

5:1a Civil War Notes

I. The rise of realism

A. Response to the Civil War: Idealism and Disillusionment

1. Idealism

a. Emerson predicted Civil War

1. was happy about the hostilities
2. predicted war would continue
3. helped volunteers to reenlist after they lost the Battle of Bull Run

b. After Bull Run, Northern disillusionment continued

c. Whitman wrote of the sense of defeat in Washington

1. worked in Washington as a volunteer nurse, after finding his wounded brother George
2. spent his time comforting the wounded and writing to their loved ones
3. felt the hospitals were horrifying places
4. the most moving and painful experience of Whitman's life
5. "Future years will never know the

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see thing hell and black infernal background of the countless minor scenes and interiors;...and it is best they should not – the real wall will never get in the books.” – Walt Whitman

2. Disillusionment
 - a. while war strengthened Whitman’s optimism, it strengthened Melville’s pessimism
1. Melville’s poems about the war were dark and foreboding
 2. was fascinated by the war, but never wrote a novel about it
 3. Melville’s poems
 - a. published in *Battle-Pieces*
 - b. based on newspaper accounts

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- B. The Civil War and literature
 - 1. Civil War literary legacy
 - a. Melville's *Battle-Pieces* and Whitman's *Drum Taps* and *Specimen Days*
 - 1. comprise bulk of Civil War literature
 - b. Other works were written by amateurs
 - 2. had historical value; no literary merit
 - 2. Reasons for lack of literature
 - a. few major writers of the time saw the war
 - 1. Emerson was in Concord
 - 2. Thoreau was dead
 - 3. Hawthorne died in 1864
 - 4. Dickinson was still in seclusion
 - 5. Henry James, Henry Adams, and William Dean Howells were all living abroad
 - b. modern, realistic novel had not been fully developed
 - 1. war was appropriate material for later novel writers

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2. Civil War writers felt the war was best depicted in poetry, not prose
3. Traditional forms and ideals could not deal with the War as a topic for novels
4. novels of the time consisted of romance and chivalry
 - a. real war had no place
 - b. those who lived through the war saw the great tragedy
 - c. later writers saw war as a symbol for the battle of existence with a hostile environment
 1. this view would help create *The Red Badge of Courage*, the great Civil War novel

C. Frederick Douglass

1. Born into slavery in 1818
2. Learned to read on his own
3. Escaped to Massachusetts when he was 21
4. Married soon after and made speeches in favor of abolition
5. Published his own newspaper, *North Star*
6. Worked for the Underground Railroad during the Civil War

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7. Felt the best way to free the slave was to educate him

D. Stephen Crane

1. born in 1871; youngest of 14
2. tried going to college, but decided to become a writer
3. after causing scandal on his brother's newspaper, he became a reporter in New York City
4. often ill due to his lifestyle
5. pioneer of Naturalism, as evidenced in his book *Maggie: Girl of the Streets*
6. Used Impressionism in *Red Badge of Courage*
 - a. showed the characters' impressions of reality
7. Traveled greatly
8. Died in Europe before he was thirty

E. Ambrose Bierce

1. Born in 1842; the youngest of 10 children
2. Had a dark vision of life, fitting with the idea of realism
3. Was a Civil War soldier

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4. Began writing fiction in 1872
5. Published *The Devil's Dictionary* in 1904
 - a. filled with sarcastic and ironic definitions
6. Died under strange circumstances in 1914
In Mexico

Slater, Eileen, ed., et al. *Literature and the Language Arts, The American Tradition*. St. Paul: EMC/Paradigm Publishing, 1996. pages 358-362.