

## INTRODUCTION FOR INSTRUCTORS

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Charles A. Johanningsmeier

Literary anthologies, it is now widely acknowledged, are not simply compilations of what everyone agrees are the “best” works of literature from a particular period, genre, or group of authors, as they were once believed to be, but are instead reflections of the interests and biases of both their creators and their anticipated readers. As Jane Tompkins wrote in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (1985), “Works that have attained the status of classic, and are therefore believed to embody universal values, are in fact embodying only the interests of whatever parties or factions are responsible for maintaining them in their preeminent position.” Quite naturally, then, as the characteristics of the people creating anthologies—as well as those of their readers—change, the elements of the literary past that are deemed most important for students, instructors, readers, and researchers to remember and learn about are also revised. The present anthology is no exception to this truism, for it, like many an anthology before it, seeks to address what its editors see as the many shortcomings evident in the general and targeted anthologies of American literature, and specifically American Realism, published during the last forty years. It is our fervent hope that the short fictions found in this anthology will not only inspire interesting, lively classroom discussions but also, in many ways, encourage instructors and their students to “reimagine Realism” by questioning its boundaries and assumptions.

We believe this collection, by exposing readers to the extraordinary vitality, variety, and complexity of this period of American history and literature’s role in it, will prove valuable to students, instructors, and readers alike. To represent the complexity of that period’s history and literary record, it was necessary to present texts that would force students to grapple with the difficult issues that this era’s fiction authors raised, instead of excluding or downplaying certain views. It is tempting to selectively choose and present only those literary texts from the period that imply a smooth, steady, easily comprehensible narrative of Americans’ nascent liberalism and seemingly “natural” march toward ever-increasing progressivism, for few students in modern American classrooms would likely object to such texts. Whether intentionally or not, by presenting only a certain group of

works, this is what many recent targeted and general anthologies have suggested “Realism” was all about. But American history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the Realist genre, were anything but simple or smooth, and there was little unanimity on any of the most significant issues, certainly not among fiction authors. Here we present a diverse group of texts intended to complicate many of the usual narratives about Realism and help shed light on the nation’s true, rough-around-the-edges history, which is less easily understood or explained. This volume’s contents will prompt a reassessment that will go a long way toward helping students more fully and accurately understand both this period’s history and what exactly constitutes the genre of Realism. In our work we are inspired by the words of James Baldwin, who wrote in *The Fire Next Time* (1963): “To accept one’s past—one’s history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressure of life like clay in a season of drought.”

Granted, most literary anthologies currently in use offer, at least compared to the anthologies that preceded them, a relatively broad range of viewpoints as to what constituted “reality” during the period from 1860 to 1920. This is because, beginning in the 1980s and then even more so in the 1990s, most American literature anthologists began to include texts by authors who challenged readers’ notions of “reality” as defined chiefly by the White male authors whose works had previously predominated in them. These volumes brought to the forefront previously under-studied works by women authors, African American authors, and Native American authors and at least a few by authors from the Asian American and Latinx communities. All these anthologies are to be applauded for helping democratize the literary canon.

However, while the selection of works and authors contained in these anthologies has changed only slightly since the 1990s, our understanding of the period from 1860 to 1920 has changed a great deal. We wanted to reflect these developments in our anthology.

One significant development is that scholars have recovered, from many previously lesser-examined sources, even more excellent fictions and authors that deserve to be seriously considered as part of the period’s literary history. Exposing students to more of these works and writers is especially crucial because many of the “fresh new voices” once introduced by anthologies have, during the past few decades, become frequently read and written about and are no longer especially “fresh.” Today, for example, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Charles W. Chesnutt, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sui Sin Far, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Zitkala-Ša, as well as a small number of their works, are now somewhat familiar to most students of this period’s literature. This wider recognition and readership is a very good thing. At the same time, though, most anthologies have not given these authors their proper due, chiefly in the way they continue to be represented by only a limited selection of their works. For instance, readers of current anthologies could be forgiven for not knowing that Sarah Orne Jewett wrote anything more than “A White Heron”; that Mary Wilkins Freeman wrote

