INTRODUCTION
Although realism and naturalism could have sprung up independently in the United States, the historical fact is that they flourished earlier in the European countries all the way eastward to Russia and that American writers were especially stimulated by British and French models. On the other hand, though a still provincial, moralizing culture might have rejected realism and naturalism as alien or profane or harmful, nevertheless they did become established in the postbellum United States. Even Richard Chase, whose *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) had argued that the romance was the quintessential mode of fiction in the United States, felt compelled to declare:

After all, realism, although it was there from the beginning, *did* "rise," or at least became conscious of itself as a significant, liberalizing and forward-looking literary program. Whole areas of the American novel, both classic and modern, are closed to any reader who . . . thinks that it contains no meaningful element of realism. The great writers, classic and modern, did not devote themselves exclusively to translating everything into symbols, myths, and archetypes, thus removing literature from the hazards of experience and the vicissitudes of change. These writers functioned in the real world, or tried to; they reported significant aspects of the real world in their fictions, and often they had, besides archetypes, *ideas* — political, cultural, religious, historical.¹

American realism did and does matter importantly.

My essay will treat realism and naturalism as joined sequentially rather than as disjunctive, though either approach has good foundations. More specifically, though naturalism could have arisen only after absorbing the insights of realism, it insisted on subjects, attitudes, and techniques that bewildered and often offended its forerunners. Some literary historians feel obliged to work out an essentially unique rationale for it. Still, like the realists, the naturalists saw sentimental and adventurous fantasy and, behind that, the genteel tradition as the main source of miasma.
Critics favorable toward realism, through hindsight, can explain its rise as triumphantly irresistible. In fact there was no “movement” as any careful historian would define that word – no clubs, much less marches or any other group action. From various starting points a few writers worked toward a practice that we can class as realistic. After William Dean Howells’s series of monthly essays that were stitched together as *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), he attracted letters and visits from admirers. But the realist ranks stayed thin and – in the opinion of some Europeans – stunted politically. In 1888, Edward and Eleanor Marx Aveling’s *The Working-Class Movement in America* asked accusingly: “Where are the American writers of fiction?” Karl Marx’s daughter and her husband meant to emphasize that no novelist (Garland, Crane, and Dreiser were still apprentices) had looked penetratingly at the small farmers and the urban proletariat squeezed by the corporations, financiers, and speculators. Even rightist Europeans thought that the Old World realists and naturalists had plumbed far more deeply. Inclined to feature innovation, literary historians of the New World have exaggerated the success of realism in the 1880s and 1890s. It met with fierce resistance in the marketplace, which preferred the gospel of positive thinking confirmed by progress – actual or imagined.

**THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND**

The sequence with which an analysis takes up ideas inescapably implies judgments about their relative importance. More problematically, the history of ideas implies some degree of autonomy for ideas, though they always interact with their sociohistorical context. Still, there’s heuristic gain in analyzing them as a self-contained system even if novelists are drawn by temperament toward narrative rather than philosophy. A narrow use of that temperament could be to extrapolate the origins of the American realists/naturalists from the Continental masters they admired. But besides blurring national differences that would treat literature hermetically.

Domestically, the origins of realism can be traced back through famous passages of Ralph Waldo Emerson (such as “What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street . . .”) and Joel Barlow’s “Hasty Pudding,” arriving ultimately at 1620 or 1607 (if we settle for English-language sources). But even adding sidetrail sources like Sarah Kemble Knight would leave such an analysis not just provincial but too literate, as well as literary. Like everybody else, writers swim in the ocean of their society, studying (perhaps) its few metaphysicians and hearing regularly its spokespersons (politicians, editors, and ministers),
yet interacting, at some level of awareness, with the spottily educated classes.

Although the illiterate leave no formal record (before the arrival of "oral history"), Lewis O. Saum has accumulated a convincing body of evidence about them rather than balancing an inverted pyramid of inference. The antebellum sources he synthesizes—primarily the letters and diaries of the barely educated, who spell more by sound than rule—resist high-level abstractions, but they expressed (during the childhood of Howells, John William De Forest, or Mary Catherwood) three attitudes that could encourage realism. First, they pulsed with an earned feeling that the lifecycle was far harsher than political rhetoric or literary sentimentalism admitted; such a feeling, however patient, could welcome the relief of seeing easy optimism challenged. Second, they recorded a growing egalitarian self-respect fed by taking election-time bombast seriously; without soaring into Whitmanic gigantism, a subsistence farmer or a housewife could feel that his or her story deserved a more authentic telling. Third, they understandably saw that society and its values were changing, a fact that could open the mind to new approaches. Of course, countercurrents to these attitudes ran strong, drawing on a sturdy Christian religiosity that was de facto the official dogma.

Although Henry James grew up more remote from the sweaty masses than any other writer of his time, teeming Manhattan did surround Washington Square. Although the father of Sarah P. Willis tried hard to block her off from low people and sights, "Fanny Fern's" readers would wonder at how closely she knew life down to its grittiest. (Anybody who read the big-city newspapers imaginatively could intuit the entire spectrum.) Painfully observant Samuel Clemens matured in a bustling rivertown; as a steamboat pilot he saw an underside of antebellum glamour that he pretended to ignore; out in the mining West he prospered much less but endured much more than he had counted on. Perhaps overstating out of humility, Howells remembered an earnest and idealistic family that could never reach minimum security. None of these future novelists needed four years of civil war, with its festering casualties and its waves of frustrated hope, to learn that the day-to-day routine in the United States entailed painful problems, that the larger-scaled society emerging while at least the first-line defenses of a caste/class system crumbled was bringing changes in deep structure as well as street manners.

Fred Lewis Pattee stressed the trans-Appalachian roots of Mary H. Catherwood's fresh, honest fiction. More grandly, literary historians of his era celebrated the effects of frontiering as vital to the rise of realism, but, if pushed hard, this would imply that realism could arise only in the United
States (or similar countries). Furthermore, Saum’s documents show that the push westward more often registered as an ordeal under the threat of accidents, sickness, and malign weather than as a path to innovative self-reliance. Early realistic fiction was midwestern rather than western: Edward Eggleston’s *Roxy* (1878), Catherwood’s “Serena” (1882), and Hamlin Garland’s stories collected as *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891). Farmers, closer to the despised city, had more quickly soured on the forces sweeping the industrial Northeast.

