

Episode: #9

SOCIAL REALISM

Producers: Carla Farrell, Ian McCluskey

Writer: Kristian Berg

Editor: Pamela Chipman

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<u>Time Code</u>	<u>Audio</u>
01.00.00.00	A/CPB ANNOUNCER
01.00.21.20	NARRATOR: NEW YORK AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY-- A CITY SPLIT BETWEEN THE 'HAVES AND THE HAVE NOTS...'
01.00.28.22	WHARTON READER: <i>It was not the custom in New York drawing rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another.</i>
01.00.38.26	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>Nothing was before me but the hunger in our house, and no bread for the next meal if I didn't sell the herring.</i>
01.00.46.20	NARRATOR: TWO WOMEN WRITERS, EDITH WHARTON AND ANZIA YEZIERSKA, CRONICLED TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS LIVING SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL REALISM.
01.01.22.13	NARRATOR: AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, AMERICA BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE A NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. THIS TRANSFORMATION PEAKED IN THE DECADES BETWEEN 1890 AND 1920 WHEN THE NATION BECAME A PREDOMINANTLY URBAN, INDUSTRIAL, AND CONSUMER SOCIETY. WRITERS RESPONDED THROUGH SOCIAL REALISM. STEPHEN CRANE, UPTON SINCLAIR AND ANZIA YEZIERSKA WROTE OF THE STRUGGLES OF THE POOR. HENRY JAMES, CHARLOTTE PERKINS-GILMAN

	<p>AND EDITH WHARTON CRAFTED PSYCHOLOGICAL STORIES OF GENDER AND CLASS. THE ERA BEGAN AS A "GUILDED AGE" --A TIME WHEN EXTREME POVERTY CO-EXISTED WITH EXCESSIVE OPULENCE.</p>
01.02.12.11	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: There were huge amounts of money to be made, fortunes to be acquired as the country was linked together by the railroad and by business and by industry.</p>
01.02.33.00	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: The...coming of a technology after the Civil War, which allowed you to dig deeper, build higher, and dream bigger dreams really... really took those major cities and made them. . . magnificent.</p>
01.02.47.18	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: The new rich in New York were able to build their mansions along Fifth Avenue, they were able to build their enormous summer cottages in Newport. It was a marvelous time for people who liked to spend money and to live very well.</p>
01.03.06.00	<p>NARRATOR: THE "GUILDED AGE" PRODUCED A POWERFUL NEW CLASS IN AMERICA WITH NEW IDEAS AND FABULOUS NEW WEALTH.</p> <p>THE "OLD MONEY" CLASS HAD TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE NEW TYCOONS—NAMES LIKE VANDERBILT, CARNEGIE, AND ROCKEFELLER...</p>
01.03.24.20	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: After the Civil War you had this coming together of the old landed aristocracy, the people who had made their money in the 18th and early 19th centuries who were well dug into their old neighborhoods, and these new people with new ideas, imagination, the new technology to change everything including the very face of these cities, and no obligation to anybody whose been there before.</p>
01.03.49.00	<p>NARARATOR: THE NEW AMERICAN CITIES, OFFERED THE PROMISE OF NEW OPPORTUNITY IN A "NEW WORLD."</p>

01.03.57.00	<p>JUDITH BASKIN: New York certainly was the magnet, the place that people had heard about ... The early immigrants sent back glowing reports of a golden land where there were possibilities for employment and for improving one's way of life that were very attractive to people living in very oppressive conditions back in Eastern Europe.</p>
01.04.21.00	<p>NARRATOR: WITH THE RAPIDLY SHIFTING STRUCTURE OF CLASS AND AN INFLUX OF IMMIGRANTS, CAME COMPETING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS...</p>
01.04.33.09	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: This is a time of enormous political ferment. We have Utopian socialism, Fabian socialism, communism, the roots of fascism. Every imaginable kind of political "ism" is knocking heads in the streets of Western Europe. We have anarchists throwing bombs at czars, we have an enormous turmoil as to what the party system and the political fabric of America is going to be. In other words, this is a whirlwind which can pull in writers very very easily.</p>
01.05.05.00	<p>JUDITH BASKIN: Earlier immigrant groups had come from Ireland and from Germany, but beginning in 1880, there was a huge influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, from Italy, from other parts of southern Europe. And among those millions of immigrants were about a million and a half Jews from Eastern Europe.</p>
01.05.25.00	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: At the end of the 19th century, to be truly White, to be truly accepted as American, didn't merely mean a white skin. It meant no accent, it usually meant Anglo-Saxon heritage. From some points of view even the Irish weren't White, no matter how good their English was. Certainly East European Jews were a long way from gaining any kind of acceptance as White Americans.</p>
01.05.51.00	<p>NARRATOR: THE CONTRAST OF CLASS CREATED A DEEP CHASM BETWEEN THE "HAVES" AND THE "HAVE-NOTS." NOWHERE WAS THE ECONOMIC AND</p>