other fictions besides “A New England Nun” and “The Revolt of ‘Mother’”; that Charlotte Perkins Gilman authored short stories other than “The Yellow Wall-Paper”; that Charles W. Chesnutt did not include the character of Uncle Julius in all his fictions; that Kate Chopin had a larger oeuvre than “The Story of an Hour” and “Désirée’s Baby”; or that Sui Sin Far penned many excellent works besides “Its Wavering Image” and “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian.” Such treatment is not limited solely to “recently discovered” authors either, as seen in the way particular stories, such as Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case,” and Jack London’s “To Build a Fire,” are almost invariably chosen to represent these authors.

This persistent repetition of the same small group of short fictions in anthologies has, quite unintentionally, come to represent a problem for students and their instructors in numerous ways. First, students quite understandably become tired of the usual cast of authors and texts they encounter in the wide-scope anthologies used in their introductory classes, because later they are assigned to read the same ones in more narrowly focused anthologies for an upper-division course. The interest level in some discussions, not surprisingly, is not always as high as the instructor might wish it to be. Second, because students have been misled into believing that all the represented authors—especially those more recently added to the canon—wrote only a handful of truly exceptional fictions, the likelihood has diminished that students regard these authors as “major”; after all, one key criterion for such a designation has always been an extensive oeuvre of high-quality work. Third, a plethora of online study guides, sophisticated critical articles, and even books on commonly reprinted stories—as well as ready-for-purchase essays to hand in for class assignments—have made it seem that there is nothing new to say about any of these authors. This, we feel, has discouraged students from investigating further and offering their own interpretations on essays and exams. For all these reasons, we wanted to create an anthology that included a broader collection of short fictions from this era than had previously been available, one that would both generate excitement and prompt a reconsideration of Realism that is long overdue.

We have purposely included many texts that, although written by familiar authors, are not themselves well-known at all. These stories will allow students, instructors, and readers to see dimensions of such authors rarely acknowledged but richly deserving of recognition and further study. Mark Twain’s “The Facts concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut,” for example, exemplifies the way he sometimes put his considerable satirical powers to use in examining individuals’ psychological and moral struggles. Louisa May Alcott’s “Hospital Sketches: A Day” is nothing at all like *Little Women*, just as Rebecca Harding Davis’s “A Day with Doctor Sarah” has almost nothing in common with *Life in the Iron Mills*. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “Mrs. Beazley’s Deeds” demonstrates her keen use of irony to communicate her ideas about women’s rights in ways quite different from how “The Yellow Wall-Paper” does. Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “Old Woman Magoun” chronicles a much darker and insidious side

of male control than is found in, for example, “The Revolt of ‘Mother.’” And her story “One Good Time” (as well as Sarah Orne Jewett’s “Tom’s Husband” and “Stolen Pleasures”) shows that women authors of this period did sometimes pen endings that portrayed heterosexual marriages as mutually beneficial and desirable. In addition, although Jack London’s “The League of the Old Men,” included here, does indeed take place in the Yukon, as many of his more famous stories do, it focuses neither on dogs, wolves, nor desperate prospectors. Furthermore, while Owen Wister is widely celebrated for his 1902 novel, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, almost no one has read his first published story, “Hank’s Woman,” a much less Romantic treatment of gender relations in backcountry Wyoming in the 1890s that defies many common expectations of the Western genre. Finally, the textual version of Stephen Crane’s “An Experiment in Misery” presented here is significantly different from the one occasionally reprinted; to our knowledge, it has never been included in an anthology.