Their urbanized counterparts, however skimpily educated, were also learning that the factory and the banks behind it directed, as best they could, the flow of power. That ethereal Truth so obvious to the antebellum spokespersons, North and South, that Truth assumed yet lovingly explicated, that certainty of transcendent order in a God-guided universe functioning down to the microlevel, had clouded over, had started to look gilded rather than solid. Extending his research to the later nineteenth century, Saum discovered that “natural,” understood as based in observable practice, “was swiftly becoming a synonym for good, a change that borders on transmogrification.” Just as ominous for the cozily eternal certainties, the “confined” sense of “society” as “companion and things partaking directly of companion-ship” was capitulating to a “self-centered self” that felt embedded in a broad, puzzling framework.

Stephen Crane, who prided himself on avoiding pride of status, learned quickly from exploring the lower depths, concluding that the Truth proclaimed from denominational and secular pulpits had to be unmasked, especially for the masses who tried to live up to pious dogma while fuzzily suspecting they were being misled. Dreiser, who started out at the bottom of the white social ladder, believed utterly – or so he later claimed – in transcendent values that blessed his immediate world; but when he trudged into disbelief, he thought he was expressing the vague but deep doubts of his originary class. Such are the mysteries of biography that Mary E. Wilkins, rather than ridiculing what she perceived as a dying breed of small-acreage farmers further constricted by religiosity, found cause to respect their quirkiness and to memorialize the sturdy yet insightfully skeptical women. In ways that cannot be “proven,” Crane, Dreiser, and Wilkins (later Freeman) drew much of their strength as realists/naturalists from their interaction with the anxieties permeating the millions rather than from sequenced discourse with intellectuals.

The attempt to demonstrate that mass-democratic attitudes also fed into realism is both inviting and elusive. Some believers have always received Christianity as egalitarian if not communitarian; Howells kept his family’s
fondness for such a reading, which he fleshed out with a semimodern socialism during the 1890s. Of course, the United States rested literally – through its founding documents – on the principles of liberty, equality, and impartial justice. The shrewd conservative, the schoolteacher, the editorialist, and the politician kept the catchphrases familiar and ready – ironically – for the reformers to invoke. They could invoke stronger passages from Tom Paine or the abolitionists or Whitman if they knew _Leaves of Grass_ and, better still, _Democratic Vistas_. However, Karl Marx, known at second or third hand, became anathema; his shadow so melodramatically darkens two early novels about unionizing – Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s _The Stillwater Tragedy_ (1880) and John Hay’s _The Bread-Winners_ (1884) – that they are seldom instanced as realistic. But egalitarian ideas, partly as held and exemplified from below, surely encouraged Howells or Wilkins to present the bottom classes more empathetically.

Although “serious” writers naturally lived among the literate classes, realists got little help from them. The American variety of Victorianism certainly matched its model in believing that sober uplift served the community better than probing into its failures. Whereas Howells’s David Sewell attacked only sentimental romances at the dinner party in _The Rise of Silas Lapham_, rank-and-file ministers were likely to carry on their tradition of warning against all fiction as sin-inducing frivolity; more importantly, they were increasingly rounding off their sermons – after the expected scourging – with a chord of hope that included worldly redemption. Without much retooling, some ministers doubled as academics, though an overworked professoriate was emerging. Professors of English who taught any literature at all favored the classics (Greek and Roman more than British) and accepted as their mission molding character rather than challenging the inherited ideology. While H. H. Boyesen spoke out for realism during his fifteen years at Columbia University, none of his colleagues joined him.

Among the other emerging professions, realists might have expected support from lawyers, who in the 1870s made the crucial passage to defending, without loss of caste, (high-paying) clients who reeked ethically; the antebellum mold of the gentleman/attorney/belletrist had crumbled. While a thin layer of _raisonneurs_ was developing a new academic specialty, courses such as “mental” or “moral philosophy” were typically taught by theologians, were mandatory for all seniors, and were designed to send them out convinced that virtue was triumphant. “From the pre-eminent mental philosopher of the 1860s and the 1870s, Professor Noah Porter, Yale students learned that knowing was possible because ‘the _rational methods of the divine and human intellect_ are similar.’” Porter “assumed that God was
beneficent and that He had arranged human and natural life according to certain uniform principles." Such confidence sanctioned current principles of behavior and belief, though the intelligentsia also preached the gospel of progress – progress that would make everyday life immensely more civilized, not just more comfortable, yet would not erode the underlying Truth.

The most evident proof of progress was the accelerating success of technology. Both the sophisticate and the bumpkin marveled at the showy manipulations of a reality that, significantly, had to be uncovered by expert techniques rather than magic or prayers. Electricity was the most obviously impressive feat. All along it had lurked there somewhere; once the technical mind found it, it worked for everybody’s use and pleasure – the telegraph, the telephone, the light bulb, and the phonograph. A farmer who had only heard about these wonders might see a locomotive pulling an immense load. If the first electric motors seemed less mighty, they did confirm the benefits of technology. During the nineteenth century these benefits steadily evolved toward anti-supernatural or merely secular attitudes, eager to accept the treasures of this earth. Once John Stuart Mill published his Utilitarianism in 1861, the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number soothed many consciences. Careful, objective thought would discover new facts, from which induction derived “laws” for the laboratory and also for ethical choices. In 1866 Robert E. Lee counseled his daughter: “Read history, works of truth, not novels and romances. Get correct views of life and learn to see the world in its true light. It will enable you to live pleasantly, to do good, and, when summoned away, to leave without regret.” This advice could stand as a reprise of Scottish “commonsense” philosophy – the favored antebellum metaphysics – but it could also sound up-to-date during the decades ahead.

At the self-consciously intellectual level, scientific thinking, labeled as such, won supporters for its coherence and rationality, reinforced by usable results. As the century began, a coordinated universe, planned by a divine creator, was already revealing manipulable patterns; problem-solving instead of wishful thinking (or the wishful feeling encouraged by sentimental romances) produced answers beneficial ever after for this world. Closure-prone historians of ideas tend to make Darwinian biology displace mechanical physics, but even today many lay admirers of science as the path into functioning reality are fundamentally Newtonian.

With the return to peacetime discourse, interest in the scientific approach jumped sharply. Examples so abound as to recall Charles Darwin’s astonishment at how nature fills every crack and any crevice. In Boston the Radical Club started up in 1867 to suit the “desire of certain ministers and laymen
for larger liberty of faith, fellowship, and communion . . . for the freest investigation of all forms of religious thought and inquiry.” But by the time the club dissolved in 1880, its meetings had centered “generally upon scientific and educational problems.” As early as 1873, when Whitelaw Reid – already in control of the New York Tribune – delivered a widely praised speech at Dartmouth College, he could assert: “Ten or fifteen years ago, the staple subject here for reading and talk, outside study hours, was English poetry and fiction. Now it is English science. Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Huxley, Darwin, Tyndall, have usurped the places of Tennyson and Browning, and Matthew Arnold and Dickens.” Reid, who would have icily resented the label of philistine, was pleased that “we are no longer sentimental” but firmly quizzical instead. Although he primarily belabored “sentimentalists” about politics, he also cared about literature. To many intellectuals, science taught objectivity, defined both as the patient screening out not just of prejudices but also useless truisms and as the springboard to further insights. With a counterbalance of irony, the basis for Howellsian realism was in place.

Darwin's On the Origin of Species would prove more important for naturalism, though it came out as early as 1859. Not that it played to the stereotype of the epoch-making theory that inches toward notice. When On the Origin was soon republished in the United States, the New York Times ran a very long review that begins: “Mr. Darwin, as the fruit of a quarter-century of patient observation and experiment, throws out, in a book whose title at least by this time has become familiar to the reading public, a series of arguments and inferences so revolutionary as, if established, to necessitate a radical reconstruction of the fundamental doctrines of natural history.” But that revolutionary thrust was soon blunted by a “soft” Darwinism, partly cosmetic and partly optimistic. Like his father a Congregational minister and long a professor of moral philosophy and metaphysics at Yale University, Noah Porter, along with his peers, rejected a nature red in tooth and claw as manifestly false; more crucially, they argued that evolution was simply God's intricate, patient way of bringing humankind to its almost perfected state. Ridicule at all levels of print down to filler-jokes and cartoons doubtless discouraged other minds from bending Darwin's way. Most viscerally, there was reluctance to abdicate the throne of the chain of being or to slide from the center of the universe into the animal kingdom – moves harder to take because Thomas H. Huxley, Darwin's “bulldog,” insisted on facing the brute facts.

Although “hard” Darwinism had to cut across the grain in the United States, it did spread soon. Enough proof abounds to have delighted Darwin,
who liked to pile up examples stupefyingly. Before the monthly *Galaxy*, Mark Twain’s chief outlet, gave a rich survey, it predicted:

The Taine of the twentieth century who shall study the literature of the nineteenth will note an epochal earmark. He will discover a universal drenching of belles-lettres with science and sociology, while the ultimate, dominant tinge in our era he will observe to be Darwinism. Not only does all physical research take color from the new theory, but the doctrine sends its pervasive hues through poetry, novels, history. A brisk reaction betrays its disturbing presence in theology. Journalism is dyed so deep with it that the favorite logic of the leading article is “survival of the fittest,” and the favorite jest is “sexual selection.” In the last new book, in the next new book, you will detect it.12

The *Galaxy’s* particulars included: “At New Orleans, last Mardi Gras, what did the ‘Mistik Krewe of Comus’ choose for their sport but the ‘Missing Links’ of Darwin.” Although playfulness more than anxiety must have motivated that sport, the members of Boston’s Radical Club were perturbed by a lecture on “Evolution,” which pointed out that the skulls of some extinct human species “did exactly resemble the corresponding features of our monkey.” Discussion drifted on into “the relations of human nature to that of the lower animals.”

The questions that Darwin stimulated were far-reaching yet intensely personal, gritty yet exciting, obvious to wits and journalists yet profound to philosophers of science. He “established a theoretical framework for integrating biological thought with the mechanistic structure of physical thought,” thus supplying “grounds for a unified system of knowledge.”13 Lay thinkers, including novelists, absorbed Darwinism more painfully. Even those who stood immovably on religious faith had to cope harder with the possibility that science and religion are not compatible. Before Darwin, the lecturer in moral philosophy might rhapsodize that the physical world keeps offering up evidence of how the Creator had designed it to serve His flock, or still cozier evidence of how the physical and human worlds serve each other. The literal accuracy of the Bible – already clouded by the textural “higher criticism” and the comparative study of religions – grew dimmer; Heaven as both goal and endpoint also dimmed while secular values made for a better wager than in Pascal’s time. As increasingly understood just before Darwin, God’s design had incorporated moral order, which no longer meant predestination but a freedom of will within mutual benevolence. Huxleyan humankind competed to survive for – arguably – no demonstrable purpose beyond producing members of the species who would repeat the process.

Although basic Darwinism proposed a coordinated pair of principles, it
implied consequences so wrenching that individual acceptance varied dizzyingly. Still, the stance of realists and naturalists differed fundamentally from that of Jane Austen, often made the exemplar of how the Newtonian worldview could shape a novel. They tried to discipline themselves to a stricter level of objectivity, even that of the scientist poised to consider any reasonable idea – such as that the ancestors of Homo sapiens may include simians but not angels, that Homo may act far less from sapience than from instinct, that physical needs may override the conscience, that life is a chancy process rather than a path toward redemption, that nurture within an inescapably specific environment shapes organisms in fascinating but sometimes grim ways. In the pre-Darwinian United States the boldest novelists, and especially Herman Melville, had sensed most of these ideas, but nobody could combine such loomings into an integrated vision and technique.

Melville came close because he resonated to some of the same ideas that educated Darwin. When the other sciences get a fair hearing, On the Origin blurs as the massive turning point. Once mostly a hobby, geology as practiced by Charles Lyell established the principle of uniformity, that is, the consistency of earth-shaping processes over aeons, over “deep” time. Likewise, chemistry was discovering other underlying processes or structures, showily demonstrable in the kitchen or the factory or, in ten seconds, at a popular lecture. More crucial at first than any metaphysical iconoclasm was the impact on general knowledge. Sciences of the nineteenth century were of course less abstruse than today, and their leaders wrote for the weekly and monthly magazines. By 1871, when Howells took over as chief editor, the Atlantic Monthly carried the subtitle “A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics.” Furthermore, readers eagerly labored to keep pace, and Popular Science Monthly, featuring articles that now look dully formidable, reached a print run of eleven thousand soon after 1872. Its publisher had already started an “International Scientific Library” that would grow to over fifty volumes through offering the leading thinkers, not their interpreters.

