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## Artistic Liberties: American Literary Realism and Graphic Illustration, 1880-1905 (Amer Lit Realism Naturalism)

*Adam Sonstegard*

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# ARTISTIC



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*American Literary Realism and Graphic  
Illustration, 1880-1905*

ADAM SONSTEGARD

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**Adam Sonstegard : Artistic Liberties: American Literary Realism and Graphic Illustration, 1880-1905 (Amer Lit Realism Naturalism)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Artistic Liberties: American Literary Realism and Graphic Illustration, 1880-1905 (Amer Lit Realism Naturalism):

Artistic Liberties is a landmark study of the illustrations that originally accompanied now-classic works of American literary realism and the ways editors, authors, and illustrators vied for authority over the publications. Though today, we commonly read major works of nineteenth-century American literature in unillustrated paperbacks or anthologies, many of them first appeared as magazine serials, accompanied by ample illustrations that sometimes made their way into the serials' first printings as books. The graphic artists creating these illustrations often visually addressed questions that the authors had left for the reader to interpret, such as the complexions of racially ambiguous characters in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The artists created illustrations that depicted what outsiders saw in Huck and Jim in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, rather than what Huck and Jim learned to see in one another. These artists even worked against the texts on occasion—for instance, when the illustrators reinforced the same racial stereotypes that writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar had intended to subvert in their works. Authors of American realism commonly submitted their writing to editors who allowed them little control over the aesthetic appearance of their work. In his groundbreaking *Artistic Liberties*, Adam Sonstegard studies the illustrations from these works in detail and finds that the editors employed illustrators who were often unfamiliar with the authors' intentions and who themselves selected the literary material they wished to illustrate, thereby taking artistic liberties through the tableaux they created. Sonstegard examines the key role that the appointed artists played in visually shaping narratives—among them Mark Twain's Pudd's head Wilson, Stephen Crane's The Monster, and Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth—as audiences tended to accept their illustrations as guidelines for understanding the texts. In viewing these works as originally published, received, and interpreted, Sonstegard offers a deeper knowledge not only of the works, but also of the realities surrounding publication during this formative period in American literature.

“Artistic Liberties makes useful contributions to scholarship on the relationship between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary texts and the illustrations that accompanied their original publication in book and serial form. It extends the work of other critics who have explored this terrain and situates its argument adeptly in relation to existing scholarship. Sonstegard is at his best when he allows the intricacies of the relationship between text and image, author and illustrator, to serve as aids to interpretation.” —Henry B. Wonham, author of *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism*