In the 1930s Vernon Louis Parrington defined naturalism as "a pessimistic realism, with a philosophy that sets man in a mechanical world and conceives of him as victimized by that world" (Parrington 1930: 325). Originating in France with Gustave Flaubert and Émile Zola, the naturalist school aimed to turn novelists into "men of science" able to analyze the interaction of individuals with their social environment (Zola, quoted in Parrington 1930: 324). Naturalist writers strove toward objectivity: they developed "an amoral attitude toward [their] material" (p. 323). Their fondness for behavioristic psychology led them to privilege "low-grade characters" or even "grotesques" (p. 325) at the risk of letting their fiction be ruled by a "'sex complex'" (p. 325). In terms of literary discourse, naturalist determinism gave rise to a non-Aristotelian form of tragedy focusing on the disintegration of protagonists who are neither noble nor afflicted with a tragic flaw: they are merely crushed by the urban industrial environment (see Parrington 1930: 326). This tragic world-view, Parrington argues, marks a pessimistic twist within a realist tradition which initially aimed to develop a "critical attitude" with regard to "the industrialization of America under the leadership of the middle class" (p. xxvi).

Parrington’s argument ranks among the best of what might be called the orthodox descriptions of naturalism. It is echoed in many later essays (see Åhnebrink 1950: 21–33, 61–2; Kazin 1956: 66–7; May 1959: 169–71; Berthoff 1965: 226–7; Moers 1969: 143–6, 151–2; Conder 1984: 1–19; Pizer 1984: 9–11; Pizer 1995: 3–6; Mitchell 1989: 1–31). Since the 1980s, however, new scholarly approaches have challenged these views. The novels’ politics, their contribution to the consolidation of a white male canon, the writers’ relation to social and cultural institutions — all have been redefined almost beyond recognition. The present chapter starts off with a survey of naturalism from the point of view of orthodox readers. Revisionist approaches are discussed in the following section. I think it indeed useful initially to describe naturalism as it was perceived over the first century of its reception.
Although the earlier criticism may seem utopian in its judgment of naturalist politics, it captures a critical dimension in turn-of-the-twentieth-century fiction less often acknowledged by recent readers.

For orthodox scholars such as Parrington, Alfred Kazin, Lars Åhnebrink, Charles Child Walcott, Warner Berthoff, Donald Pizer, and Ellen Moers, the most prominent naturalists are Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London. Naturalism’s secondary figures are Hamlin Garland, Harold Fredric, and Robert Herrick. That this corpus should be restricted to white males reflects the professional customs of a period in which canon expansion was not on the agenda. Yet we will see that this bias is also rooted in the naturalist writers’ definition of their own practice. Naturalism, more than classical realism, established itself in opposition to literary traditions connoted as feminine – domestic fiction, sentimental romance, melodrama. It aimed at the literary appropriation of the public sphere: the exploration of the new metropolis. Writers, Norris argues, must “rough-shoulder [their] way among men” and find “healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob” (1964: 13). This cultural program presupposes a freedom from social restraints available only to empowered subjects. It was barely accessible to writers subjected to patriarchy and racism.

While gender and race are glossed over in orthodox criticism, class politics and the critique of corporate America play a polarizing role. Earliest comments on realism and naturalism – by the novelists themselves or by early twentieth-century critics such as H. L. Mencken – focused on the struggle against Puritanism (see Pizer 1995: 9). Left-liberal scholars – Parrington, Kazin, Berthoff – discuss fiction in broader social terms. They establish such narrow links between writing and its social context that their essays read like intellectual and political histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In their view, realism and naturalism embody the progressive momentum of US history. It challenges the dehumanizing aspects of capitalism. Still, left-liberal critics argue that naturalism compromises its literary integrity when it shifts to overt political commitment. For Parrington, the partisanship of Norris, London, Herrick, even Zola brought about their literary “failure” (1930: 325). Kazin endorses the political commitment of Progressive-era novelists but believes that some writers of the 1930s (Michael Gold, Edward Dahlberg, James T. Farrell), by their endorsement of communism, forfeited the “deep and subtle alienation” from US society that naturalism requires (Kazin 1956: ix). Reservations about the political appropriations of naturalism by writers of the years preceding World War II form a tacit assumption of 1950s and 1960s criticism as well. Walcott, Pizer, and Moers render naturalism accessible to the postwar readership by suggesting that it offers a “complex intermingling of form and theme,” not mere documentary reportage (Pizer 1984: 30). They approach the texts from a New Critical angle, stress their affinities with the canonically prestigious American romance, and anchor them within a liberal humanist tradition highlighting the writer’s “individual temperament” (Pizer 1984: 30).
II

