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one of many phenomena of the late nineteenth century that transformed the United States from a country dominated sectionalism in attitude (e.g., New England, South, Midwest, Far West) into a unified nation of the world that would come to consider its regional diversity a vital if mostly secondary trait.The technological advances that followed the Civil War, particularly in the areas of American transportation and communication, also contributed mightily to the emergence of this new, more unified cultural awareness. In 1860, for example, fewer than thirty thousand miles of railroad existed in the United States, and major sections of the country remained essentially unconnected to each other. By May 1869, however, less than a decade later, as the last rail spike was being driven into the line linking the East and the West at Promontory Point, Utah, the number of miles of railroad crisscrossing the United States had almost tripled to nearly ninety thousand. The expansion of the railroads into every corner of the Union of course made travel throughout the country much easier (thus removing a major impediment to personal mobility that would tend to promote a regional—as opposed to a national—sensibility), but it also had the equally important effect of opening up commerce and communication between different geographical regions to a much larger degree.Advances in publishing technology after the Civil War also worked to open contact between sections of the United States. Subscriptions to major newspapers and magazines skyrocketed in the 1870s and 1880s as Americans from all over the country grew hungrier for information from beyond their local borders. Already existing periodicals such as the Atlantic Monthly and Harper's Monthly widened their circulations dramatically in the last few decades of the nineteenth century as telegraph and transportation improvements made it possible for them to reach those more distant readers longing for access to these now more broadly focused national publications. Hoping to capitalize on newly opened markets and the increased readership among the American public, hundreds of new magazines appeared for the first time in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, including Galaxy, Overland Monthly, Scribner's Monthly, and Century Magazine, to name a few of the most prominent.Though late-nineteenth-century improvements in transportation and communication helped to foster a larger, more unified conception of an American culture, these advancements also had a simultaneous and somewhat paradoxical effect on the nation's consciousness. Ironically, as Americans seemed to be dismantling sectional boundaries in the 1870s and 1880s by traveling farther from home and by reading a wider variety of publications from across the United States, they were at the same time made newly aware of regional differences in speech and manners through contact with those people and places beyond their immediate milieus. This rediscovery of regional diversity in the context of a budding national culture would prove to have profound implications for the establishment of an indigenous American voice in literature in the decades following the Civil War.THE RISE OF LITERARY REALISMBy 1870 a new generation of American authors, committed to the tenets of literary realism, had begun to emerge. The realist artistic vision, though expressed in a variety of ways by hundreds of writers in the late nineteenth century, was, at least in principle, relatively uncomplicated: portray people, places, and things as they actually appear in everyday life. Realism as an aesthetic movement was in large part a reaction against the idealizing (if universalizing) tendencies of literary romanticism, which had dominated literary expression in the United States since the early decades of the 1800s. The major novelists of the post-Civil War period, Mark Twain (1835-1910), William Dean Howells (1837-1920), and Henry James (1843-1916), self-avowed realists all, emphasized in their writing a fidelity to actual experience, particularly by focusing on the development of "common" characters confronting complex ethical issues.Although Twain, Howells, and James as well as other American writers produced novels of the highest quality in the final decades of the nineteenth century, none of these works could be said to have truly achieved the status of the Great American Novel insofar as any of them alone represented the fullness of the American cultural experience. In fact, Howells himself famously argued that it would be impossible because of the regional diversity of the country for any one book to capture completely the American experience. American realist writers generally focused on the particular details of the geographical area of the country they knew best, recording the distinctive manners, colloquial speech patterns, and distinguishing traditions of its inhabitants. Of course the ways people talk and behave tend to be sectional in nature. And so the particular brand of realist literature produced by Americans in the late nineteenth century came to be known as regionalism.Indeed, in many ways the last three decades of the nineteenth century constituted an age of regionalism in American literature. Coinciding with the growing interest among Americans in their country's sectional differences, regionalist writing flourished between 1870 and 1900. As the public appetite for stories with regional qualities increased, the proliferation of magazines following the Civil War provided an outlet, particularly for the work of short-fiction writers whose work was distinguished by this quintessentially American brand of late-nineteenth-century literature. In the