To further expand the range of readings available to students and probe the boundaries of Realism, we have also included a handful of stories by authors who were quite popular during their day but who, for various reasons, have not been highly regarded by later critics. As a result, these works have never appeared in a major literary anthology—yet they offer valuable new viewpoints to consider. In this category are Octave Thanet’s “The Face of Failure,” Kate Cleary’s “Feet of Clay,” Lafcadio Hearn’s “In the Twilight of the Gods,” Elia Peattie’s “After the Storm: A Story of the Prairie,” and Ruth McEnery Stuart’s “The Unlived Life of Little Mary Ellen.” The reasons why such texts have not been republished are extremely varied. Some of their authors lacked advocates powerful enough to promote their work among publishers, especially after their deaths, while others were the victims of critical bias against particular regions or simply expressed ideas that ran counter to those that many anthologists from the 1970s forward wished to emphasize.

Also contributing to the breadth of this collection and adding to the range of choices available to instructors are a number of pieces that possess strong Romantic and Sentimental elements. This is not something typically found in most anthologies that seek to represent the genre of Realism. As scholar Nancy Glazener has well documented in *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (1997), genteel cultural commentators and literary reviewers, as early as the 1860s, began to more highly value fictions that exhibited more “realistic” attributes. They also negatively judged those that, because of their coincidental events, strong doses of pathos, happy endings, and so forth, were regarded as overly Romantic or Sentimental. She writes, “The construction of realism at midcentury as a uniquely democratic and modern form was simultaneously the construction of the romance as aristocratic and outmoded; the construction of realist authorship as professional authorship around the 1880s was simultaneously the construction of sentimental and sensational authorship as unprofessional.” This bias in favor of Realism was continued by most academic critics in the twentieth century, and for almost a century thereafter, texts

“tainted” with Romantic and Sentimental elements have, for the most part, been tacitly yet powerfully excluded from general and more focused literary anthologies. Yet Realist authors frequently incorporated Romantic and Sentimental devices in their work, in part because they knew that the most popular—and thus remunerative—fictions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved romance and sentiment. Most students, though, due to the absence of such texts from modern anthologies, are unaware that the boundaries between these genres were much less rigid than they have been led to believe. We believe students should know that calling the period from 1860 to 1920 the “Age of Realism” is quite misleading.

To rectify this situation, the present anthology does not discriminate against Romanticism or Sentimentalism. Instead, we have chosen to include a number of texts that most modern literary critics would dismiss, for various reasons, as “unrealistic”; these include Octave Thanet’s “The Face of Failure,” Frank Norris’s “The House with the Blinds,” Rebecca Harding Davis’s “A Day with Doctor Sarah,” and Ruth McEnery Stuart’s “The Unlived Life of Little Mary Ellen.” This anthology’s lack of anti-Romantic bias is especially evident in certain western Regionalist fictions included herein. In the 1970s, modern anthologies began to excise almost all western writers besides Mark Twain, including Bret Harte and many of his contemporaries, because they were judged to be simplistic, predictable, and unrealistic. To counter the stereotype of western, Romantic fiction as less artistically advanced than Realist works, we have included Harte’s “The Luck of Roaring Camp” and “Wan Lee, the Pagan,” as well as “Sister Celeste,” by C. C. Goodwin, and Samuel Post Davis’s “A Christmas Carol,” all of which take place in or near “exotic” western mining towns and involve numerous “unlikely” events.

Many Realist authors, too, incorporated Sentimental elements to produce some excellent, gripping tales that profoundly moved their readers. Indeed, instructors will likely learn that such works can prove quite popular among their students. This popularity should not be distrusted; after all, as a number of excellent studies of women’s writing of this period have documented, if one judges the excellence of literary works at least in part by the influence they exerted over readers, then one must make room for texts that elicit strong emotional responses. Some works of this type included here are Sarah Orne Jewett’s “Stolen Pleasures,” Harriet Prescott Spofford’s “Her Story,” Constance Fenimore Woolson’s “Miss Grief,” Rebecca Harding Davis’s “A Day with Doctor Sarah,” Grace King’s “Making Progress,” and Louisa May Alcott’s “Hospital Sketches: A Day.” All are outstanding works that make their readers feel great empathy for certain characters, and discussions with students about the roots of their emotional resonance and great success among readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will, we believe, not only lead them to question how “un-Sentimental” the Realist genre actually was but also afford them a better understanding of the period’s literary marketplace and how Realist authors navigated it.