E. L. Youmans (1821–87), the organizer behind those two enterprises, zealously promoted Herbert Spencer into one of the most spacious intellects since humankind began to reason – though his books are now ignored as wordy, opaque, and free-floating. His disciples took him as proving that a system of interrelated “forces” guides an evolutionary sweep upward. Building the symmetrical mansion of certainties that they yearned for, he supplied more of an emotional than a logical experience. Whereas Howells and Crane were indifferent, Dreiser and Norris realized that they had been groping to find his “universe of force.” Norris’s grandiosity causes later
readers to skim without recognizing that *The Octopus* could not have been written without Spencer. He would help lead less ebullient minds such as Henry Adams to what Herbert Schneider, in a history of American philosophy, labels "desperate naturalism."

Intellectuals willing to consider the scientific approach could feel that they were discovering how their world is put together, could feel proud of exploring caves that stand-fast religionists shunned, and could grow eager to apply empiricism everywhere. Getting up from armchair introspection or from prayer for a humankind that had in Adam's fall sinned all, they started to observe how individuals develop, to record how consciousness actually works, and so to move toward William James's functionalism. Gordon O. Taylor has concluded succinctly:

Roughly between 1870 and 1900 fictive psychology in the American novel undergoes a fundamental shift. . . . The basic view of the mind underlying the representation of consciousness in fiction moves away from a notion of static, discrete mental states requiring representational emphasis on the conventional nature of particular states, toward a concept of organically linked mental states requiring representational emphasis on the nature of the sequential process itself.\(^\text{14}\)

Although biographers profitably debate the influence of William James as psychologist on his brother Henry's novels – and possible reciprocity – other writers doubtless learned from the essays commissioned by the magazines that considered themselves conduits of the latest expertise and kept increasing their audience in the decades after the Civil War.

By the 1880s James and Howells were berated for cutting, as coldly as a scientist, into the mind of the girl-woman, endangering her ideals along with those of her admirers. We have to wonder whether that stopped James and Howells from cutting deeper, down to the libido, and whether their critics felt threatened more by biology than by current psychology. In 1871 Darwin had released *The Descent of Man*, bothersome enough with its pictures comparing the facial emoting of simians and humans. But when read carefully, it confronted the effects of pairing for reproduction, which *On the Origin of Species* had discussed inconclusively. The public was uneasily fascinated, according to the *Galaxy* essayist who complained that "the favorite jest is 'sexual selection.'" Although hit-and-run historians overstate Victorian prudery, literary realists, and much more naturalists, felt charged on behalf of objective fact to scrutinize the professed standards for sexuality and, most egregiously, for courtship and marriage.

Less traumatically, post-Darwin biology, by supporting the principle that
all experience operates under “laws,” contributed to the rise of sociology, already proposed by Auguste Comte as a science for codifying a fresh concept, which appropriated the term society. “The older disciplines had failed fully to explain human conduct, not only because of their reliance on ideal, rather than observed, categories but also because they were limited in what they investigated. In ‘society,’ the new intellectuals of the later nineteenth century hit upon a concept that described a space between the State as described in political theory and Man as understood in philosophy.” This “recognition of society as a rule-bound entity that was greater than the sum of its individual parts” lay behind the founding in 1865 of the American Social Science Foundation, which stressed reform but increasingly debated theories of development.15 The so-called genetic method began tracking the individual within the shaping context that might be changing too. While psychologists groped for the discrete individual, the sociologists discovered typicality. As Jerome J. McGann encapsulates the matter: “. . . it came to be believed that if one wanted to understand ‘human nature’ in general, one had to proceed along two dialectically related paths: along the path of a thorough sociohistorical set of observations and along the path of the, now so-called, sciences of the artificial. For ‘human nature’ was not (is not) ‘made’ by God, it was (and continues to be) artfully, artificially constructed by human beings, within certain given limits, in the course of their social development.”16 The realistic writers’ dilemma had arrived, though they saw it as an invigorating challenge: how to create unique characters who nevertheless stand for more than themselves, stand for an occupation, a class, a “type.”

Some, if not most, of the mainline spokespersons during the 1890s chortled at the dilemma. William Roscoe Thayer, then eminent as an editor, historian, and biographer, jeered at the novelist who pretended to “scientific impartiality,” precision, and also breadth.17 Others professed to accept current science yet insisted on a God enthroned just behind its laws, a step from where He had reigned at mid-century. Edith Wharton’s slyly titled short story “The Descent of Man” (1904) sympathized with a biologist who, irritated by “soft” uses of science, tried to “avenge his goddess by satirising her false interpreters” and their “hazy transcendentalism”; but his book, which heaped “platitude on platitude, fallacy on fallacy, false analogy on false analogy,” was welcomed seriously into bestsellerdom. Although acclaimed painters like F. E. Church absorbed the geologists’ concept of uniformitarian process within deep time, their landscapes depended on a “natural theology”; Darwinism only sharpened their sense of the intricate variety of the Nature planned by the Creator.18 Taking our own lesson from
evolutionary thought, we must focus on how novelists behaved both individually and typically within their particular ambiance.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Major shifts of ideas occur within broad, visible processes. Still, it sharpens insight to distinguish the historical from the intellectual sources of realism, to specify the events and groupings that elicited or else supported it. Getting specific must start, however, from the recognition that attitudes toward history itself were changing. Collectively, nineteenth-century science undercut the ancient theories that humankind moves in recurring cycles; instead, the doctrine or myth of progress sprang into many-faceted dominance. In even minimal terms this scotched any harking back to some golden age. The field marshals of progress orated with positive gestures that embraced all viable troops, including novelists. In 1870 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, now remembered mainly for his interchange with Emily Dickinson, predicted an “advance along the whole line of literary labor, like the elevation which we have seen in the whole quality of scientific work in America, within the past twenty years”; soon after, he joined the chorus anticipating the “Great American Novel” that such an advance would surely produce.\(^{19}\) Progress also meant discarding the outmoded as much as it demanded openness to the new. While scientists used some facts discovered in the past, it was essentially prehistory for the bustling, superior present.

A fortified thesis holds that the modern novel, inherently mimetic, arose along with the middle class of a commercial, industrializing society. That middle class began craving to be presented respectfully and encouraged that end by buying the obliging novels. In turn, it encouraged middle-class secularism, which found that practical economics can pay off at a rising rate. Otherworldliness faded before the pleasures of consumerism and reaching shorter-term goals.