Far West, authors like Bret Harte and Dan De Quille as well as writers of Nevada's "Sagebrush School," Joseph Goodman and Rollin Daggett, to name just two, wrote accounts of outlaws, roughs, and prospectors. Midwestern writers such as Alice Cary, Joseph Kirkland, and Edward Eggleston chronicled the lives of prairie farmers and small-village folk. George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, and Grace Elizabeth King depicted the unique complexities of postwar life in the South. In New England, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary Wilkins Freeman recorded the peculiar experiences of Yankees and spinsters. Taken together, these and other writers from the period produced a representation of American cultural experience that in both form and content matched the regional diversity of the United States.AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE EARLY AMERICAN ACADEMYAlthough American authors enjoyed popular success among subscribers to national publications in the decades following the Civil War, American literature, generally speaking, had yet to achieve the status of serious art in the minds of those readers. Americans, still harboring lingering feelings of provincial inferiority a century after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, remained wary about maintaining that their own literary past could be ranked with the hallowed traditions of England and Europe. American literature was very young by comparison of course, and most of the reading public—including all but a handful of academic scholars—simply refused to believe that American literature could be as aesthetically elevated as the literature of the Old World. Universities throughout the United States did occasionally offer courses in designated types of American writers in the final decades of the nineteenth century, but for a student to announce an intention to study literature in the late nineteenth century invariably meant that the student would study English literature.The slow growth of an academy curriculum in American literature seems lethargic indeed when contrasted to the maturation of other curricula of academic study in American universities at the time, such as American history. Less than 10 percent of the more than 150 universities in the United States had developed fledgling graduate programs in American literature by 1900, and only four Ph.D.s had emerged in the field. By contrast, scholars of American historical studies could report that nearly nine out of ten history dissertations written in American universities in the 1880s and 1890s dealt with native subjects. Moreover, by the 1890s most universities were offering equal selections of courses in ancient, European, and American history. Even within the relatively few colleges that were teaching American poetry and prose, English and other European literature received vastly more attention.The civic pride generated in the 1870s by the national centennial celebration, along with the emerging post-Civil War conception of the United States as a national culture, helped to begin changing minds, both inside and outside the academy, about the stature of American literature. In the years leading up to the centennial, for example, publishers looking to cash in on enthusiasm for things American readily promoted the work of American writers, prompting many readers to consider for the first time their own authors, past and present. Furthermore, that the nation had reached such a significant milestone enabled many within the intellectual class to entertain seriously, perhaps for the first time, the notion that the United States might possess an aesthetic culture worthy of some consideration. These events clearly would have contributed to the search for and discovery of an American literary tradition.Book-length collections of American literature marketed for the general public in the late nineteenth century also played a crucial role in shifting academic critical attitudes toward American writers. Although these large collections had been popular with American readers since the mid-1800s, colleges only gradually adopted this anthology format in the classroom. But once they did, competition among literature professors to produce an authoritative anthology specifically for use in the college classroom fostered an upsurge of academic interest in American literature. Scholars trace the first true collection of American literature back to John Seely Hart's (1810-1877) Manual of American Literature, published in 1872. Hart is likewise credited with offering, at Princeton, the first college course in American literature at an American university that same year. Hart's collection, like its contemporaries that were intended for a more general readership, was suggestive of a biographical dictionary or encyclopedia supplemented by small excerpts of poems and prose and representing the work of literally hundreds of American authors. Detailed attention to factual data and biography and the absence of historical and interpretive information characterized these first literary collections. But despite such limitations, Hart's anthology became a model for subsequent classroom texts.Attempts by literary scholars to organize into professional associations during the 1880s further promoted the serious treatment of American literature in American college classrooms. In 1883, together with nearly forty language and literature specialists from universities around the country, A. Marshall Elliott founded the Modern Language Association of America, and one year later in 1884 that group published the first volume of the Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, which even in the early twenty-first century remains the flagship