This anthology further expands the boundaries of Realism by including a small number of works written by authors who are almost completely unknown to modern readers, having been discovered only recently. These authors typically published only a handful of works in their lifetimes, did not have their stories appear in major magazines, or never had their fictions collected and republished in book form. Although Hannah Lloyd Neall and Lucy Bates Macomber, for instance, each wrote and published fewer than ten stories in their lifetimes and dropped completely out of sight afterward, one cannot help but admire how Neall's powerful story "Placer" grapples seriously with the moral implications of White Americans' displacement of Native Americans in California, and how Macomber's "The Gossip of Gold Hill" highlights the great toll the California gold rush took on the wives that male fortune hunters left behind.

To further interrogate the current understanding of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "reality" as defined in literature, we have consciously not applied any type of political litmus test to the fictions we chose to include. Some of the works in the volume consequently depict themes and characters in ways contrary to those typically found in most modern literary anthologies. Student readers who have never been exposed to fictions of this period that include the type of nonprogressive ideas and language found in them will likely feel unsettled and possibly even disturbed. For instance, in the works in this anthology a number of female characters find happiness in traditional heterosexual relationships, not all rich people are evil, and some characters and authors manifest views on race, class, and gender that are now considered extremely problematic. We feel that such texts should be included for a number of reasons. For one, students will get from them a more accurate sense of Americans' varied views on these topics during this time period; for another, they give students the opportunity to actually use the critical literary theories they have learned about race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation and thereby learn to recognize the sometimes subtle, and sometimes more overt, ways that texts of this era reflected the ideologies surrounding race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, modern literary anthologies have also far too often avoided texts that include certain aspects of American history, as well as American literary history, that raise a number of uncomfortable questions. We have consciously chosen not to do so, because we believe that well-conducted discussions about such texts can help students better understand the pervasive racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism of this era. We hope the disequilibrium these texts are thus likely to produce in today's readers will be justified by the way they inspire spirited, thoughtful, critical discussions, not only about how these literary works reflected and contested prevailing ideologies during the period in which they were written but also about why certain texts have been privileged or marginalized in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We contend that students today have a right to know the truth about the American past, even when it includes certain elements that are contrary to what they have been taught to believe and which most Americans today find unconscionable. Students today

need to be exposed to texts such as these because if they are not, these aspects of American history will be forgotten and students will not have an opportunity to understand what so many people have been fighting against—and for—in hopes of a better future.

Instructors should take special note that we have not avoided stories that employ racial, ethnic, class, and gender epithets that are today deemed offensive by most people. This is not a decision we have taken lightly. We understand that some readers might be quite disturbed by these terms, so to caution these readers, we have placed warning notes directly preceding any stories that include them. We of course do not wish to condone or endorse the use of such language; however, its casual and frequent use in fictions of this era was an unfortunate reality.

Those who teach these works should thus expect to engage in some difficult—yet necessary—conversations about these terms and the power dynamics involved in their use, both in the past and in the present. Instead of regarding these discussions with trepidation, instructors should approach them as educational opportunities, ones that can take place only if students are exposed to these terms and the attitudes and assumptions behind them.