The middle class professed religious (synonymous with Christian) values. However, the realistic classics of the later nineteenth century would rarely show such values as happily directing the mainstream of experience. In fact, the genteelist critics attacked those classics as impious or actively destructive of idealism, and romances about faith that conquers all, usually through a woman’s tenacity, far outsold those classics. Especially in the United States, the middle class had entered into its schizophrenia: its split between laissez-faire economics and a rationalizing denial of the brutalities entailed. As one result, men – the “breadwinners” competing head to head – belittled fiction as a toy for sheltered women, while realists tried to win respect for what
they considered the highest potential of the novel, its “fidelity to experience and probability of motive,” according to Howells. Since the middle class had built its success upon practicality, H. H. Boyesen, a would-be peer of Howells, argued craftily, in “The Great Realists and Empty Story-Tellers” (1895), that their mode of fiction helped toward “survival and success in life.”

Although the middle class was more powerful in the United States than elsewhere, it was less self-conscious than in England or France. With some sincerity, its rhetoric for onshore politics ignored or minimized the sorting by income in a New World of equality. “I affirm,” wrote Higginson in “Americanism in Literature,” “that democratic society, the society of the future, enriches and does not impoverish human life, and gives more, not less, material for literary art. Distributing culture throughout all classes, it diminishes class-distinction and develops distinctions of personal character” (62). Early admirers of Howells declared Silas Lapham the embodiment of Higginson’s vision, especially as he elaborated it: “To analyze combinations of character that only our national life produces, to portray dramatic situations that belong to a clearer social atmosphere, – this is the higher Americanism.” But Higginson’s future could not later welcome Carrie Meeber (of Columbia City) as a product of “our national life” nor the Bowery as part of our “social atmosphere”; it had retained too much of his antebellum world.

The Civil War, we now recognize, ended in victory for Northern capitalism and its centralizing bureaucracy, its network of railroads, and – most important at the time – its factories. Its captains trumpeted the visible changes, certified as Progress, and for the Centennial played loud Te Deums. The festivities of 1876 presented American history as a quickening march, a sequenced narrative. In actual demography, postwar industrialism lured people from farm to town and then to pell-mell cities, inviting yet mysterious to outsiders. Editors saw an urgent need as well as profitable opportunity to document the new social contexts – the city more than the factory – and the way that Americans were adapting to assembly lines and horsecars, electric lights and apartment houses. The competing, burgeoning metropolitan newspapers featured the twists of daily survival or success; periodicals featured breathless essays on changing facts and attitudes. Ephemeral fiction also exploited such approaches, though it more often played up to nostalgia.

Serious novelists likewise felt the impulse to explain, or at least to record, the onrushing changes. But any documentation is selective and therefore implicitly judgmental. The realistic temperament turned toward the disjunct-
tures between optimistic rhetoric and what was actually happening. Its next phase—“critical” realism—emphasized the mismatches between the boastings of laissez-faire industry and the workers ground up in the dark satanic mills; Rebecca Harding Davis’s still familiar short story had already moved in 1861 beyond documentation to pained protest. Little known today are some texts of countercritical realism that showed factory “hands” resisting their own best interests. But by the 1890s its genial foremen and owners appeared seldom. The realists we still respect, Howells especially, would increasingly indict either the logic of Manchester Liberalism or those who carried it into a practice that refused a livable wage and a safe workplace.

The Jeffersonian-agrarian ideal collapsed so slowly that, into the twentieth century, farmers attracted wider sympathy than factory workers. Their troubles had differentiated them from the quirky trailblazers, ennobled in 1893 as Frederick Jackson Turner’s “pioneers,” and the get-rich-quick prospectors of Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*. They battled nature to function as productive units of the nation but were exploited by bankers, railroads, and “trusts” (industrial monopolies). Although the farmers producing for the commodities market were in fact gambling, they had no chance against the speculators in Omaha, Kansas City, Saint Louis, or Chicago—who looked to Manhattan for the bank of last resort. Although the Grangers and the Populists protested the farmers’ entrapment sooner than did the intellectuals, by the later 1880s Hamlin Garland was writing short stories that still resonate. Historians also honor E. W. Howe’s *Story of a Country Town* (1883) and Joseph Kirkland’s *Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County* (1887).

Before the Civil War the major novels had ignored current affairs. While *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) made a sensation, neither chattel nor wage slavery inspired a genre of social-justice fiction. The promise of romantic democracy to set all wrong matters right for whites still sounded believable. After the Civil War, however, many of those matters not only looked but felt different; the age of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and even Abraham Lincoln seemed almost quaint. Overriding a chaotic increase in population, modernization crunched onward without a pause. However, historians agree on its exclamation points. Grantism, the deep corruption in federal affairs, upset revered symbols: the chief hero of the war had degenerated into a President conned by his cronies. In 1873 a depression ended the dream that the postwar prosperity would go on expanding forever. Too soon after the Centennial, the railroad riots of 1877 proved that American workers—perhaps even the native-born—could destroy property, could defy the regular army called in to rescue the police. Violence punctuated the 1880s more
The American Background

regularly, as the Knights of Labor led strikes and the Populist militants stirred. A judicial lynching after the Haymarket Affair astounded Howells. The bloody Homestead strike of 1892 horrified several differing constituencies; the Panic of 1893 reminded those who had prospered lately that the economic machine had structural flaws; labor unions and their allies concluded during the Pullman strike of 1894 that the wealthy made up law and order to suit themselves. If the campaign against the Filipinos in 1900 had inspired memorable fiction, that would have seemed the climax of the education that middle-class liberals had accumulated during the last thirty-five years. Instead, economic history had compiled a more dangerous liability: in Dreiser and Jack London the city’s victims were starting to produce their own writers, mordantly skeptical toward what the ruling elites told them to believe.

Between 1865 and the First World War, three movements that never built to a famous crisis disturbed, nevertheless, the hymns to progress. The freed slaves themselves began contrasting the promises made (and sometimes proclaimed as kept) and the reality that was eroding the ground won during Reconstruction. White women began joining organizations that campaigned for their legal and political rights; more illuminating for novelists, the bravest women announced that the genteel version of their character and desires hid the facts. Finally, immigration, growing exponentially, flooded in a melange of humankind whose values and behavior shook WASP complacencies. Moreover, those immigrants who had believed democracy’s promises began resisting their mistreatment; a few - numerous by comparison with homegrown reformers - imported a leftist critique of capitalism.