In orthodox scholarship, the genesis of naturalism coincides with the fading of William Dean Howells’s career. In this view, the generation of the 1890s – Crane, Norris, and Dreiser – broke free from the Howellsian novel of manners, which focused on the everyday rituals of the upper middle classes (see Kazin 1956: 7–8; Michaels 1987: 36; Parrington 1930: 250). Howells has often been ridiculed for endorsing the puritanical sentimentalism of the genteel tradition. Sinclair Lewis uncharitably described him as “a pious old maid” (quoted in May 1959: 8). His legacy had to be outgrown if one were to explore the truth of the social world. Yet Howells did anticipate naturalism. He defended realism against the post-Civil War craze for popular romances and sentimental fiction. Through his critical and editorial work, he introduced US readers to the European novels on which naturalism would feed. He also sponsored Crane’s early works – the first naturalist texts to be published in the United States.

Above all, Howells was sensitive to changes in US society that only future novelists would address (see Parrington 1930: 242, 250–3; Kazin 1956: 6–8; Pizer 1984: 2–3; Michaels 1987: 41–2). By the end of his career, he realized that the future of the United States would be determined by class and ethnic inequalities, mass urbanization, and the exploitation of immigrant labor – the phenomena Alan Trachtenberg draws together as the “incorporation” of America (Trachtenberg 1982: 3). Howells had been one of the few US intellectuals to defend the anarchists accused of plotting the Haymarket riots of 1886 (see Michaels 1987: 35–6), and the Haymarket executions had rendered him skeptical of the course taken by the American republic. A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890) dramatizes this pessimism through the narrative of a failed publishing enterprise. It shows that, in socially and ethnically fragmented New York, characters from diverse backgrounds cannot pursue the same professional project. Gathering them physically in the same room already seems a breach of verisimilitude. When a strike breaks out, the group falls apart along class and ethnic lines, leaving a cluster of middle-class characters conscious of the failure of their utopian aspirations.

Howells was a Midwesterner who, after moving to Boston, identified so closely with the New England ruling classes that he became their cultural mentor. Naturalist writers positioned themselves further from the center of the literary field. Garland, another Midwesterner, wrote about impoverished frontier farmers. Norris, a California writer, described the urbanization and incorporation of the west coast. Crane’s bohemian lifestyle seemed designed to frustrate the values of his Methodist parents. It included visiting prostitutes, rumors of drug addiction, and the peregrinations consequent on his work as a war correspondent (see Åhnebrink 1950: 90–102). Dreiser best embodies this off-center status. Born to German-speaking parents in an Indiana small town, he wrote English prose that proved the despair of editors. Complaints about the crudeness of Dreiser’s style or about his indiscriminate hand-
ling of self-taught knowledge are commonplace (see Kazin 1956: 67; Berthoff 1965: 243; Moers 1969: xvi).