	<p>SOCIAL CONTRAST MORE STRIKING THAN IN NEW YORK CITY, WHERE A FEW CITY BLOCKS SEPARATED WEALTHY SOCIALITES FROM STARVING IMMIGRANTS.</p> <p>FOLLOWERS OF CHARLES DARWIN APPLIED HIS THEORIES TO HUMAN SOCIETY, PREACHING SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.</p>
01.06.20.00	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: Darwin, of course, was writing that only the fittest would survive, and so you had novelists suddenly saying we — we shouldn't be romantics anymore. We should be realists. We should be investigating what is — what is causing these changes in the society; what is causing so much poverty as well as so much wealth. It's our responsibility to use detail and not to look through rose-colored glasses.</p>
01.06.50.18	<p>JUDITH BASKIN: Social realism is the effort through art, particularly through literature, but also through painting, and one might even say to some extent through music, to represent the reality of the world in which we live from the point of view of a social conscience and with the ultimate goal of social action.</p>
01.07.13.00	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: We're looking at a moment where American literature and culture open up to a population, which had not been admitted to it or had been a subject of it before.</p>
01.07.25.00	<p>NARRATOR: TWO NEW YORK WOMEN—EDITH WHARTON AND ANZIA YEZIERKA--BOTH CRITICIZED THE CONSTRAINTS OF CLASS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY. REJECTING THE TRADITIONAL EXPECTATIONS FOR WOMEN, THEY CREATED A NEW VOICE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.</p> <p>WHILE YEZIERKA WROTE OF THE STRUGGLES OF POOR IMMIGRANTS, EDITH WHARTON OPENED A WINDOW INTO MANHATTAN HIGH SOCIETY.</p>
01.07.54.00	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: Edith Wharton lived an utterly fascinating life. Born during the Civil War and dying on the eve</p>

	of World War II, she lived through an enormous number of changes, both in her own private world and in the world at large as she knew it.
01.08.15.00	<p>NARRATOR: IN 1862, EDITH NEWBOLD JONES WAS BORN INTO THE WORLD OF THE IDLE RICH. HER PARENTS CAME FROM A COLONIAL FAMILY WHO MADE A FORTUNE IN SHIPPING, BANKING AND REAL ESTATE. AS A CHILD EDITH SPLIT HER TIME BETWEEN MANHATTAN HIGH SOCIETY, SOJOURNS IN EUROPE, AND SUMMERS IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND. IN 1879 SHE WAS INTRODUCED TO NEW YORK SOCIETY AS A WOMAN WITH MONEY AND AVAILABLE FOR MARRIAGE... SIX YEARS LATER SHE AGREED TO MARRY TEDDY WHARTON, A GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE.</p> <p>EDITH WHARTON'S SOCIAL SET WAS SMALL AND EXCLUSIVE... SHE WROTE ABOUT IT WITH INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE. WHARTON DESCRIBED HER WORLD IN HER NOVEL <i>THE AGE OF INNOCENCE</i>.</p>
01.09.14.20	<p>WHARTON READER: <i>The world of the fashionable New York hotel—a world overheated, over-upholstered, and over fitted with mechanical appliances for the gratification of fantastic requirements . . . Through this atmosphere of torrid splendor moved wane beings as richly upholstered as the furniture— beings without definite pursuits or permanent relations.</i></p>
01.9.43.00	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: The dinners that Wharton describes, for example, in <i>The Age of Innocence</i> were marvelous displays of wealth. Of enough food for a small army and, certainly, for a lot of poor people was wasted at these dinner parties. The lavishness and the money that was spent is — is just beyond our ken.</p>
01.10.10.00	<p>NARRATOR: WHARTON'S SOCIAL CIRCLE FROWNEED ON WRITING AS A CAREER FOR A WOMAN... BUT HER HUSBAND'S ALCOHOLISM AND PRECARIOUS FINANCES CONVINCED HER TO CONTINUE.</p>

