

PART IX

INDUSTRIALISM AND THE HUMANITIES: THE MIDDLE AND LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Chapter 29

Art and Literature in the Industrial World: Realism and Beyond

1. The progressive industrialization of society in the nineteenth century was something artists and social thinkers were forced to come to terms with.
2. The idealizing and exotic tendencies of romanticism was not an adequate response.
3. Industrialization and its social consequences required a profound change in all the arts.

I. Architecture

1. Up until the mid-nineteenth century architects usually selected traditional preexisting forms based on associations with the function of the building.
2. Yet new functions and materials demanded new solutions and invited new possibilities.
3. The Crystal Palace (London 1851) was an early example representing a modern solution without reliance on the visual or technical formulas of traditional architecture.
4. The tall office building was a response to similar challenges as the Crystal Palace—limited time, land, money, and the need for adequate space and light.
5. The invention of the elevator, fireproofing, and the perfection of steel framing made skyscrapers possible.
6. The problem was to decide what a skyscraper was supposed to look like.

A. Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) and the Commercial Style

1. Sullivan searched for the theoretical ideas that buildings expressed.
2. The successful creation of the form for the tall office building was a driving force of his career.
3. He believed tall buildings should express their verticality and other aspects of their essence.
4. Sullivan’s designs were free of ornamentation.
5. Some critics felt this movement of the expression of form through function was too commercial and expedient.

II. Painting: Realism

1. In the mid-nineteenth century what seemed most real and important were progress and economic expansion.
2. Yet many painters and artists believed that social inequities wrought by industrialization demanded a response.
3. Realism developed from a sense of social responsibility of artists to paint what they saw.

A. Gustave Courbet (1819–1877)

1. Courbet was a member of a collection of artists called “realists.”
2. Artists should paint what they saw—the ugly, as well as the beautiful, the realists believed.
3. Courbet preferred to paint the working classes because he believed their contribution to society was greater.
4. His works did not idealize or romanticize working-class life.

B. Ford Maddox Brown (1821–1893)

1. Brown was another realist who depicted socially relevant scenes from contemporary life.

2. Brown painted out-of-doors, seeking an intensified illusion of reality.
3. He was an advocate for workers' rights and this was notably reflected in the subjects he selected.

C. Thomas Eakins (1844–1916)

1. The American-born Eakins was another realist who painted intense ordered and descriptive paintings.
2. Eakins, like Monet and Vermeer, had the ability to capture a moment in time..

III.–Photography

1. The social and economic forces that influenced the realists coincided with a technological revolution with respect to how realistic images could be made—photography.
2. Photography held the potential of making painting obsolete, or at least the realist school of painting, by its conventions of the time.
3. A realism in painting, however, based on an attitude or ideal of objective honesty rather than a technique of rendering visual reality could and did compete with photography.
4. Some painters like Eakins and Degas used cameras to assist in capturing a moment in time.
5. Photography eventually became an art form in its own right.

IV. Realism in Literature

1. Writers too felt the need to portray reality as exactly as possible.
2. Realist writers reacted against some of the more fantastic, exotic, and ideal elements of romanticism although some works were both romantic and real.
3. The novel was the literary genre best suited to realism.
4. Realist literature was helped by an increase in literacy among the middle and lower classes who wanted to read stories about people like themselves.
5. Realism could only be considered a literary school in France although England (Charles Dickens and William Thackeray), as well as the United States (Henry James and Stephen Crane), also had important realist novelists.
6. The British realists often show concern for contemporary social issues.

A. Naturalism

1. Realism gave way to naturalism in literature and the theater.
2. Naturalism concerned itself with cause and effect, or how human beings were influenced by their environment.
3. Naturalists did not avoid the sordid ugly aspects of life in their work.
4. One great naturalist novel is Richard Wright's *Native Son*, which tells the story of man driven to criminality by the racist society he lives in.

V. The Poet and the City: Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)

1. The initiator of modern poetry, Baudelaire believed the artist's task, for him, was to portray outward reality through an inner spiritual vision.
2. Along with the realist novelist *Gustave Flaubert*, Baudelaire was put on trial for his book *Les fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil) for "offense...to good morals."
3. The two were charged for their espousal of realism which their accusers defined as a fascination with the ugly and evil and a negation of standards of beauty and good.

4. In his visions of Paris, Baudelaire portrayed some of the same conditions that Engels and Dickens had observed and written about in London.
5. Many of Baudelaire's poems deal with the concept of ideal beauty.
6. His view of urban life resembles Dante's *Inferno* through its representation of infinite spiritual loss.
7. He suggest that poets could approach beauty by interpreting elements of the natural world as symbols.

