteristics that set it apart from other genres (Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*)