Early naturalist novels seem to take up the task of literary representation where Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* left off. In *Hazard*, the character embodying the immigrant working classes is a literate German-born socialist. The uneducated immigrant masses are glimpsed only at a distance, as middle-class protagonists ride elevated trains and peep into tenement blocks (Howells 1990: ch. 9, 45). Crane’s and Norris’s texts, on the contrary, cross the barrier that keeps Howells’s protagonists from actual contact with the poor. Crane’s *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (1893) drags its readers into the “gruesome doorways” of the New York Bowery (Crane 1979: ch. 2, 6). The Irish families encountered there inhabit a world of alcoholism and brutality. Maggie Johnson is a “pretty girl” who “blossomed” in the Bowery’s “mud puddle” (ch. 5, 16). Seduced and rejected by a neighborhood beau, she falls into prostitution. After her mother and brother chase her from the family tenement, she becomes a ghostly figure threading her way through New York crowds. Her death leaves her relatives wallowing in self-pity. Likewise, the inhabitants of San Francisco’s Polk Street in Norris’s *McTeague* (1899) are urban grotesques. The novel’s eponymous figure is a barely literate dentist who competes with another suitor, Marcus Schouler, for the love and money of Trina Sieppe, the daughter of Swiss immigrants. McTeague, deprived of his dentist’s practice by Marcus’s political machinations, falls into poverty and murders Trina. He dies a fugitive in Death Valley, clutching Trina’s gold, after an ultimate struggle with his rival.

Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) transgresses the norms of gentility in subtler ways. It allows its readers to share the experiences of a young woman from a Wisconsin small town who, with minimal soul-searching, becomes a kept woman and a Broadway star. This device allows Dreiser to describe as spectacles of wonder what puritanically minded readers might have viewed as visions of hell – a “gorgeous saloon” with “polished woodwork, colored and cut glassware and many fancy bottles” (Dreiser 1986: ch. 5, 42, 43), department stores perceived as “show place[s] of dazzling interest and attraction” (ch. 3, 22), or New York theaters with scantily clad chorus lines, featuring such plays as “‘The Wives of Abdul’” (ch. 46, 444). Carrie’s success story is paralleled by the grimmer account of Hurstwood, her second lover, who steals money from his boss, ends up in destitution, and dies alone in a flophouse. Through the narrative of his downfall, the novel provides extended descriptions of poverty.

As *Sister Carrie* reveals, naturalism, in addition to providing close-up depictions of slum life, outlines the large-scale features of the urban industrial world – crowds, corporations, the metropolitan sprawl. Howells’s *Hazard* is, again, pivotal in that it anticipates novels staging what William Cronon calls the “cityward journey” – the discovery of the metropolis (1991: 9; see also Fisher 1985: 6–7). *Sister Carrie* is arguably the most famous among these, but it was preceded by Garland’s *A Spoil of Office* (1892) and *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), and followed by many others: Frank Norris’s *The Pit* (1902); Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) and *The Metropolis* (1907); James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912); Dreiser’s
The Titan (1914) and The “Genius” (1915); Ernest Poole’s The Harbor (1915); and Abraham Cahan’s The Rise of David Levinsky (1917). The cities depicted in these texts allow their observers to experience what another novelist, Robert Herrick, in Together, calls “the realization of multitudinous humanity” (1962: ch. 11, 182). They are too large to be framed by the norms of realist local color (see Cronon 1991: 13; Den Tandt 1998: 3–4, 33–43). Accordingly, characters view them with ambivalence: they are “unfamiliar, immoral and terrifying,” yet they also “challeng[e]” their inhabitants “with dreams of worldly success” (Cronon 1991: 13). Chicago’s commercial streets are “wall-lined mysteries” to Carrie not only because they mystify customers but also because they genuinely embody the city’s “strange energies and huge interests” (Dreiser 1986: ch. 2, 17). Urban masses appear simultaneously as “pleasure-loving throng[s]” and as lines of “broken, ragged” homeless men (ch. 48, 465, 467). In Norris’s The Octopus (1901) and The Pit, crowds are made up both of righteous insurgent farmers (see Norris 1986: ch. 6, 272) and of aimless speculators, dazed by market fluctuations (see Norris 1971: ch. 10, 379). The corporate world is an octopus that keeps the country in its stranglehold; yet it is also a “sphinx,” carrying enigmatic wisdom (Norris 1971: “Conclusion,” 421).