VI. Late-Nineteenth-Century Thinkers and Writers

1. During the Victorian era in England (1837–1901), a number of changes took place in the way people in the West viewed themselves and their environment.
2. As industrialism became a fact of life, people became more materialistic in their attitudes.
3. Though Marx warned that human beings were controlled by economic forces, most middle-class Americans and Europeans welcomed the kind of progress brought about by industrialism.

A. Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

1. Darwin's evolutionary theories had a profound effect on science and Western culture.
2. Darwin's theory included the idea that the human race, like other animals, had evolved from other animal species.
3. Religionists were offended by Darwin's theory because it contradicted the Bible, it demeaned the human race and its special relationship with the Creator, and it challenged the notion of "Nature" as a harmonious and idyllic creation of God.

B. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

1. Spencer misapplied Darwin's theory to explain the differences in living standards between societies and individuals within a society.
2. From this premise he concluded that government had no right to interfere in the social dynamic on behalf of the weak.
3. Spencer's ideas were used to rationalize the inequities of the industrial revolution.

C. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

1. More poet than philosopher, Nietzsche applied evolutionary theories to ends quite different from Spencer's.
2. The "freedom" that Nietzsche emphasized was spiritual and intellectual rather than economic and material.
3. He denounced the Greek emphasis on reason and Judeo/Christian ideas about morality.
4. He believed the apex of Greek culture was a synthesis of and tension between the Apollonian (rationalistic) and the Dionysian (ecstatic) found in Greek Tragedy.
5. Nietzsche's writings, interpreted in various ways, influenced a variety of modern doctrines.

D. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

1. Like Nietzsche, Dostoevsky was a radical critic of materialistic and rationalistic Western society.
2. He also, like Nietzsche, praised the extremes of human existence.
3. As a Russian he considered himself outside of the traditions of Western Europe with a unique vantage point.

4. Dostoevsky began his career as a socialist but reconverted to the Orthodox Christian faith.
5. The achievement of suffering through doubt, suffering, and even crime was one of his major themes.
6. In his ability to create vivid characters, he is in the tradition of the great literary realists of Western Europe.

VII. The New Painting

1. In the 1860s a large group of artists working in Paris identified themselves with a new artistic movement whose works were distinct from the traditional work of the period.
2. *A Salon of the Refused* in 1863 included work by Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas.
3. In 1874 a group of young artists produced a series of exhibitions of “new painting” that continued until 1886.
4. These paintings came to be described with terms such as *realism*, *symbolism*, *pointillism*, *impressionism* and *postimpressionism*.

A. The Figure and the Moment: Edouard Manet (1832–1883), Edgar Degas (1834–1917), and Mary Cassatt (1845–1926)

1. All three of these painters had come from upper middle-class backgrounds and received support from their families.
2. Manet’s influences included the seventeenth-century painter Velázquez, Japanese prints, and the new technology of photography.
3. Degas, too, was influenced by Japanese prints and used motion photography to study bodies in motion.
4. Degas’ rough application of paint reinforced the physical presence but traditional critics did not accept the technique in his time.
5. A gifted colorist, Cassatt found social life scenes irresistible ephemeral subjects.
6. With Cassatt’s work, the viewer is distinctly aware of the paint, the composition, and the hand of the artist.

B. The Landscape: Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906)

1. Claude Monet helped organize exhibits of the new painting.
2. He was interested in capturing the transient light of the out-of-doors.
3. To translate the experience of change onto canvas, Monet and Cézanne studied light and shadow.
4. The loose brushwork, vivid, unmixed colors, and painting out-of-doors characteristics was associated with a new term—“impressionism.”
5. Both Monet and Cézanne tried to reproduce the experience of seeing in the natural world.

III. Postimpressionism and Symbolism

1. Some of the artists involved with the “new painting” movement felt that paintings and painters should express spiritual and emotional values missing from contemporary life and art.

2. Two painters associated with this concern were Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

A. Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890)

1. Van Gogh came to Paris from his native Holland to pursue his painting career without success and then moved to Arles in southern France.
2. Van Gogh wanted to make paintings that would be comforting and uplifting.
3. He created intensely personal paintings of Arles and its environs.
4. In describing his work *The Night Café*, Van Gogh expressed the desire to symbolize through color.
5. His work demonstrates the power of images to convey and connect with human emotions.

B. Paul Gauguin (1848–1903)

1. Gauguin abandoned his career as a stockbroker to pursue his obsession with painting.
2. He went to Tahiti in search of a natural instinctive culture, free from the strictures of his own society.
3. His use of unfamiliar subjects forces the viewer to see and concentrate on the composition and the experience produced.