

# Realism 1865 ~ 1900

In America, an important movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century comprised of literature that attempts to depict life in an entirely objective manner.



# Core beliefs of Realism

- Realism was a direct reaction to the horrors of Civil War-
- Realists felt that literature should reflect life as it really is- no romantic notions, but a true depiction of the horrors as well as the triumphs of individuals in adversity
- Narration should be straight-forward
- Characters should be REAL



# Realism- characteristics

- rich in physical detail (imagery)
  - use of complex symbolism is limited
- ordinary characters
  - *acting on* their environment rather than simply *reacting to* it
- objective point of view-  
(less obtrusion by author)



# Content of Realist works

- original subject matter:
  - Human rights vs. legal rights, poverty, Civil War, big city corruption, misery
- prose characteristics:
  - natural diction, not heightened or poetic; tone is more matter-of-fact



# Realism offshoots

## Naturalism

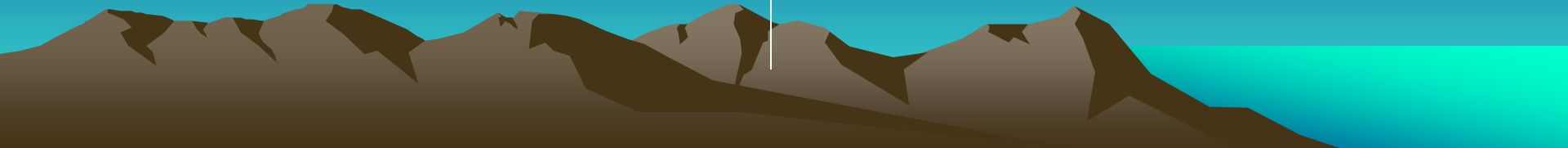
### Characters:

- often feel trapped and isolated
- have no control
- are often poor & pitiful, and reflect Social Darwinism
- Stories typically do not have happy endings

## Regionalism

realistically reflected the culture and dialects of the authors' native region:

- Yankees
- Southerners
- `Cadians (Creole)



# Realism offshoots

## Frontier Humor

### Characters:

- Perceived as morally flawed, and yet possess great redeeming qualities

## Midwestern realism

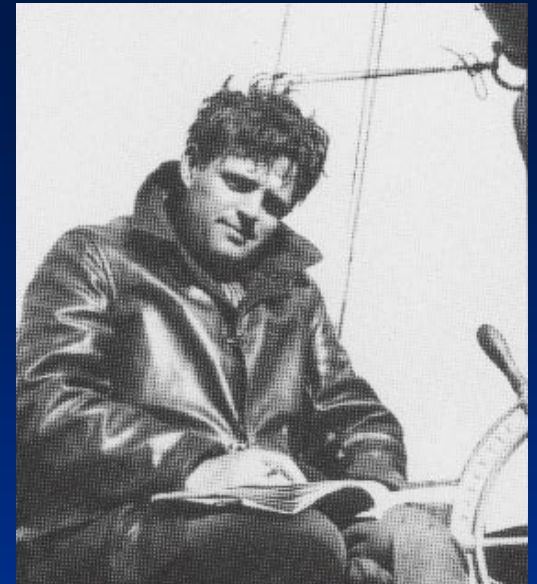
### Stories:

- Often deal with disparity between social classes



# Jack London

## 1876- 1916

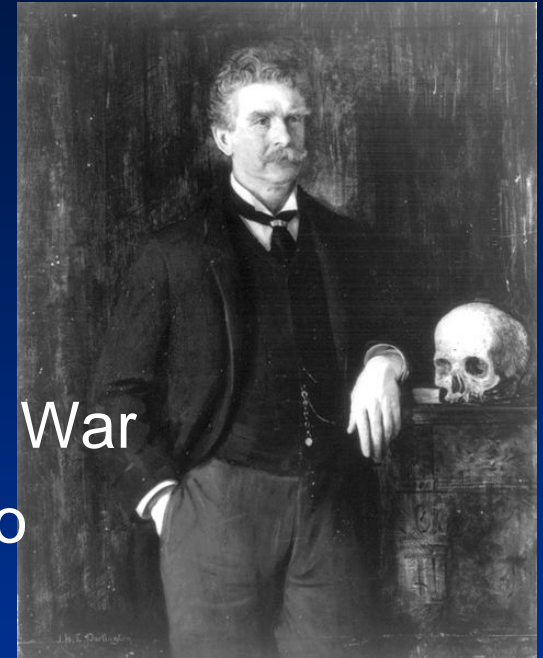


- Born into poverty
- Attended UC Berkeley- but dropped out due to financial reasons in 1897
- Spent winter in Yukon during Klondike Rush- 1897; develops scurvy and returns home
- Spends 1902 in East End of London, documenting hardships of the poor, living as a vagrant
- Socialist, though a believer in rugged individualism
- “The function of man is to live, not to simply exist.”
- Dies a rich, obese alcoholic

# Ambrose Bierce

## 1842-1913

- Worked as a topographical engineer, making maps of battlefields in Civil War
- Worked as a journalist in San Francisco
- Was a harsh literary critic, earning the name “Bitter Bierce”
- Mysteriously disappeared while covering revolutionary Mexico
- Wrote anonymous poem foreshadowing the McKinley assassination