Novels of the cityward journey appropriate mid-nineteenth-century pastoralism – Jefferson’s, Emerson’s, and Whitman’s tradition – in complex ways, now debunking it, now endorsing it for their own ends. Pastoralist ideology paints nature in utopian terms and cities as a civic threat. Naturalism, on the contrary, partly deflates the claims of nature romanticism, thus acting as the fiction of the closing of the frontier (see Lawlor 2000: 71–109). Hamlin Garland depicts life on the farm unsentimentally. Nature in Jason Edwards: An Average Man (1892) is neither a philosophical backdrop for the realization of selfhood nor the locus of the yeoman’s republic. The novel’s protagonists are city people goaded by land speculators to move to a frontier farm. Their adventure ends in bankruptcy. A Spoil of Office narrates the unequal struggle of Grangers and Populists against Washington politicians and corporate lobbyists. On the other hand, when naturalist novels do celebrate urban vistas, they draw on the language of nature romanticism. Description of wheat speculation in Norris’s The Pit echoes the rhetoric of Whitman: the flow of wheat spreads from the Chicago Board of Trade to “the elevators of Western Iowa” until “men upon the streets of New York [feel] the mysterious tugging of its undertow engage their feet” and “overwhelm them” (Norris 1971: ch. 5, 79–80). Likewise, Ernest Poole’s The Harbor celebrates the US economy’s capacity to turn “the raw produce of Mother Earth’s four corners” (Poole 1915: bk II, ch 12, 177) into a flow of commodities – “toys, sofas, glue, curled hair” (p. 178) – streaming into New York.

As Parrington indicates, naturalist writers guarantee the truthfulness of their writing by flaunting their rejection of sentimentalism. Naturalism’s relation to sentimentalism and romance is, we will see below, more complex than a sheer rejection of illusion for the sake of truth. Yet naturalist texts do stage a conflict between the voice of true experience and romance conventions. In Crane’s Maggie, the voice of illusion is music-hall entertainment: Maggie is seduced by the performers
providing Bowery audiences with a cheaper version of “the phantasies of the aristocratic theater-going public” (Crane 1979: ch. 7, 23). Naïvely, she believes that there is “transcendental realism” in melodramatic narratives displaying a “brain-clutching heroine... swoon[ing] in snow storms beneath happy-hued church windows” (ch. 8, 27).

The rejection of sentimentalism makes the pursuit of literary truth a gendered enterprise. Male writers challenge discourses of conformity they regard as feminized. In _McTeague_ and _Carrie_, the inauthentic idiom is domestic or local realism. Dreiser's narrative of the breakup of Hurstwood's upper-middle-class marriage reads like a farewell gesture not only to Howellsian realism, but also to the domestic fiction the author of _Hazard_ built on (Dreiser 1986: ch. 23, 212–13; see also Habegger 1982: viii–ix, 64–5). Hurstwood leaves his family for Carrie, who embodies a more vital field of experience. _McTeague_ satirizes the sentimental representation of middle-class households by having its characters perform a grotesque mimicry of genteel conventions. _McTeague_ and _Trina_'s marriage ceremony is a painstakingly regulated affair where guests follow chalk marks on the floor (Norris 1985: ch. 9, 163). This attempt at discipline does not, however, prevent them from being tossed about by social and biological forces beyond their control.

Rejection of sentimental standards was most controversial in the representation of sexuality and, particularly, of women's desire. In Europe, Flaubert, Lev Tolstoy, Zola, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg pointed out that the realistic portrayal of women's condition defied middle-class standards of propriety. To borrow Willa Cather's formula, mid- and late nineteenth-century European realism is the literature of lost ladies: heroines are frustrated, or, conversely, they display sexual behavior destructive to themselves and their surroundings. This context made the female protagonists' transgressions of sexual norms the benchmark of realistic radicalism – a situation epitomized in Europe by the trial for obscenity initiated against Flaubert's _Madame Bovary_ (1857). Howells was aware of these developments yet was reluctant to write novels that might offend a readership composed partly of middle-class young women (see Pizer 1998: 8). American naturalist novelists flouted these restrictions, though they never attempted the frankness of Zola. Symptomatically, some of the first naturalist novels – _Maggie, Carrie_ – are lost-lady narratives focusing on young women who live by prostitution or in promiscuous relationships. Other texts – Norris's _Vandover and the Brute_ (1914), London's _The Sea-Wolf_ (1904) – explore forms of masculinity ranging from primitive regression to homosocial desire. Norris in _A Man's Woman_ (1899), London in _The Sea-Wolf_ and _The Valley of the Moon_ (1912), Poole in _The Harbor_, and David Graham Phillips in _Susan Lenox_ (1917) specify how far they wish feminine empowerment to stretch. By twenty-first-century standards, however, the naturalist depiction of desire remains indirect: it is voiced through metaphors whose implications part of the naturalist readership may have ignored. Though daring for the time, it is still patriarchal.

