

influential French theorist and novelist, wrote in his influential essay "The Experimental Novel" (1880):

We must operate with characters, passions, human and social data as the chemist and the physicist work on inert bodies, as the physiologist works on living bodies. Determinism governs everything. It is scientific investigation; it is experimental reasoning that combats one by one the hypotheses of the idealists and will replace novels of pure imagination by novels of observation and experiment.

A number of American writers adopted aspects of Zola's form of naturalism, though each brought naturalism into his or her work in different ways, to different degrees, and combined with other perspectives. At some level they all understood that they were fabulists, not scientists, and ultimately none of them was willing to sacrifice some idea of human life as meaningful. Even the statement that life has no meaning is, after all, a meaningful statement; there is no escape from this paradox. Naturalists wanted to explore how biology, environment, and other material forces shaped lives—particularly the lives of lower-class people, who supposedly had less control over their lives than those who were better off. In this respect, naturalism is an intervention that strives to make lower-class lives comprehensible to the middle-class readers who comprised the main audience for fiction. Thus, Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, and Frank Norris all allowed in different degrees for the value of human beings, for their potential to make some measure of sense out of their experience, and for their capacity to act compassionately—even altruistically—under the most adverse circumstances. Even though, therefore, they were challenging conventional wisdom about human motivation and causality in the natural world, the bleakness and pessimism sometimes found in their fiction are not the same as despair and cynicism. Careful reading of such Ambrose Bierce stories as "Chicamauga" and "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" reveals his awareness of fiction as a tool to explore inner truths.

Stephen Crane, too, did not believe that environment counts for everything, though he said of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) that it does count for a great deal in determining human fate. Not every person born in a slum becomes a criminal, drunkard, or suicide; and Crane clearly depicts Maggie's final action in the novella as her considered choice. In "The Blue Hotel" the earth is described in one of the most famous passages in naturalistic fiction as a "whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb." But questions of responsibility and agency are still alive at the end of the story. In Crane's Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, the main character Henry Fleming responds throughout to the world of chaos and violence that surrounds him with alternating surges of panic and self-congratulations, not as a man who has fully understood himself and his place in the world. And yet, Henry has learned something; Crane, like most naturalists, is more ambiguous, more accepting of paradoxes, than a simplified notion of naturalism would suggest.

Biology, environment, psychological drives, and chance play a large part in shaping human ends in Crane's fiction. But these thematic matters are inflected by his distinct literary style, which merges honest reportage with

impressionistic literary techniques to present incomplete characters and a broken world—a world more random than scientifically predictable. We are also left, however, with the hardly pessimistic implications of "The Open Boat": that precisely because human beings are exposed to a savage world of chance where death is always imminent, they would do well to learn the art of sympathetic identification with others and how to practice solidarity, an art often learned at the price of death. After all, a belief in the meaning of deeply felt human connection is Crane's final sense of reality in this story.

Theodore Dreiser did not share Crane's tendency to use words and images as if he were a composer or painter. Like Crane, he tended to see men and women as victims of their destinies rather than creators of their lives. But his significance for readers lies in his cumulative technique that represents the solidity of the world in which his characters are entrapped. If Crane gave American readers a new sense of human consciousness under conditions of extreme pressure, Dreiser gave them in novels such as *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) a sense of the fumbling, yearning, confused response to the simultaneously enchanting, exciting, ugly, and dangerous metropolis that had become home to such large numbers of Americans by the turn of the century. Like Dreiser, Abraham Cahan wrote about city dwellers, in particular about eastern European Jews who, starting in 1882, had been coming to the United States in large numbers. Many of these Yiddish-speaking immigrants settled in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Cahan's major novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) explores the tensions entailed in attempts to reconcile traditional values and ways of living with American modernity in an urban work that, in the manner of literary naturalists, puts into conflict individual agency with larger social and natural forces, while providing new perspectives on ethnicity. Cahan's stories also explore themes of immigrant assimilation.