A novelist could perceive such movements as an opportunity, a challenge, or even a responsibility. At first Howells, like others, talked about the duty of literature to help heal the wounds of the war. Next, he urged middle-class readers to enter empathetically the maze of religions, ethnic enclaves, jobs, and regional mores. Pushed programatically, this added up to a wholly fresh way of looking at American society, not just through literature; minimally, it called for an objective, accurate picture of who and what was out there. Cultural historians have documented the lightning spread and deep popularity of photography, of taking and looking at pictures.20 During the last decades of the century the trompe-l’œil precision of William Michael Harnett and his school fascinated public taste; portrait painters, alert to the rampant diversity, understood the “anxious need” of Americans “to know what was going on beneath the masks of those strange others with whom they were bafflingly yet inextricably bound.”21 In newspapers and maga-
zines, fresh targets of humor emerged: mystics, ethereal poets, hermits, fortune-tellers, and gallants looked spurious in a steam, steel, and stock-market age.

During the 1880s the realist dynamic pushed beyond the ideal of perceptive accuracy toward a criticism of the dominating consensus – criticism for its failures not only of vision but also of motives that had blinded it to its harmful results. Howells, responsive to the evolving political-economic struggle, solidified into a gentle force for social justice. Among the ongoing coinages the term liberal realism fits his later fiction best. It exemplified his faith in achieving a shared referentiality that can function humanely and correctly. Such a faith was historically conditioned, but it continued to condition history.

THE MARKETPLACE

Although the term marketplace is still common, it was already an anachronism for the publishing business in the later nineteenth century. Technology, finance capital (in 1899 the venerable Harper & Brothers fell into the House of Morgan’s net), and advertising (aggressive, grand-scale “marketing”) would often determine what readers bought and so what got published next. That a diagram for these interactions comes harder than one for science or social conflict does not impugn their power. Of course, while publishing as a business shaped the literary realists more subtly than they could be expected to perceive, they would agree that we must consider its effects on the fiction preferred by successful editors and their customers.

However manipulated in their choices, readers ultimately exerted their own effects among the many tiers of taste available during the postbellum decades, as technologies of manufacture and distribution made more kinds of materials affordable. But no technocrat has proved whether or why they will prefer one book over another. Since genuinely enthralled readers of a novel engage with it subliminally, they themselves cannot explain their preferences. Furthermore, postbellum readers, as always, switched from one clientele to another as their moods or needs oscillated.

It is clear how the realists envisioned the audience they hoped to reach. Respecting fiction as a potentially constructive discourse with social as well as private consequences, they aspired to encourage a “common culture in which all classes could partake.” Doubtless calculating royalties too, they aimed for a readability that would win and hold a following against fierce competition and developed a professionalism that analyzed more coldly than had the antebellum writers the dialectic of supply and demand.
specifically, they felt a mission to displace fiction that inspired destructive fantasy through paragons of courage, honesty, or chaste courtship.

Because the novel offered much more room for detail, carried higher prestige, and could pay better, the realists aimed primarily at the book trade. Their desired publishers were the firms with an ongoing list for the educated general reader, who supposedly detested pulp fiction or near pornography; such a list included cutting-edge books that would bring status along with passable sales. But sentimental romance in its several varieties sold by far the best. As Scribner's Monthly reminded Boyesen, his breathless, exotic *Gunnar* (1874) continued to attract more buyers than novels darkened by "the objectionable influences allied to the so-called realistic school." Not yet labeled by George Santayana, the genteel tradition gained strength throughout the last decades of the century. The mainstream firms resisted fiction that clearly questioned the reigns code or just lacked the élan of ideality. Quite consciously, they supported the principle that social institutions — very much including the print-agencies — are interdependent, and that each must instill the basic truths that empower a progressing human-kind.

Boyesen gave the boldest analysis of how the unofficial censorship worked. "The average American has no time to read anything but newspapers, while his daughters have an abundance of time at their disposal, and a general disposition to employ it in anything that is amusing. The novelist who has begun to realize that these young persons constitute his public, naturally endeavors to amuse them." Boyesen was constantly aware that editors of the "paying magazines" mediated between him and those daughters; they acted for "that inexorable force called public taste." Still, behind them loomed "the young American girl. She is the Iron Madonna who strangles in her fond embrace the American novelist..." Boyesen also came closest to stating a related complaint: literature was being emasculated because its determining readers were women. More calmly, Howells pondered how to reeducate rather than dethrone the Iron Madonna; furthermore, he thought her less influential than the hardening pattern of the wife-mother as the docent of fine culture. Although recent analysis agrees that realistic fiction sold to both genders, publishers doubtlessly worried about the reviewers who invoked feminine tastes, and Howells tried for a more masculine appeal.

In fusing the magazine and book business Boyesen's analysis fit the facts. Novelists with any leverage first sold the serial rights; moreover, short stories paid well and quicker as the monthlies reached their peak of prosperity. They earned it by fashioning a "family" magazine, whose contents kept up
with major trends and with advice for positive thinking. Alert to their moral superiority over the *National Police Gazette* and its ilk, they rejected ads for improper merchandise, including such books. Of course they favored upbeat fiction, as Edith Wharton learned young when *Scribner's* turned down her novella “Bunner Sisters” because it did not have a cheerful episode at the break between installments.29 Writers held back a gloomy story for a collection that might include it as counterpoint; when an editor asked for a “holiday” piece, they knew what chords to play. Boyesen grew sardonic: “The editor, being anxious to keep all his old subscribers and secure new ones, requires of his contributor that he shall offend no one. He must not expose a social or religious sham . . . he must steer carefully, so as to step on nobody’s toes. . . . However much he may rebel against it, he is forced to chew the cud of old ideas, and avoid espousing any cause which lacks the element of popularity.” Even so, this indictment understated how quickly subscribers protested that a story or essay had violated some point of propriety.30

Richard Watson Gilder could have proved that Boyesen had also oversimplified. His *Century Magazine*, the leading monthly, published stories and novels that are still respected; in the 1880s it serialized *A Modern Instance* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* – and Henry James’s *The Bostonians* to noticeably light applause – and in the next generation, Jack London’s *The Sea-Wolf*. After Howells had made his staunch liberalism clear, *Harper’s Monthly* renewed his contract for “Editor’s Study.” Although firmly preferring ideality, the dominant magazines printed essays that lifted the torch for realism. More importantly, because they sold continuous freshness, they wanted fiction that broke through predictable stereotypes. An interplay developed: realists probed the limits while watching their income; editors strained to predict subscribers’ tastes and to outshine competitors while holding on to some margin of principle; readers expected fiction that suited their values but were liable to cry cliché! On the edges, latecomers probed for a share-grabbing distinctiveness. In the early 1890s the new owner of *Cosmopolitan* tried to climb along a reformist route; crusading editors of second- and third-rate magazines, most notably B. O. Flower of the *Arena*, sought out young dissenters like Hamlin Garland; a band of livelier, lower-priced monthlies inched toward the muckraking of the early 1900s that encouraged franker, more probing fiction.