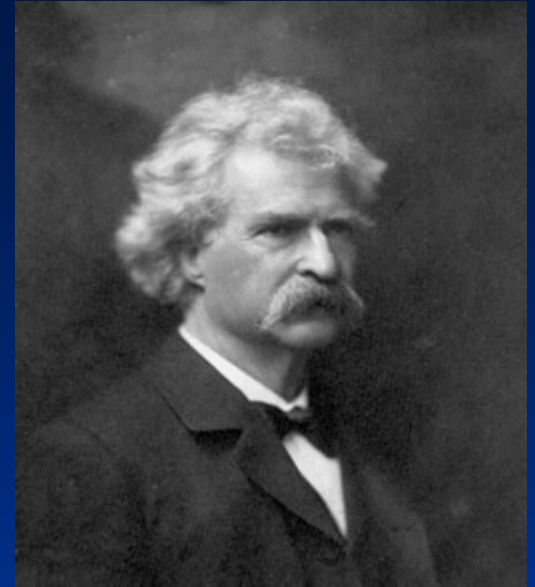


"The bullet that pierced Goebel's breast  
Can not be found in all the West;  
Good reason, it is speeding here  
To stretch McKinley on his bier."



# Mark Twain

## 1835 - 1910



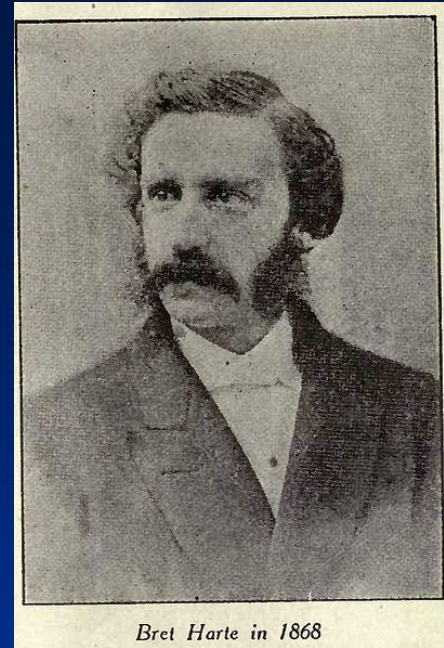
“I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year (1910), and I expect to go out with it.”

- Birth name: Samuel L. Clemens
- Earned a steamboat license in 1859- pen name derived from process of gauging river depth- “two fathoms deep”
- Childhood pranks were inspirations for characters like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn
- Spent time in the West documenting the Gold Rush for *Saturday Evening Post*
- Known for his witticisms on society- like:  
    “Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself”  
    ...and...  
    “Don't let schooling interfere with your education.”

# Bret Harte

## 1836-1902

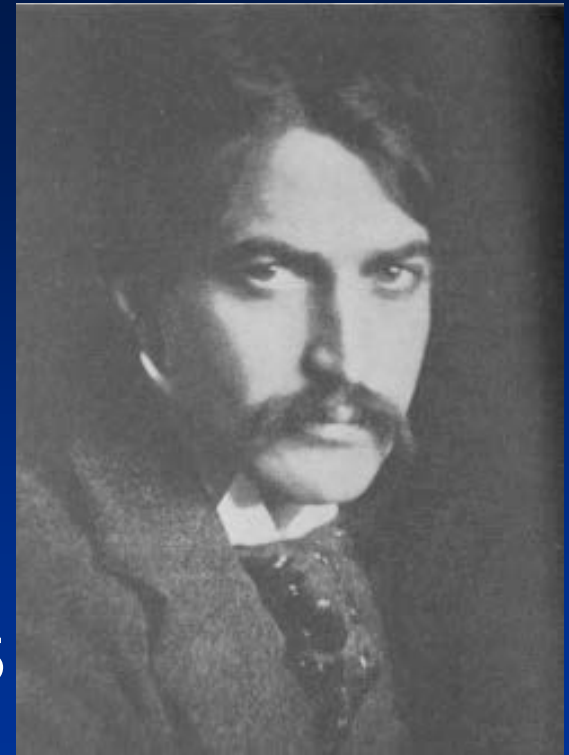
- Born in Albany, NY
- An avid reader as a boy, published a satirical poem at age 11
- Moved to CA, and worked various jobs: miner, messenger, teacher, journalist
- Covered 1860 massacre of Wiyot tribesmen; his life was threatened and he moved to S.F.
- Was both scathing critic and fond admirer of Mark Twain



# Stephen Crane

## (1871 – 1900)

- Wrote stories at 8; articles for NY Tribune at 16
- Lived among poor in Bowery slums researching his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*
- Published *Red Badge of Courage* 1895
- Worked as war correspondent in Cuba
- His impressionistic poetry was a great inspiration for modern poets, and his fiction inspired many Modernists, notably Ernest Hemingway



# Kate Chopin

## (1850-1904)

- Of Irish and French Canadian descent
- Resided in New Orleans as well as other locales in Louisiana
- Mother and grandmother were widowed at early age, she herself was widowed at 33, and great- grandmother had first legal separation in St. Louis ; she writes about independent women
- *The Awakening* 1899