journal for academic literary scholarship. Also instrumental at about this same time was a national consciousness of the deaths of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the 1880s and then of James Russell Lowell (1891), John Greenleaf Whittier (1892), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1894), and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1896), which deepened the sense that an era of American literary production had come to a close and could begin to be appraised.Coinciding with the rising interest in American letters in the American academy during the 1880s, the next stage in the development of academic appreciation of American literature grew out of attempts by scholars to apply critical methodology to the study of literature. In November 1878 Moses Coit Tyler (1835-1900) published his renowned two-volume History of American Literature. 1607-1765, a work of great importance for having pioneered the art of literary historiography. Tyler's connective critical approach revolutionized American literature studies, and for at least the next half-century it became the dominant mode in academic literary scholarship. Moving the study of literature beyond mere biography and fact gathering, literary historiographers such as Tyler essentially approached the body of American letters as a portal to the American mind and spirit. According to them, American literature (which in concept at that time also included political and scientific documents) was the written record of the American cultural milieu and as such it reflected and preserved the nation's fundamental characteristics and thought. "There is but one thing more interesting than the intellectual history of a man," declared Tyler in his literary history of colonial America, "and that is the intellectual history of a nation" (1:5). As an archival repository of the American spirit, literature was at best considered only secondarily as a formidable artistic expression. For literary historiography the works of literature themselves became a means for study rather than the subject of study. Literary historians did make small gestures toward demonstrating aesthetic values in the literature, but their commentary (by modern standards) was vague and impressionistic. In spite of these shortcomings, the scholarship of Tyler and other literary historians provided a long-deserved sense of critical legitimacy to American literature.As a result of this progress, editors of classroom anthologies of American literature started adopting literary historiography into their formats. The first notable classroom anthology combining narrative literary history with selections of poetry and prose was Charles F. Richardson's (1851-1913) American Literature, 1607-1885 (1887-1889). Though Richardson's text was divided into two volumes, separating the historical analysis from the actual literature itself, he unified the John Seely Hart-like collection of poetry and prose with the Tyler-like literary history handbook and treated for the first time the entire period of American literature up to his own day.AMERICAN LITERATURE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURYDuring the 1890s a profound and noticeable shift began taking place in American literature. A hallmark feature of post-Civil War American literary realism had been plots that featured characters confronting complex ethical dilemmas. Thus a fundamental assumption that lay behind many realist texts was that the individual possesses the free will to decide between that which is right and wrong, moral and immoral, good and evil. By the end of the century American writers, influenced by the emerging trend in European literature called literary naturalism, were starting to question the broader notion of human freedom as they embraced aspects of scientific determinism, a system of thought that rejected the existence of free will as a way of accounting for everyday human behavior. Conceptions of "determinism" were not completely unknown to Americans of the nineteenth century. For hundreds of years of course numerous interpretations of Christian theology had preached doctrines that denied human agency at most if not all levels of existence. But certain scientific developments in the early and mid-1800s began to assert arguments for more secular varieties of determinism. In 1859 Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published his ground-breaking study On the Origin of Species, and its subsequent effect on Western thinking, particularly in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, is nearly impossible to overstate. His theories of "natural selection" fundamentally undermined an ennobled vision of human life by intimating that human beings might be directly related to lower forms of animals. In addition to challenging centuries of foundational religious thinking, Darwin's hypotheses suggested that human behavior is largely governed by biologically determined forces that are beyond the individual's control. Darwinian evolutionary theory quickly became the basis for any number of pessimistic late-century scientific hypotheses concerning human conduct. Most famously, perhaps, the Englishman Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied Darwin's observations to social models and in the 1870s coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" as he attempted to justify the social and economic inequities of the Gilded Age.Darwin and Spencer as well as other revolutionary scientific thinkers of the nineteenth century incited a new generation of American writers to portray life as a battle in which human beings struggle against forces seemingly bent on their destruction. Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Edith Wharton, and Jack London, to name a few of the most prominent figures, all produced fiction near the turn of the century that emphasized deterministic forces—social, biological, and environmental—exerting control over the lives of their characters. Crane's (1871-1900) Maggie, A Girl of the Streets (1893) is generally considered to be the first significant naturalistic novel by an American, and it showcases many of what would become the movement's hallmark features: a hostile setting, oppressed lower-class characters, images of despair, metaphors drawn from war and savagery, and profoundly tragic themes. The work of American naturalists that followed would likewise depict unflinchingly the bleakness of urban slums, arctic wildernesses, and impoverished rural environments; portray young women driven to prostitution, young men to brutality, and entire families to total annihilation; and explore the complex of overwhelming forces, external and interior, that compelled their characters toward seemingly inevitable fates. In the end, however, the despairing tone of literary naturalism was not without purpose. American naturalist authors generally wrote to transform the world around them, to bring to the attention of readers the effect of deterministic forces in their lives and to propose ways of coping with those forces. By doing so, these writers saw themselves as assisting in the improvement of society as a whole.As turn-of-the-century American writers embraced literary naturalism, the American publishing scene proudly began to promote past American authors in ways that it had not before. Houghton, Mifflin, for example, introduced its Riverside Literature Series in the early 1890s, which featured the poetry and prose of America's most revered literary artists. Each volume in the series featured the work of a single writer, providing the public with affordable collections of American literature and providing American literary art with its long-deserved sense of cultural legitimacy. Sales were extraordinary right from the start, and second editions followed almost immediately. Also very popular among turn-of-the-century readers were illustrated omnibus collections of American literature. Donald G. Mitchell's American Lands and Letters (1897) is typical of the larger compilations of American writings that appealed to the general reader by providing hundreds of selections by multiple authors and large numbers of portraits and other images in a single volume. Additionally, the Atlantic Monthly and other highly respected magazines ran articles throughout the 1890s touting the merits of indigenous writers of the past while calling for a body of work from writers of the future worthy of the greatness of American culture. All said, as the country moved into the new century American literary art seemed finally to be receiving the kind of backing from the American print trade that had been so conspicuously absent in preceding decades.The following is a passage from Stephen Crane's Maggie, A Girl of the Streets (1893), generally considered to be the first significant naturalistic novel by an American.Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags, and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about its bowels.Crane, Maggie, A Girl of the Streets, p. 6.Academic interest in American literary studies was also beginning to accelerate rapidly in the early years of the twentieth century. Forty-two doctoral dissertations, for example, were completed on American literary topics between 1900 and 1920 despite few graduate course offerings on exclusively American topics. To meet this expanding interest in American literature within universities, a number of literary histories and collections of poetry and prose virtually free of interpretive explication entered the market after 1900. Nevertheless, the earlier textbooks by Tyler and Richardson, along with Barrett Wendell's (1855-1921) A Literary History of America (1900), continued their hegemony as the trusted literary anthologies. In fact a clear difference between high school and college literature collections emerges only in the years following the end of World War I. Before then, anthology editors had intended that their textbooks be used as general guides to American literature for students of all levels, but by 1919 scholars were compiling collections specifically for yearlong college courses, interspersing historical background with the poetry and prose together in the now familiar same-volume format. Influenced by recent critical trends, scholar-editors began moving textbooks away from almost total emphasis on the historical backgrounds and biography, bringing about an expanded coverage of literature. In 1919 Fred Lewis Pattee published his first anthology of American literature designed for a yearlong survey. Norman Foerster's American Poetry and Prose: A Book of Readings 1607-1916 (1925) became the first literary anthology designed for the college classroom that divided American literature under the conventional modern headings of "Colonial/Puritan Background," "Romanticism," and "Realism." Shortly afterward several other major literary textbooks appeared, one after another, ushering in the age of the modern anthology of American literature as well as inaugurating the proliferation of academic American literary studies that would by mid-century lead to the recognition of American authors and texts as major contributors to world literature.See alsoGenteel Tradition; Naturalism; Professionalism; Realism; Regionalism and Local Color FictionBIBLIOGRAPHYPrimary WorksBoynton, Percy. A History of American Literature. Boston: Ginn, 1919.Cairns, W. B. A History of American Literature. 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