The unsentimental gaze naturalism casts at social conditions is, according to the novelists, validated by science. Zola, in “The Experimental Novel,” wishes the words
“nove1ist” and “doctor” might become interchangeable (1963: 162; see also 187–96). US naturalists partly fulfill Zola’s program: they echo the concerns of the nascent human sciences – studies of urban criminality such as Charles Loring Brace’s *The Dangerous Classes of New York* (1872) or reform-minded investigation of poverty such as Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). They also indulge in philosophical reflections inspired by evolutionary thinkers – Herbert Spencer, predominantly. From this corpus, US naturalists retain the beliefs that human beings are shaped by their environment, not by idealist essences, and that Darwinian evolution is the historical manifestation of this socio-biological process. Humans are therefore not distinct from animals and are apt to revert to primitive behavior – to what Zola calls the human beast. Among US novelists, London most explicitly investigates this biological past. His companion novels *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) illustrate opposite evolutionary scenarios (see Lawlor 2000: 135–31). The former traces the path into the primitive of a dog who had first been cherished, then brutalized by humans. The latter shows a wolf evolving toward civilization by virtue of his human master’s love. The novels do not specify which of the two options should prevail.

The thematics of atavism leads to a typically naturalistic form of dualistic characterization. Protagonists otherwise beholden to late-nineteenth-century decorum are overcome by primitive violence. In *McTeague*, a Sunday picnic degenerates into a wrestling match in which Marcus bites off a chunk of McTeague’s ear and the dentist breaks his rival’s arm. McTeague, metamorphosed, is animated by the “perverted fury of the Berserker” (Norris 1985: ch. 11, 235). His yelling is “no longer human”; it is “an echo from the jungle” (ch. 11, 234). Similarly, farmers in *The Octopus*, fired by political frenzy, turn into “human animal[s] . . . with bared teeth and upraised claws” (Norris 1986: ch. 6, 272). London’s *Before Adam* (1907) drives atavistic characterization to extremes. The protagonist is an overcivilized weakling obsessed by dream visions of his Neanderthal ancestor “Big Tooth,” fighting against “Red Eye,” the tribe’s alpha male (London 1984a: ch. 1, 2). Atavism, though ostensibly frightening, is a source of fascination in naturalist fiction: characters who revert to the primitive are Darwinian shamans, shifting from one plane of being to the other. In *The Sea-Wolf*, seal-schooner captain Wolf Larsen contemplates with relish the moment when his energy will turn into “strength and movement in fin and scale and the guts of fishes” (London 1984b: ch. 7, 68).

Admittedly, naturalist science is often comically outdated. Dreiser explains the chemistry of Hurstwood’s depression by reference to “poisons in the blood . . . called katastates,” counteracted by “helpful chemicals, called anastates” (Dreiser 1986: ch. 36, 339). He also compares the city’s impact on Carrie to the “mesmeric operations of super-intelligible forces” (ch. 8, 78). Pizer offers an elegant method to reclaim such pseudoscience as literature. Some of it, he argues, is parasitical (see 1984: 64–8). Dreiser misleads his readers when he states that Carrie, as she ponders her surrender to Drouet, is a “wisp in the wind” wavering between “desire and understanding” (1986: ch. 8, 73). The passage aligns the novel with a Christian reading of Darwinian evolution and thereby covers up the fact that Carrie is eventually empowered by her
assent to “the forces of life” (ch. 8, 73). On the other hand, naturalist science may be read metaphorically. Norris’s Vandover tells the story of a young artist overcome by fits of lycanthropy. Vandover’s behavior is explained in terms of such pseudoscientific concepts as “Life” and “Nature” (Norris 1978: ch. 14, 230). Yet the novel may also be viewed as an allegory of selfhood, pitting the artist’s “life of the spirit” against his “demonic, self-destructive” tendencies (Pizer 1984: 62).

A few naturalist novels did endorse at least one metaphorical interpretation of Darwinian science: that which equates determinism with the law of capital, and evolutionary strife with what London calls “the group struggle over the division of the joint product,” that is, the class struggle (1982b: 1124). The social question had been a recurrent subtext in late-nineteenth-century Darwinian sociology. Political economist David Graham Sumner regarded capitalism as the human species’ biological destiny. He traced its origins “[a]mong the lower animals” (1961: 53). For Sumner, “Nature’s forces know no pity” (p. 133). “[T]he victim” in the struggle for survival “is to blame” (p. 137). Sociologists Lester F. Ward and Thorstein Veblen showed, however, that Darwinism could articulate a less reactionary agenda. Evolution might aim to establish not primacy in the sociobiological scuffle, but instead rational collaboration. The Brutes of human history might be not slothful proletarians but the robber barons themselves (see Veblen 1934: 226–7).

Naturalist novels written from a Progressive or socialist viewpoint appropriate Darwinism along Ward’s and Veblen’s left-leaning lines. Sinclair’s The Jungle narrates a sociobiological experiment leading to political liberation. The Rudkus family are transplanted from pre-industrial Lithuania to the Chicago meat-packing plants. Their ethos of family and village solidarity provides little support in this new environment. Chicago capitalism is a “slaughtering machine” performing meat-making “by applied mathematics” (Sinclair 1984: ch. 3, 44, 45). The industrial slaughterhouses turn animals — including, occasionally, the bodies of hapless workers — into packaged commodities. Biological fitness is crucial to this economic system, since foremen hire the strongest workers first and, as Jurgis Rudkus experiences, throw them to the streets when they are mangled. After the deaths of his wife and his son, Jurgis is rife for conversion to a more hopeful view of the future of the species: the novel ends as a pamphlet for socialist unionism.

Properly defining the future of humankind is the concern of London’s The Iron Heel (1908) as well. Avis and Ernest Everhard, the protagonists of this socialist anti-utopia, wage guerilla warfare against a capitalist dictatorship whose members think of themselves as the crown of biological evolution. Avis and Ernest believe, however, that these self-styled supermen have “made a shambles of civilization” (London 1982a: ch. 5, 378). They let modern workers live “more wretchedly than the cave-man” while human “producing power is a thousand times greater” than in prehistory (ch. 5, 377). Less optimistically than Sinclair, London predicts a temporary victory for capitalism. By co-opting the socialist activists, the dictatorship postpones the advent of the “Brotherhood of Man” for several centuries (“Foreword,” 321). We have seen above that such political explicitness found little favor among critics — a disdain that
explains the lack of interest in the naturalist-oriented political fiction of the 1900s and 1910s (Phillips; Charlotte Teller; Arthur Bullard; Poole). Yet a shift toward politics seems logical for writers who investigated social life and were concerned with the ends of human evolution. Parrington's and Kazin's skepticism notwithstanding, the legacy of early naturalism consists partly in opening a field of possibilities for later writers of political fiction – immigrant novelists such as Anzia Yiezerska and Mike Gold, or African American writers such as Richard Wright and Ann Petry.