In Jack London's most successful works, such as his novels *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), along with most of his nearly two hundred short stories, there are currents of myth and romance. London was notoriously inconsistent—a socialist and an individualist, a believer in Anglo-Saxon superiority who attacked white racism and colonialism. Most of his short story "The Law of Life" (1901) recounts Old Koshkoosh's memories, especially his youthful encounter with a dying moose set upon by wolves. Koshkoosh himself, an imagined recreation of an indigenous person, has been left to die by his tribe as is customary, London suggests, when people reach extreme old age. He thinks: "Nature did not care. To life she set one task, gave one law. To perpetuate was the task of life, its law is death." This thought suggests a deterministic view of life, but what London underscores in the overall story is that acts of imagination and identification lend meaning and dignity to human existence.

In sum, despite conventional notions that insisted on humanity's elevated place in the universe and a middle-class readership that disliked ugliness and "immorality," urban America and the sparsely populated hinterlands proved to be fertile ground for realistic literary techniques and naturalistic ideas, though the ideas were often inconsistently applied and the documentary techniques usually interwoven with other literary strategies. Crucial to American writing during this period, realism and naturalism took on many forms and exposed readers to a wide range of subjects and perspectives.

REGIONAL WRITING

Regional writing, another expression of the realist impulse, resulted from the desire both to preserve a record of distinctive ways of life and to come to terms with the new world that seemed to be replacing these early and allegedly happier times. More practically, regional writing responded to the new market of mass magazines, for which the short story form was ideal, and for which variations of local habits could provide an endless source of narrative. By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually every region of the country had one or more "local colorists" dedicated to capturing its natural, social, and linguistic features. Though often suffused with nostalgia, the best work of the regionalists renders convincing details of a particular time and investigates psychological character traits from a broad perspective. Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp," which made Harte a national celebrity in 1868, is sometimes treated as an example of local color, but it is more concerned with creating myths of the colorful West than it is in realism. Like other literary forms, it is a hybrid rather than a pure example of a strategy rigorously applied. Writers as diverse as Owen Wister, author of the popular novel *The Virginian* (1902), Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Mary Austin, and Jack London all contributed to the work of depicting the West as a legendary region—or (as in the case of Twain and Bierce) to the work of debunking such a legend.

Hamlin Garland, rather than creating a myth of a region, set out to destroy one. Like many writers of the time, Garland was encouraged by Howells to write about what he knew best—in his case the farmers of the upper Midwest. As he later said, his purpose in his early stories was to show that the "mystic quality connected with free land . . . was a myth." Garland's farmers are not the vigorous and thoughtful yeomen of Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), but bent, drab figures. In Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw," from the collection *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), local color is not nostalgia but realism in the service of social protest—another indication that realism could never be only "realistic" but was always something more.

The places and the themes of regional writers assumed increasing importance in the twentieth century. Many women initially associated with regionalism expanded their interests to write about the world of women: Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Sui Sin Far, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Winnemucca, and others. Mary Austin was a self-declared feminist, and much of her writing, including her classic *Land of Little Rain* (1903), invites readers to see the world from a woman's perspective. But more important, in "The Land of Little Rain" and other sketches, she introduced the desert country of southern California to readers and showed how the characters who live in this inhospitable terrain are products of it. Stowe, Jewett, and Freeman do more than lament the postwar economic and spiritual decline of New England; their female characters suggest the capacity of human beings to live independently and with dignity in the face of community pressures, patriarchal power, and material deprivation.

Kate Chopin may be thought of as a regional writer interested in the customs, language, and landscapes of the northern Louisiana countryside and,

