

# Roaring twenties

# Regional realism

- Regional realism or local colourism
- Diversity of the country after the Civil War
- The population became conscious of their local colour and characteristics; growing national identity
- A tone of nostalgia
- Written as realistically as possible; were identified by its scrupulously factual, realistic technique

# Francis Bret Harte (1836-1902)



- an American author and poet, best remembered for his accounts of pioneering life in California

# Francis Bret Harte

- Parody to the European sentimentalism – the search of a new way to depict reality
- Bret Harte was making fun of the French sentimentalism – developed his gift for satire
- 1864 – Secretary of the California Mint
- 1868 – an editor of *The Overland Monthly*

# Francis Bret Harte

- 1868 - *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, propelled Harte to nationwide fame
- unconventional way of depicting reality
- Bourgeois critics: the story was “indecent, irreligious, and improper”
- The first literary interpreter of life in the West with its striking contrasts of situations and characters

# Francis Bret Harte

- 1870 - *Dickens in Camp* - considered as his masterpiece of verse, for its evident sincerity, the depth of feeling it displays, and the unusual quality of its poetic expression
- Typical character – an outsider thrown out of society but showing a true unselfish character

# Francis Bret Harte

- Works are outwardly realistic, but presenting a bit romantic version of the gun-slinging West
- First to introduce low-life characters
- Readers were fascinated by melodramatic descriptions of the hard and violent life on the frontier.

# Francis Bret Harte

- His realism was limited: he didn't try to solve social problems, he merely colorfully depicted what he saw.
- He didn't accept the bourgeois ideas of morals; shared humanitarian moral values
- Saw the tragedy both in the gold-fields life and in ridiculous violent conflicts over petty trifles



# Local colorists

- Social protest, esp. towards the end of the century
- Racial injustice, inequality between sexes:
- **George Washington Cable** (1844-1925), *The Grandissimes* (1880)
- **Kate Chopin** (1851-1904), *The Awakening*
- **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** (1860-1935), *The Yellow Wallpaper*

# Psychological Realism

- **Henry James** – American life in the Gilded Age was not worthy as a subject of literature
- Literary art “makes life, makes interest, makes importance”
- “international theme” – complex relations between naïve Americans and cosmopolitan Europeans
- the psychological problems of upper-class people in a realistic way

# Henry James



- *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875)
- *The American* (1877)
- *Daisy Miller* (1879)
- *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) – the drama is not created by the heroine's actions, but by the thoughts in her mind

# Henry James

- Second period – experimental; new ideas – feminism, social and political reform:
- The Princess Casamassima (1885)
- The Bostonians (1886)
- Third period – international subjects, but treated with increasing sophistication and psychological insight
- The Wings of the Dove(1902); The Ambassador (1903); The Golden Bowl (1904)

# Henry James

- The Turn of the Screw – an enigmatic ghost story, intricate style and surgically precise analysis of character
- The story is fascinatingly ambiguous
- The ambiguity is created through the use of a limited point of view
- It's up to the reader to decide whether or not he may trust the main character's account of events

# Edith Wharton

- Social transformation: the decline of the cultivated group of the society and the rise of boorish nouveau-riche business families
- Contrasts Americans and Europeans
- The core of her concern – the gulf separating social reality and the inner self
- A sensitive character feels trapped by unfeeling characters or social forces

# Edith Wharton

- The House of Mirth (1905)
- The Custom of the Country (1913)
- Summer (1917)
- **The Age of Innocence** (1920)
- novella Ethan Frome (1911)

# Naturalism and Muckraking

- Explicitly used realism to relate the individual to society
- Is essentially a literary expression of philosophical doctrine of determinism
- Denied religion as a motivating force in the world and perceived the universe as a blind, uncontrolled machine
- Naturalism opened up underside of society and the topics of divorce, adultery, poverty and crime



# Literary Naturalism

- Naturalism was opposed to romanticism (symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment of subjects). Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter.
- Naturalistic works were often very pessimistic and frequently criticized for being too blunt.