Historians of realism identify journalism as the common road of apprenticeship.31 The pattern works well enough for Howells, E. W. Howe, Ambrose Bierce, Crane, Harold Frederic, Dreiser, and Willa Cather, among others. Certainly, reporters routinely see and hear facts that contradict offi-
cial morality. Just turned twenty, Howells found the sordidness of his stint on the *Cincinnati Gazette* unbearable. Dreiser recalled a ghastlier trauma: “I went into newspaper work” at the age of twenty “and from that time dates my real contact with life – murders, arson, rape, sodomy, bribery, corruption, trickery and false witness in every conceivable form.” But, raised two generations later, Dreiser could add, “Finally I got used to the game and rather liked it.”

Less sensationally, newspapers once gave much space to reviewing books. In playing to a mass audience they were likelier than the magazines to praise native writers; calling for, predicting, the Great American Novel made the term a catchphrase, and realism was potentially the most indigenous mode. Far more influential, probably, were the so-called literary comedians. Between 1870 or so and 1920 many a newspaper had its own humorist-columnist poking fun at Hamlin Garland’s heroes who “sweat and do not wear socks” and heroines who “eat cold huckleberry pie and are so unfeminine as not to call a cow ‘he.’” However, sentimental or historical romances overreached worse, with characters and rhetoric that struck cynical journalists as demanding ridicule. Aside from such burlesque, the literary comedians featured an honestly colloquial language seldom used elsewhere in respectable print. Boyesen’s “average American” who “has no time to read anything but newspapers” was absorbing a protorealism, not just from the crime stories but also the columns meant to be amusing.

**THE MOVEMENT**

In any argument on whether nineteenth-century realism was concerted enough to rate as a “movement” both the positive and the negative are easily attacked. Many intelligent polemicists assumed that “realism” signified a clear and present breakthrough or else danger. On the other hand, the roster of novelists who explicitly endorsed that catchword is short and conspicuously lacks the names of Mark Twain and Henry James.

The “realism war,” as Howells called it, first grew sharp during the 1880s. Because art for art’s sake showed no American panache until the 1890s, the debate posed realism against “ideality.” While it never reached the sophistication or intensity of its earlier climax in France, it had a far stronger moral-ethical tone. For the historian, to highlight particular debaters itself turns into a test of objectivity, because either side could sound
naive. Gilder's record as editor of *Century Magazine* makes his "Certain Tendencies in Current Literature" the fairest exhibit: Since "realism is, in fact, something in the air . . . the Time-Spirit . . . the state of mind of the nineteenth century," it "is at this moment vitalizing American literature and attracting to it the attention of the world." Having overstated generously, Gilder orated onward to a compromise: "The pronounced realist is a useful fellow-creature, but so also is the pronounced idealist - stouten his work though you will with a tincture of reality." At the least Gilder shows that the opposing terms operated then as intrinsically significant.

Deepest down, Gilder sided with the idealists, some of whom debated far more testily. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who kept rising in prestige from the 1860s until after 1900, sniped away. His "An Untold Story" ended provocatively: "A gloss of grim fact might have spoiled the finer text"; "At the Funeral of a Minor Poet" condemned the "Zolaistic Movement" for its "miasmatic breath." In the magazines, satiric verse consistently favored the side of ideality. Because of Boyesen's temperament and European training he emerged as realism's fiercest champion in a string of essays that his death cut short in 1895.

Besides his polemics, younger novelists could draw enough strength from the essays collected by Howells as *Criticism and Fiction*, by Garland as *Crumbling Idols* (1894), and by Norris as *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903) to believe that they lived in the age of realism. Kate Chopin, Harold Frederic, and Edith Wharton could stand on what seemed a liberated rationale, though today we see them as having been conditioned by the same society they urged their audience to judge objectively. That society taught the dignity of self-support along with sincerity and altruism but awarded fame for strenuous personal achievement; while advising the masses to nurture themselves on "good" literature, it shaped tastes toward immediate profits, on which authors had to live. The realists, who never came close to dominating sales or critical opinion, struggled with problems they sometimes could not define, much less master. For instance, Howells puzzled over the dilemma of how to improve best-sellers by belittling them without reinforcing elitism.

Historians who hold that a movement did coalesce have to stretch when inscribing its honor roll, especially if they exclude native American humor and the larger school of local color. Some would include Harriet Beecher Stowe's turn into a household-centered "domestic" realism that they find already active by the 1850s; her *Oldtown Folks* (1869) opens with a memorable manifesto for plain-folks mimesis. Others would resuscitate Oliver Wendell Holmes's three "medicated" novels, particularly *Elsie Venner*
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(1861). Historians posted on Southern literature reach back further to William Gilmore Simms, for the raw, lusty detail of his works set on the “Border” – the frontier of the antebellum Southwest.

Nevertheless, when John W. De Forest surveyed current fiction in 1868 he found no major movement in sight.\(^{39}\) Actually, he could have puffed his own *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) for its war scenes, fitfully natural dialogue, and ironic undertone. His *Kate Beaufort* (1872) and *Playing the Mischief* (1875) moved further toward a quiz-zicality and self-discipline that would have improved Edward Eggleston’s novels. Although the sentimentalism runs too deep for surgery in the once famous *Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), *Roxy* (1878) boldly accepts a Darwinian descent; its narrator comments on village folk enjoying the antics of caged monkeys that they “were not conscious that there might be aught of family affection in this attraction” and laughed “without a sense of gamboling rudely over the graves” of “their ancestors” (chap. 20). Working toward its climax, Roxy explodes a steamboat: a “young Baptist minister, who with his bride had just come aboard, stood . . . waving his handkerchief to the friends on shore, when in an instant the boat flew into a thousand pieces. . . . The bar-keeper alighted on the inverted roof of his bar, away in the stream, and was saved. The young Baptist minister and his wife were never found. A mile away . . . in a tree-top, there was found a coat-collar, which his friends thought belonged to him” (chap. 57). More crucially, the future of the worthy heroine, who married for love, looks troubled rather than happy.