	SHE CAME INTO HER OWN, WRITING ABOUT WOMEN TRAPPED BY SOCIAL FORCES.
01.10.27.00	BRUCE MICHELSON: Edith Wharton is in some ways a classic modern writer in that she's both inside of a privileged social situation and outside. We get an awful lot of our best writers from that excruciating condition of being...of belonging and not belonging.
01.10.46.00	ABBY WERLOCK: Edith Wharton was very concerned with the fact that women were partly excluded from real participation in society because they owned no property. They were the property.
01.11.02.00	NARRATOR: ONE EARLY SOCIAL CRITIC WHO RECOGNIZED THE PREDICAMENT OF UPPER CLASS WOMEN WAS THE ECONOMIST THORSTEIN VEBLEN. IN HIS 1899 BOOK, <i>THE THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS</i>, VEBLEN CONDEMNS THE PRESSURE SOCIETY PLACES ON WOMEN TO REMAIN MERELY ORNAMENTAL.
01.11.23.06	VEBLEN READER: <i>It grates painfully on our nerves to contemplate the necessity of any well-bred woman's earning a livelihood by useful work. It is not "woman's sphere." Her sphere is within the household, which she should "beautify", and of which she should be the "chief ornament".</i>
01.11.45.00	JUDITH BASKIN: This kind of thinking became typical of bourgeois or middle class life, both in Western Europe in the Nineteenth Century, Victorian England, and in the United States. To allow your wife to be the ornament of the household, the goddess, the priestess, was to proclaim to the world that you as her husband could earn enough money to support her in that style.
01.12.12.00	NARRATOR: IN HER NOVEL, <i>THE HOUSE OF MIRTH</i>, EDITH WHARTON PERSONIFIED THE ISSUE THROUGH HER PROTAGONIST LILY BART. LILY CONFIDES TO A CLOSE

	FRIEND THAT WOMEN MUST DRESS TO "MAKE THE SALE."
01.12.29.00	WHARTON READER: <i>If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well dressed till we drop- and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership.</i>
01.12.55.00	NARRATOR: WHARTON EXPLORED NOT ONLY THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES PLACED ON WOMEN, BUT ALSO THE PROCESSES OF HER CHARACTERS' MINDS.
01.13.03.00	ABBY WERLOCK: The psychological realism that Wharton employs in fleshing out Lily's character for us shows that she is a mass of confusion, worry . .
01.13.20.00	NARRATOR: WHARTON'S CHARACTERS ARE COMPLEX, WITH A CONCIIOUSNESS OF SELF. HER WRITING WAS INFLUENCED BY THE NEWLY EMERGENT IDEAS OF PSYCHOLOGY AND INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS, IDEAS POPULARIZED BY WILLIAM JAMES.
01.13.36.00	BRUCE MICHELSON: William James I think legitimizes an idea of the self as a...as a...locus of a lot of contradictions. In other words, it becomes possible to describe the individual as not being driven by one motive, noble or base, or a simple conflict of two motives knocking together like a couple of jars, but a whole swirl of possible emotions based on your...of your upbringing, based—heaven forbid—on your hormones.
01.14.05.00	NARRATOR: LILY'S EMOTIONAL CONFUSION LEADS HER TO MAINTAIN HER SOCIAL STANDING WHLE SIMULTANEOUSLY DENYING IT.
01.14.12.00	BRUCE MICHELSON: I think Edith Wharton has an...has an odd ambivalence about the class system. There are moments where she seems to chafe against it,

	<p>moments where she seems to affirm it. It's out of that ambivalence that her fiction gets interesting.</p>
01.14.27.05	<p>NARRATOR: WHARTON'S WRITING WAS NEVER A SIMPLE STATEMENT ABOUT WOMEN AS OPPRESSED BY MEN. SHE OFTEN DEPICTED MEN AS SIMILAR VICTIMS OF SOCIETY.</p>
01.14.37.10	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: When we think about the leading men in Wharton's fiction, rather than the cads in the background, we still have a problem. These are people with a lot of personal charm and sometimes with a lot of moral force. But they often hesitate in ways which are excruciating just when women need them, just when they can break away from social habit and become something new and independent.</p>
01.15.00.12	<p>NARRATOR: WHARTON'S OWN MARRIAGE ENDED UNHAPPILY. IN 1911, SHE SEPARATED FROM HER HUSBAND AND MOVED PERMANENTLY TO FRANCE. SHE RETURNED TO ACCEPT THE PULIZTER PRIZE FOR 'THE AGE OF INNOCENCE" AND AN HONORARY DEGREE FROM YALE UNIVERSITY. HAVING WRITTEN MORE THAN 50 VOLUMES OF NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES, WHARTON UNLOCKED THE PARLOR ROOMS OF THE GILDED AGE. SHE EXPOSED THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY COMPLEX WORLD OF THE SOCIAL ELITE, AT A TIME WHEN THE TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES OF CLASS AND CONCIOUSNESS WERE BEING RESHAPED BY SOCIAL CHANGE.</p>
01.15.44.00	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: What I'd say. . . in her New York the windows are open and you can hear another world outside, a world which doesn't belong to that social class, a world which may be demanding admission or requiring the people in those drawing rooms and those opulent parlors to recognize that their city is populated by more</p>