Because of the potentially contentious ideas and offensive language present in some of these stories, instructors must carefully prepare for, and sensitively moderate, the discussions that result from them; only in this way can these conversations be educational rather than hurtful and divisive. Based on her many years of experience leading educational discussions, Professor Peggy Jones of the University of Nebraska at Omaha suggests that instructors spend a good deal of time beforehand engaging students in a dialogue about the choice of course materials and how the class will be conducted. For instance, instructors should candidly explain their rationale for choosing particular texts, despite the fact that they might make some students feel uncomfortable or insulted. They should also make clear to students their expectation that they all be open to learning about very challenging, provocative material without negatively judging other students for their expressed views. In addition, she suggests students should be informed from the start that their grades will not depend on the personal views they express but rather on assessments such as quizzes, exams, and papers that will be judged by the objective criteria established beforehand. Prof. Jones adds—and we fully agree—that one good way to work these issues out is to have students discuss them in small groups, in which they could possibly also create a type of class charter that spells out mutually agreed-upon ground rules for discussions.

Once students are properly prepared, the class will be ready to engage in substantive, meaningful dialogues that might address questions like the following: Why did particular characters in these works use demeaning and dehumanizing terms to refer to people different from themselves? Why did authors during this time period depict people from different identity groups the way they did? Did readers of this era actually think these fictions presented “reality”? Why did readers back then not object to these portrayals and to the use of such hurtful

language? Should we read such works today if they include offensive language as well as distasteful themes? These are the types of meaningful questions students might ask; with your guidance, they can explore them in a productive, educational way.

Other elements of this anthology are intended to help instructors generate student discussions that will prompt them to think about certain subjects in new ways. For instance, we have intentionally not grouped these selections by particular subgenres of Realism or by the racial, gender, or regional identities with which their authors identified. Such categorization by other anthologists has, in our view, often predisposed readers to restrictively interpret works and to miss evidence of the complexities and cross-pollination between categories that greatly enriched these stories. The best literary works are those which cannot be easily pigeonholed. The very fact that so many of the texts in this anthology cross conventional boundaries and thus fit in many different categories is itself strong evidence of their excellence. To avoid such pigeonholing, we have instead simply provided a chronological listing of when the texts were published and then presented the fictions in alphabetical order according to their authors. We hope this organization will allow instructors and students maximum flexibility to make their own connections among the texts. We trust all will appreciate this freedom and respond positively to the challenge.

Another way this anthology affords readers as much interpretive latitude as possible is by providing only brief headnotes and a limited number of endnotes. Our headnotes are not miniature biographies/bibliographies of the authors, for we assume that anyone wishing to know more about a particular author or text can easily find such information online. Instead, the headnotes limit themselves to providing thumbnail sketches of the author's life, situating each text in its original biographical and literary context, and briefly recounting the circumstances of its production and publication. In the headnotes we also consciously avoid telling readers the standard critical opinions about what each text "means," for these too often overly circumscribe readers' approaches to the text by giving them preconceptions about the "correct" interpretation of each story. Our endnotes, too, are designed to inform rather than prescribe. Thus, we have included only annotations we thought were especially helpful or absolutely necessary to understand the fictions, and we have striven to present this information as objectively as possible; we hope that, in at least some cases, they will inspire students to further inquiry.

There are numerous parallels between what took place in the United States from 1860 to 1920 and what is occurring today, and these similarities will likely continue to be of great importance to many people in the decades to come. Today the United States is experiencing an epic, transformative period in which questions of national identity and how to respond to various manifestations of modernization are once again being fiercely debated throughout its culture. The questions of what is "real" and what is "fake," and of how the agendas of those making such judgments are influenced by their own personal biases, pervade

the news. In addition, the project of learning more about, and respecting, the viewpoints of Americans different from ourselves is still ongoing—and remains vital to our nation’s cohesiveness.

Because of these parallels, we contend that now is a highly propitious time to rededicate ourselves to the project of discussing and studying as diverse a set of Realist literary texts, representing as many different views on the American experience as possible. The tasks of determining how we wish to remember the origins of our modern nation and of gathering together the literary evidence that can help explain ourselves to ourselves are truly never-ending. It is our sincere hope that this collection will not only reenergize interest in the period’s literature among students, instructors, and readers but also do its small part in improving the national conversation about the issues its texts raise, thereby helping lead us into a less fractious future.