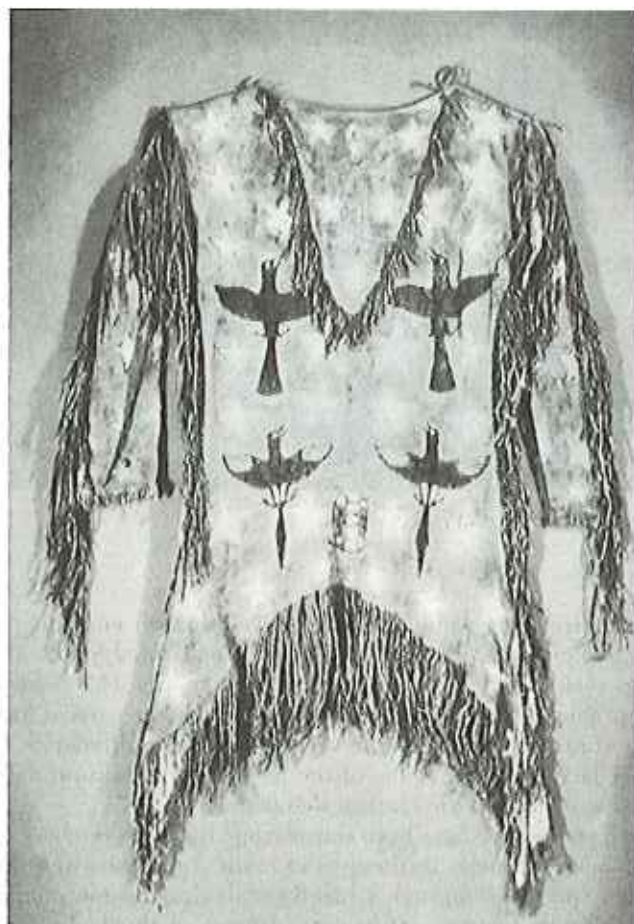
downriver, New Orleans. But in addition to working with local color, Chopin wrote probing psychological fiction with intriguing female protagonists. Edna Pontellier of *The Awakening* (1899) looks back to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and forward to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Chopin began her writing career only after she returned to her native St. Louis from a long sojourn in Louisiana, and in her narratives she memorializes (and perhaps romanticizes) the relaxed and sensuous way of life of the local population. Though the lives she portrays seem less severe and repressed than those in the Protestant towns and villages of New England regionalism, Chopin nonetheless depicts—especially in *The Awakening*—the struggles of women in conservative Catholic communities. With its focus on the inner life of Edna Pontellier, *The Awakening* in particular, a novel that has served to crystallize many women's issues at the turn of the century and since, testifies to the fact that regionalism, despite its avowed focus on lives outside of the urban mainstream, is by no means a marginal genre.

From a very different perspective, Native Americans also described their lives and traditions—especially as these were imperiled by white advances into their territories. The oratory of Charlot and Smohalla, the Ghost Dance religion, and the writings of Zitkala Ša, Sarah Winnemucca, and Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa) all widened public appreciation of literary models outside the European tradition while also challenging the dominant culture's identification of the West with the imaginary line of the frontier.

REALISM AS ARGUMENT

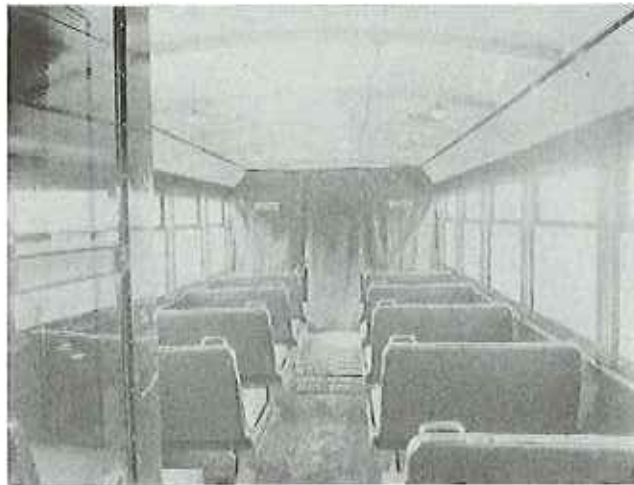
Realism was an important spur to the development of nonfiction. Between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of World War I, much nonfiction prose described, analyzed, and critiqued the social, economic, and political institutions that had emerged in this period of rapid growth and change. Women's rights, political corruption, the degradation of the natural world, economic inequity, business deceptions, the exploitation of labor, tenement housing—these became the subjects of articles and books by numerous journalists, historians, social critics, photographers, and economists. Much of this writing had literary ambition and is regarded as among the great literary achievements of the era. For example, in his autobiographical work of moral instruction and philosophy, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), Henry Adams registers through a literary sensibility a historian's sense of the disorientation that accompanies rapid and continuous change.

Of all the issues of the day, perhaps the most persistent and resistant to solution was the fact of racial inequality in the social arena. Several selections in this anthology address the long history of white injustices to black Americans, particularly as it became clear, with the end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of federal troops from the southern states in 1877, and then with the subsequent shift to segregationist Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), that there had been considerable erosion of the Constitutional amendments promising to guarantee the civil rights of African Americans. Among the most significant and influential voices of the period were those of African Americans addressing such topics as race, black community, and



Arapaho Ghost Dance Shirt. After the emissaries sent to visit Wovoka, the prophet of the Ghost Dance, returned with glowing reports, the Arapahos became the first adherents of the Ghost Dance on the plains. Wovoka had described special shirts to be worn while performing the Dance, and this is one made by the Arapahos. It is unclear whether the shirts, as some said, were supposed to make the wearer impervious to bullets or only to enhance the power of the Dance.

continuing racial inequities. In their short fiction and novels, Charles Chesnut, Pauline Hopkins, and James Weldon Johnson investigated the very nature of "race," pointing to its contradictions and (especially in the case of Hopkins) its promises for the regeneration of black community. Two works by black writers and leaders from the turn of the century have a special claim on our attention: the widely admired autobiography of Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1900), and the richly imagined *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by W. E. B. Du Bois, with its powerfully argued rejection of Washington's assimilationist philosophy. The Washington-Du Bois controversy set some of the key terms of the continuing debate among black leaders



Jim Crow Railroad Car.

about which strategies would most effectively hasten educational, social, economic, and political equality for blacks in the United States. It is fair to say that in very different ways *Up from Slavery* and *The Souls of Black Folk*—admirable literary achievements in themselves—carried forward the antebellum traditions of such writers as David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs and set some of the terms of the cultural debates that would become central to the Harlem Renaissance.

In the half century we have been considering, material, intellectual, social, and psychological changes in the lives of many Americans went forward at such extreme speed and on such a massive scale that the enormously diverse writing of the time registers, at its core, degrees of shocked recognition of the human consequences of these radical transformations. Sometimes the shock is expressed in recoil and denial—thus the persistence, in the face of the ostensible triumph of realism, of the literature of diversion: nostalgic poetry, sentimental and melodramatic drama, and popular swashbuckling historical novels such as Charles Major's best-selling *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1898). The more enduring writings of the period, however, attempt to come to terms imaginatively with the individual and collective dislocations associated with the closing of the frontier, urbanization, unprecedented immigration, the surge of national wealth unequally distributed, revised conceptions of human nature and destiny, racial inequality and the concept of race, the reordering of family and civil life, and the pervasive spread of mechanical and organizational technologies. Although change is, as Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked, "the law of life," in the half century after the Civil War, writers seemed more aware of turbulence and disruption than before, and attempted to generate new forms of literary art that could represent and make sense of a nation in flux.

AMERICAN LITERATURE 1865–1914

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
1855 Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	1860 Short-lived Pony Express runs from Missouri to California
1860–65 Emily Dickinson writes several hundred poems	1861 South Carolina batteries fire on Fort Sumter, initiating the Civil War • Southern states secede from the Union and found the Confederate States of America
1865 Walt Whitman, <i>Drum-Taps</i>	1865 Civil War ends • Reconstruction begins • Lincoln assassinated • Thirteenth Amendment ratified, prohibiting slavery
	1867 United States purchases Alaska from Russia • Jesse Chisholm maps out the Chisholm Trail, connecting Texas cattle ranches to railheads in Kansas City, Cheyenne, Dodge City, and Abilene
1868 Louisa May Alcott, <i>Little Women</i>	1868 Fourteenth Amendment passed, guaranteeing citizenship to all peoples born in the United States (exclusive of Native peoples) • Congress institutes eight-hour workday for federal employees • sweatshops, using mostly immigrant labor, begin to proliferate in cities
	1869 First transcontinental railroad completed by construction crews composed largely of Chinese laborers • Susan B. Anthony elected president of American Equal Rights Association; Elizabeth Cady Stanton elected president of National Women's Suffrage Association
1870 Bret Harte, <i>The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches</i>	1870 Fifteenth Amendment, giving African American men the right to vote, ratified
	1871 Indian Appropriation Act ends the practice of negotiating treaties with the tribes as sovereign nations
1872 Mark Twain, <i>Roughing It</i>	1872 Yellowstone, first U.S. national park, established
	1873 Economic panic: financial depression lasts until 1879
	1874 Women's Christian Temperance Union founded in Cleveland • invention of barbed wire effectively ends the open range
1876 Charlot, "[He has filled graves with our bones]"	1876 Custer's regiment defeated by the Sioux and Cheyenne at Little Big Horn River, Montana • Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone
	1877 Reconstruction ends • segregationist Jim Crow laws begin

Boldface titles indicate works in the anthology.

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
1878 Henry James, <i>Daisy Miller</i>	1879 Thomas Edison invents the electric lightbulb • female lawyers permitted to argue before Supreme Court
1880 Joel Chandler Harris, <i>Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings</i>	1880–1910 Massive immigration from Europe
1881 Helen Hunt Jackson, <i>A Century of Dishonor</i>	1881 Tuskegee Institute founded
1883 Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"	1882 J. D. Rockefeller organizes Standard Oil Trust • Chinese Exclusion Act instituted
1884 Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	1884 Tailors' strike in New York City brings national attention to sweatshops
1885 María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, <i>The Squatter and the Don</i>	1886 Statue of Liberty dedicated • Haymarket Square labor riot leaves eleven dead • American Federation of Labor organized
1889 Theodore Roosevelt, <i>The Winning of the West</i> • Hamlin Garland, "Under the Lion's Paw"	1887 General Allotment Act or Dawes Act permits the president to divide tribally owned lands into individual allotments to be held in trust for twenty-five years, with "surplus" lands to be sold to non-Indians. This led the Indians to lose some 90 million acres of land by the time Dawes was repealed in 1934.
1890 Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"	1890 U.S. Bureau of the Census declares the "frontier" "to be closed." There is no more "free" or "unoccupied" land • Sitting Bull killed. Massacre of Big Foot's Minneconjou band by federal troops at Wounded Knee Creek ends the Ghost Dance among the Sioux • Ellis Island Immigration Station opens
1891 José Martí, "Our America" • Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "A New England Nun"	1893 World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago • Economic panic and depression, set off by the collapse of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroads
1892 Anna Julia Cooper, <i>A Voice from the South</i> • Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper"	
1893 Stephen Crane, <i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i> • Frederick Jackson Turner, <i>The Significance of the Frontier</i>	
1895 Crane, <i>Black Riders</i> and <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
1896 Paul Laurence Dunbar, <i>Lyrics of a Lowly Life</i> • James Mooney publishes <i>Ghost Dance Songs</i>	1896 <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> upholds segregated transportation
1897 Crane, <i>The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure</i>	1897–98 Klondike Gold Rush
1898 Abraham Cahan, <i>The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories</i>	1898 United States annexes Hawaii
1899 Charles Chesnut, <i>The Conjure Woman and The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line</i> • Kate Chopin, <i>The Awakening</i> • Frank Norris, <i>McTeague</i>	1898–99 Spanish-American War
1900 Theodore Dreiser, <i>Sister Carrie</i> • Ida B. Wells-Barnett, <i>Mob-Rule in New Orleans</i> • Pauline Hopkins, <i>Contending Forces</i>	1900 U.S. population exceeds seventy-five million
1901 Zitkala Ša, <i>Impressions of an Indian Childhood and The School Days of an Indian Girl</i> • Norris, <i>The Octopus</i> • London, "The Law of Life" • Booker T. Washington, <i>Up From Slavery</i>	1901 J. P. Morgan founds U.S. Steel Corporation • first transatlantic radio • oil discovered in Spindletop, Texas
1903 W. L. B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> • London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i> • Mary Austin, <i>The Land of Little Ruin</i>	1903 Henry Ford founds Ford Motor Co. • Wright brothers make the first successful airplane flight • <i>The Great Train Robbery</i> is first U.S. cinematic narrative
1904 Edith Wharton, "The Other Two"	1904 National Child Labor Committee formed
1905 William Dean Howells, "Editha"	1905 Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies) founded
1906 Upton Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i>	1906 April 18: San Francisco earthquake and fire
1907 Henry Adams, <i>The Education of Henry Adams</i> , privately printed	1909 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded
1910 Jane Addams, <i>Twenty Years at Hull-House</i> • Sui Sin Far, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance"	1910 Mexican Revolution
1912 James Weldon Johnson • <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i>	1914 U.S. Marines invade and occupy Vera Cruz, Mexico • Panama Canal opens