	people than just themselves.
01.16.10.00	NARRATOR: NOT MORE THAN A FEW MILES FROM WHARTON'S UPTOWN MANHATTAN SOCIETY, JEWISH IMMIGRANTS SCRAPED OUT A LIVING IN THE TENEMENT SLUMS OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE. LIKE WHARTON, WRITER ANZIA YEZIERSKA DESCRIBED HER CULTURE IN INTIMATE DETAIL. . . SHE SPOKE OF THE HOPELESS TRAP OF POVERTY.
01.16.37.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>No- the landlord ain't going to get the best from me! I'll learn him a lesson. 'An eye for an eye.'</i>
01.16.46.20	NARRATOR: IN YEZIERSKA'S SHORT STORY, THE LOST BEAUTIFULNESS, HER CHARACTER HANNAH SAVES PENNIES FOR MONTHS TO PAINT HER APARTMENT—ONLY TO HAVE THE LANDLORD RAISE THE RENT BECAUSE OF HER IMPROVEMENTS. FACED WITH EVICTION, SHE DESTROYS HER OWN HARDWORK.
01.17.08.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>With savage fury, she seized the chopping-axe and began to scratch down the paint, breaking the plaster on the walls. She tore up the floorboards. She unscrewed the gas jets, turned on the gas full force so as to blacken the white-painted ceiling. The night through she raged with the frenzy of destruction. This demolished beauty, like her own soul, though killed, still quivered and ached with the untilled pain of life. "Oi Vey!" she moaned, swaying to and fro. "So much lost beautifulness."</i>
01.18.00.00	ABBY WERLOCK: Her goal was to explain immigrant people to the rest of the Americans who were reading her fiction. And if we take as fact that the goal of social realism is to reform and to educate, then Anzia Yezierska is just as much of a social realist as Edith Wharton.
01.18.25.08	BRUCE MICHELSON: Yezierska doesn't overthrow or challenge

	American myths. She broadens the boundaries, she changes the setting, she draws in characters we haven't seen before, she tells the old story in new ways and applies them to new people.
01.18.41.00	NARRATOR: YEZIERSKA WROTE FROM HER OWN EXPERIENCE AS A JEWISH IMMIGRANT COMING OF AGE IN THE EARLY 1900'S IN NEW YORK CITY'S LOWER EAST SIDE.
01.18.51.20	JUDITH BASKIN: The Lower East Side would have been an extremely crowded, bustling, noisy part of New York City. Immigrants lived in crowded tenement buildings, generally speaking. A building might have only one tap with running water, one water closet for people to use, so the conditions of life were extremely unpleasant.
01.19.13.00	BRUCE MICHELSON: Yezierska's story is really miraculous. She comes out of what they call a "shtetls", which is a dirt-poor environment in Eastern Europe, ah, one of those Jewish settlements where nobody has anything. She's dropped into New York City at the age of 15. She learns English quickly. She attends Columbia University and somehow out of that background she becomes a master of English prose.
01.19.36.20	NARRATOR: AS A YOUNG WOMAN, YEZIERSKA STRUGGLED TO FIND SUCCESS IN AMERICA. SHE TOILED IN THE SWEATSHOPS WHILE ATTENDING NIGHT SCHOOL TO BE A STENOGRAPHER. IN HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY, <i>RED RIBBON ON A WHITE HORSE</i>, SHE REMEMBERS LOOKING FOR A JOB.
01.19.55.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>Again and again I was told, "No Jews wanted." But I had to have a job. So I kept on answering ads. I could not give up the hope that somewhere in some office it wasn't a crime to be born a Jew.</i>
01.20.13.04	NARRATOR: JUST AS YEZIERSKA CRITICIZED SOCIAL INJUSTICE, SHE ALSO CELEBRATED THE PROMISE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM... IN