By the 1880s the realistically persuaded were focusing on complexity of motive. S. Weir Mitchell, better known as a clinician and medical psychologist, kept readers of *In War Time* (1884) unsure how to judge the protagonist; deservedly, he ends up “broken” in mind and spirit, but that result was not predictable and was constructed with enough empathy to block any effect of a villain. For a while Henry Blake Fuller, in *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) and *With the Procession* (1895), promised to outdo Howells. Admirers of Boyesen’s polemics had yet stronger hopes, supported less by the qualities of *The Mammon of Unrighteousness* (1891) than by its preface, which pledged to avoid “sensational incidents”: “I have disregarded all romantic traditions, and simply asked myself in every instance, not whether it was amusing, but whether it was true to the logic of reality – true in color and tone to the American sky, the American soil, the American character.” Although Boyesen’s star dimmed quickly, Robert Herrick, another professor of literature, was soon impressing reviewers with intellectually ambitious novels, known today only to scholars. Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of
Theron Ware (1896), which also has only such readers now, deserves better for its low-key, tolerant, slow defrocking of a Methodist preacher.

Lately, historians have been rediscovering writers such as Charles Chesnutt and Frances E. W. Harper – for Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted (1892). However, postbellum Afro-Americans fought for other such vital causes as to leave realism secondary. Primary enrichment has come through the latest wave of feminism, which has analyzed Kate Chopin’s The Awakening (1899) up to canonical status and has shown that Sarah Orne Jewett’s Country of the Pointed Firs (1896) and short stories deserve a roomier, better respected category than local-color or regionalism. Overall, Josephine Donovan contends that postbellum women were marginalized in both ambition and subject, that local color was their self-censored realism.40

NATURALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Realism became an integral source of naturalism without, however, losing its own vitality. Although the post-Howells generation almost inevitably thought they were rejecting their mentors, they continued in practice to take sentimental romance as the chief, long-lived enemy in literature. The most productive questions are (1) what sources led beyond realism? and (2) how did the two isms differ?41

The naturalists were the first cohort to consider without surprise the processes the Civil War had made dominant. They recognized that industrialism and urbanism, now clearly irreversible, were accelerating; iron mills had expanded into steel mills run by corporations scheming toward monopoly; not just the fitful pains of growing up, the conflict between capital and labor was getting bloodier at the seams of a hardened class structure; in 1894 Coxey’s Army looked like formidable guerrillas. Naturalists framed politics in economics-oriented, more systematic and explicit terms than the reformism implied by the realists. They also recognized that science had cornered Homo sapiens by tracing his animal heritage and chemical mechanisms. More willingly than grudgingly, the business of publishing had changed as drastically. Garish facts peddled in the mushrooming tabloids had punched gaps in the reticence that the public supposedly demanded of novelists; though his enemies had shown Howells the foolishness of a static mind, he received Maggie gingerly as the next stage of iconoclasm, which he could not mount. Publishers and editors, competing for a readership expanding in diversity and boldness of taste, accepted brighter colors, louder tones, grubbier characters, and more brutal action; Norris felt born in the nick of time.
Because critics disagree sharply, the sane conclusion is that the naturalists wrote out of a loose gestalt of values and techniques rather than a coordinated metaphysic or aesthetic. They surpassed the realists qualitatively in exploring humankind's animal sides; their approach to psychology could let instinct overpower conscious will. Most distinctively, they pushed further toward determinism — economic or biological or cosmic — than American novelists had cared or dared to go before.\textsuperscript{42} In method — secondary to content insofar as the choice could or had to be made — they intensified the ideal of objectivity; at documentary length, tabooed attitudes got not merely a hearing but a self-justification. Although the naturalists’ rhetoric turned back toward intensity of tone and metaphor, readers were now manipulated to regret the fate of a working-class dentist or accept the rise of fallen women. Illiterate characters suffered as consciously as the rich and fluent, and struggled with guilt as painfully as a Puritan minister, though naturalistic closure brought pessimism instead of redemption. Within the protean genre of the novel, a sympathetic reader easily distinguishes a naturalistic from a realistic work, and either, through method as well as attitude, from any other mode.

No American novelist moved from realism to naturalism, leaving a neat exhibit for taxonomy. Nor did naturalism fit the metaphor of a gathering stream. The shift was not accretive but qualitative. Naturalism burst out with Crane, and then Norris and Dreiser, all more indebted literally to foreign than to native masters. Along with realism, it merged into the permanent background for the art of the novel.\textsuperscript{43} Likewise, it has kept its own ongoing vitality. It is the foreground for JohnDos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner (arguably), John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell, Richard Wright, Norman Mailer, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, and John Updike’s “Rabbit” tetralogy.

\textbf{NOTES}


Philip Quilibet, "Darwinism in Literature," *Galaxy* 15 (1873): 695–8. Quilibet wrote a regular "Department" headed "Driftwood." Each issue of the *Galaxy* also carried "Scientific Miscellany."


Most recent is Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History: Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture,*
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23 Borus, Writing Realism, pp. 38–9, 109, and elsewhere, develops this point convincingly. Michael Denning’s Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America (London: Verso, 1987) demonstrates that when analysis proceeds beyond the mainline books, publishers, and periodicals it encounters still more intricate problems and imponderables.


25 Christopher P. Wilson, The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), develops this last point, especially as it applies to the 1890s and later.


27 Boyesen’s essay “Why We Have No Great Novelists,” Forum 2 (1887): 615–22, was reprinted in his Literary and Social Silhouettes (New York: Harper, 1894) as “The American Novelist and His Public.”

28 Borus, Writing Realism, p. 111.


31 Shelley Fisher Fishkin, From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), covers this approach, though she prefers to describe the emerging “contours” of a “distinctively American aesthetic.”


33 Benjamin T. Spencer, “The New Realism and a National Literature,” PMLA 56 (1941): 1116–31, develops this line of analysis with more sophistication than is needed here.

34 Despite the title of William R. Linneman’s “Satires of American Realism,” American Literature 34 (1962): 80–93, he begins with fine examples of burlesques of sensationalist, sentimental, or morally pretentious fiction.

35 The chapter on “critical realism” in John W. Rathbun and Harry Hayden Clark, American Literary Criticism, 1860–1905 (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), sums up the matter judiciously. Among the many other relevant articles and
books, the most insightful, as well as interesting, is Edwin H. Cady, ed., William Dean Howells as Critic (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).


37 Pizer, Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature, pp. 70–85, 97–102, 107–11, expounds their critical principles lucidly.


41 Donald Pizer has analyzed incisively the ongoing controversy; see especially chap. 3 of his Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature.

42 Chap. 2 of June Howard’s Form and History in American Literary Naturalism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) deals capably with determinism in the fiction.