# American Naturalism

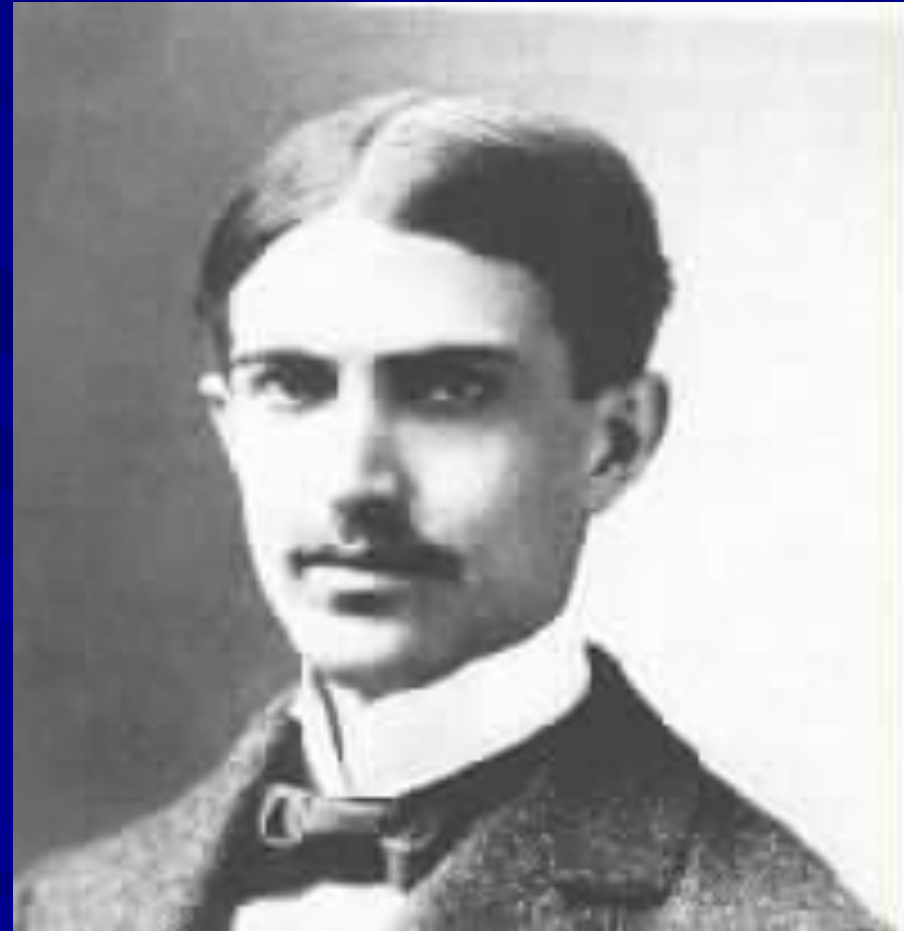
- American naturalists, especially Norris and London, were heavily influenced by Zola.
- Naturalists did not form a coherent literary movement, their occasional critical and theoretical reflections do not present a uniform philosophy.
- American naturalism - a reaction against the realist fiction of the 1870s and 1880s, whose scope was limited to middle-class or “local color” topics, with taboos on sexuality and violence

# American Naturalism

- A disadvantage of naturalism: the writing is fragments of a picture with a great number of details. The naturalists gave only an impression, lacking analysis
- Russian realism (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov) with its humanism had a much greater influence of American writers

# Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

- Writer and poet
- *Maggie: A Girl Of The Streets* (1893) - a milestone in the development of literary naturalism
- *The Red Badge Of Courage* (1895) - the first modern war novel



# Maggie: A Girl Of The Streets

- One of the best and the earliest naturalistic American novels
- The harrowing story of a violent life of a poor, sensitive girl
- Earthy subject matter, objective, scientific style, devoid of moralizing

# Stephen Crane

- *The Black Rider* (1895), a collection of poems, brought Crane better reporting assignments
- *The Open Boat*, is based on a true experience, when his ship sank on the journey to Cuba in 1896.

# Frank Norris (1870-1902)

- an American novelist during the Progressive Era, the US first important naturalist writer



# Frank Norris

- Notable works: **Mc Teague** (1899);
- **The Octopus: A California Story** (1901);
- **The Pit** (1903).
- Didn't support socialism as a political system, but a socialist mentality and influenced progressive writers such as Upton Sinclair.
- was influenced by Darwinism



# Jack London (1876-1916)

- Socialist; described conditions under capitalism and wanted to change them
- London's socialism had very strong naturalist elements (surviving of the fittest and the ideal of a "superman")
- Primitive struggle of strong and weak individuals against the background of natural forces

# Jack London

- The Son of the Wolf (1900)
- The Call of the Wild (1903)
- The Sea-Wolf (1904)
- Martin Eden (1909), an autobiographical novel – the inner stresses of the American dream experienced during the rise from the obscure poverty to wealth and fame
- Martin Eden – an unsuccessful story

# Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945)

- Explores the dangers of the American Dream (An American Tragedy)
- Clyde Griffiths – a boy of weak will and little self-awareness
- Precise details build up an overwhelming sense of tragic inevitability
- Failure of the American dream
- Stresses of urbanization, modernization and alienation

# The Roaring Twenties

- The economy boomed
- A desire to be “emancipated”; Jazz
- Restricted emigration; prohibition
- Wall Street Crash 1929
- Literature – relentless criticism
- Intellectual immigration to Europe (small town provincialism)

# The Roaring Twenties

- The First World War – sale of weapons to the Western Allies – prosperity
- October 1918 – 2 ml Americans were sent to the war
- After the war – policy of isolationism gave rise to a xenophobic feeling across the nation
- 1924 and 1929 – Immigration Quota Laws
- KKK gained widespread support and sought to persecute immigrants and minorities in the early 1920s

# Prohibition



- US government outlawed the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages
- 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act

# Prohibition

- A profitable, often violent, black market for alcohol flourished.
- Racketeering happened when powerful gangs corrupted law enforcement agencies.
- lack of tax revenues on alcohol (some \$500 million annually nationwide) affected government

# Prohibition

- The KKK strongly supported Prohibition and its strict enforcement
- Joseph Kennedy, father of John F. Kennedy, smuggled alcohol from Canada to the U.S. and built a sizable fortune both during and after Prohibition.
- Crime and political corruption became much more common and accepted.
- Urban areas began to hold increasingly liberal views of sex, alcohol, drugs, homosexuality



# Daring 20s



**BOLD AND DARING FOR THE 20s**



**DANCING FLAPPER**



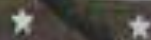
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**HAIR BOBBING**



**WORLD'S HIGHEST STANDARD OF LIVING**



*There's no way  
like the  
American Way*



# Small-town America

- Stupidity and prejudice was condemned
- 1915 – **Edgar Lee Masters** – *Spoon River Anthology*: people are damaged by the narrowness of a small-town life
- 1919 – **Sherwood Anderson** – *Winesburg, Ohio*, collection of short stories; simpler writing style, emphasis on form and a special use of time – a departure from the chronological structure

# Sinclair Lewis