	HER NOVEL <i>BREAD GIVERS</i>, A YOUNG GIRL MAKES ENOUGH MONEY TO FEED HER FAMILY FOR ONE MORE DAY... AND BASKS IN HER JOY.
01.20.31.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>It began singing in my heart, the music of the whole Hester Street. The pushcart peddlers yelling their goods, the noisy playing of children in the gutter, the women pushing and shoving each other with their market baskets- all that was only hollering noise before melted over me like a new beautiful song.</i>
01.20.54.00	NARRATOR: <i>BREAD GIVERS</i> DELVES BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE, EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION, A PAINFUL TRANSITION FOR TRADITIONAL JEWISH FAMILIES.
01.21.07.00	BRUCE MICHELSON: The crisis in <i>The Bread Givers</i> is a classic ethnic crisis. How much do you accommodate America? How much do you join the kind of social freedom and turmoil of the emerging United States without losing too much of your own ethnic identity, without losing family, without losing those relationships which both restrict you and at the same time sustain you.
01.21.36.00	JUDITH BASKIN: We see this strongly in <i>Bread Givers</i> , which is very much a book about the battle between the generations, the battle between the old patriarch from the Old Country who was not prepared to adjust, who was not prepared to change his view of the world in order to conform with what he sees as mistaken, vulgar, materialistic, American ideals, and the youngest daughter in the family who is intent on becoming Americanized, who believes that only in Americanization does she have the possibility of becoming a person, able to fulfill her potential to the fullest.
01.22.16.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>The prayers of his daughters didn't count because God didn't listen to women. Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into Heaven because they were wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God's Torah, but they could be the</i>

	<i>servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men, and washed for the men, and didn't nag or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there.</i>
01.22.59.00	JUDITH BASKIN: It's a struggle between a patriarch, a father from the Old Country who has very set and distinct ideas about what are appropriate roles for men, and what are appropriate roles for women, and It's his battle with his daughter. Or perhaps more accurately, his daughter's battle with him to insist that in America there are new gender possibilities, that she as a woman does not have to be constrained into the roles that would have been her lot in the Old Country, and which her father wants to perpetuate for his daughters even though they are now living in New York, in America.
01.23.35.00	NARRATOR: SARAH'S JOURNEY TAKES HER IN A CIRCLE OUT INTO MAINSTREAM AMERICA AND BACK TO HER FATHER. SHE COMES TO REALIZE THAT EVEN AFTER FINDING SUCCESS, SHE CANNOT ABANDON HER FAMILY AND CULTURE.
01.23.51.00	YEZIERSKA READER: <i>It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me...</i>
01.23.58.20	JUDITH BASKIN: And these are the last words of the book, her realization that no matter what she does, in her own culture she will never be respected, only as a wife who enables her husband to study will she be respected and this can only create anger and bitterness. She has gone as far as a Jewish woman can go in her particular generation, in her particular culture and she knows that, set beside American ideals, it is not enough. And this is the conflict with which the book closes: will Judaism change? Will America change? Will things change for women?
01.24.41.00	NARRATOR: WITH HER LITERARY SUCCESS,

	<p>YEZIERSKA MOVED FROM NEW YORK CITY... BUT FOUND THAT SHE COULD NOT WRITE OUTSIDE HER OLD NEIGHBORHOOD. SHE MOVED BACK TO THE LOWER EAST SIDE AND FOUND HER MUSE ONCE MORE. SHE DIED IN 1970 AT AGE 91.</p>
01.24.59.00	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: Yezierska aspired to be what some of Wharton's characters were, and yet Yezierska came to the same conclusion that Wharton did; and that is, one gives up a huge amount to reach that point, if one goes too far away, not only from one's family, one's roots, but also from one's moral compass.</p>
01.25.38.00	<p>JUDITH BASKIN: She certainly did not want to be known as a woman writer. She certainly did not think of herself as a Jewish writer, yet the great irony of her life was that she achieved her success in America because of her otherness, her Jewishness, so that what made her of interest to American readers in her time, and to some extent even today, was the window she opened into American-Jewish immigrant life.</p>
01.25.57.00	<p>NARRATOR: DRAWING FROM THE DETAILS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, ANZIA YEZIERSKA AND EDITH WHARTON CREATED WORKS OF SOCIAL REALISM. OPENING DOORS TO THEIR WORLDS, THEY EXPOSED THE INCONSISTENCIES AND INEQUITIES OF AMERICAN SOCIETY IN ONE OF ITS MOST TURBULENT TIMES. THEIR WILLINGNESS TO CRITICIZE WITHOUT PROVIDING EASY ANSWERS MAKES THEIR WRITING AS RELEVANT NOW AS WHEN IT FIRST APPEARED IN PRINT.</p>
01.26.26.20	<p>ABBY WERLOCK: We hope that there never will be another time in our history when there is a social pyramid the way Wharton described it in New York, but we need to know about it. We need to know the struggles that people went through.</p>
01.26.41.18	<p>BRUCE MICHELSON: I think there's an ongoing lesson that we can learn that culture is healthy if it's not static, if it's</p>

	always changing, if...it's always dynamic, and new ways of looking at ourselves and describing and defining ourselves are in play.
01.26.58.01	Credits
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