WALT WHITMAN

1819–1892

Walt Whitman revolutionized American poetry. Responding to Emerson's call in "The Poet" (1842) for an American bard who would address all "the facts of the animal economy, sex, nutriment, gestation, birth," he put the living, breathing, sexual body at the center of much of his poetry, challenging conventions of the day. Responding to Emerson's call for a "metre-making argument," he rejected traditions of poetic scansion and elevated diction, improvising the form that has come to be known as free verse, while adopting a wide-ranging vocabulary opening new possibilities for poetic expression. A poet of democracy, Whitman celebrated the mystical, divine potential of the individual; a poet of the urban, he wrote about the sights, sounds, and energy of the modern metropolis. In his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, he declared that "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." On the evidence of his enormous influence on later poets—Hart Crane, Langston Hughes, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, and countless others, including Spain's Federico García Lorca and Chile's Pablo Neruda—Whitman not only was affectionately absorbed by his own country but remains a persistent presence in poetry throughout the world.

Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in West Hills, Long Island (New York), the second of eight surviving children of the Quakers Louisa Van Velsor and Walter Whitman. In 1823, Whitman's father, a farmer turned carpenter, sought to take advantage of a building boom by moving the family to Brooklyn—then a town at the western and most urbanized part of Long Island. Whitman left school when he was eleven, and was soon employed in the printing office of a newspaper; when his family moved east on Long Island in 1833, he remained in Brooklyn on his own. In his midteens he contributed pieces to one of the best Manhattan papers, the *Mirror*, and often crossed the East River on the ferry from Brooklyn to Manhattan to attend debating societies and the theater. He was hired as a compositor in Manhattan in 1835, but two major fires later that year disrupted the printing industry, and he rejoined his family. For five years Whitman taught at country and small-town schools at East Norwich, Long Swamp, and other towns on Long Island, interrupting his teaching to start a newspaper of his own in 1838 and to work briefly on another Long Island paper. By early 1840 he had started the series "Sun-Down Papers from the Desk of a School-Master" for the Jamaica, New York, *Democrat* and was writing poems and fiction. One of his stories prophetically culminated with the dream of writing "a wonderful and ponderous book."

Just before he turned twenty-one Whitman stopped teaching, went back to Manhattan, and began work at the literary weekly *New World* and soon became editor of a Manhattan daily, the *Aurora*. He also began a political career by speaking at Democratic rallies and writing for the *Democratic Review*, the foremost magazine of the Democratic Party. He exulted in the extremes of the city, where street-gang violence was countered by the lectures of Emerson and where even a young editor could get to know the poet William Cullen Bryant, editor of the *Evening Post*. Fired from the *Aurora*, which publicly charged him with laziness, he wrote a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*, for a one-issue extra of the *New World* late in 1842. After three years of various literary and political jobs, he returned to Brooklyn in 1845, becoming a special contributor to the *Long Island Star*, assigned to Manhattan events, including theatrical and musical performances. All through the 1840s he