III

The belief that realism and naturalism are politically progressive was, however, challenged in the 1980s and 1990s by neo-Marxist, neo-historicist, and feminist critics, as well as by advocates of canon expansion. Eric Sundquist's critical collection American Realism: New Essays (1982) served as manifesto for this new paradigm. Ironically, as Michael Anesko remarks, the revaluation of realism and naturalism thus initiated was facilitated by advances in textual bibliography performed by orthodox scholars – the 1981 publication of the restored text of Sister Carrie, for instance, or Donald Pizer's editions of turn-of-the-twentieth-century critical documents (see Anesko 1995: 86). The Marxist, feminist, and multiculturalist scholars who write in the wake of Sundquist's volume – June Howard; Rachel Bowlby; Walter Benn Michaels; Mark Seltzer; Philip Fisher; Elizabeth Ammons – highlight the conspicuous, though previously overlooked, sexist and racist discourse of naturalist writers (see Seltzer 1992: 31–5; Howard 1985: 85–6). As far as class politics go, they debunk the left-liberal view of naturalism as a liberating force (see Howard 1985: 131–41; Michaels 1987: 48–58; Seltzer 1992: 40–4). Naturalists, in these views, cannot be portrayed exclusively as crusaders for truth and justice, alienated from the US mainstream. They are also literary professionals consolidating their position in a burgeoning mass market (see Kaplan 1988: 80–7; Wilson 1985: 1–16). Far from criticizing the trusts, they are fascinated by the opportunities of the consumer economy (see Bowlby 1985: 1–17). Their class discourse fosters social control over the disenfranchised (see Howard 1985: 146–7). Finally, the very logic by which the concepts of realism and naturalism have been constructed is shown to privilege a white male corpus that excludes similar works by women and minority authors (see Ammons 1995: 95–7).

At the basis of these new readings lies a skeptical redefinition of naturalism's relation to reality and social phenomena. Influenced by poststructuralism, the recent critics no longer lend credence to what Erich Auerbach, after Aristotle, calls "mimesis" – realist representation (1946: 7). They contend that realism and naturalism cannot capture ideologically neutral snapshots of the real. Instead, it carries out ideological strategies described by such concepts as naturalization, surveillance, management, or containment. Naturalization, as Roland Barthes defines it, implies that realism passes off as natural what is historically and ideologically constructed (see
Barthes 1972: 141). Thus, Howells makes upper-middle-class domesticity the yardstick of all social arrangements (see Michaels 1987: 40; Kaplan 1988: 9; Thomas 1997: 14). Likewise, when *The Sea-Wolf* suggests that overcivilized women should become the “mate of a cave-man,” it promotes a patriarchal view of womanhood the more stringent as it is validated by Darwinism (London 1984b: ch. 36, 256). Surveillance is a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault. As applied to realism and naturalism, it means that novels contribute to an economy of power that anchors subjects in positions of supremacy and subordination. Realism and naturalism foster surveillance notably through the construction of what Irene Gammel calls a “panoptic city” – an urban scene subjected to a disciplinarian spectatorial gaze (1994: 64). Mark Seltzer argues similarly that the novels’ mapping of the city “opens the way for . . . the emergence and dispersal of agencies of social training and social control” (1982: 103).

Using the same logic, June Howard shows that naturalism sets up a dichotomy between “the spectator and the brute” (1985: 115; also 70–102). The novels’ middle-class characters indulge in sociological slumming: they spy on proletarians or ethnic others depicted as subhuman. In this, they anticipate Progressive-era reformers.

Management refers to a more indirect implementation of power. Seltzer, drawing on Foucault, defines it as the naturalist text’s capacity to create a total system of power that empties out the subject’s potential for opposition. Norris’s *Trilogy of the Wheat*, he argues, misleads its readers by setting up a pseudo-contrast between individual desire and corporate power – between “economic and sexual domains” (1992: 40). Yet it simultaneously makes these spheres interchangeable: by depicting economic processes in *The Trilogy of the Wheat* by means of sexual metaphors, Norris’s text undercuts the subject’s prerogative to challenge corporate power in the name of autonomous desire. Amy Kaplan, drawing on Fredric Jameson, suggests a less disciplinarian understanding of management. She contends that realist/naturalist texts are committed to what historian Robert Wiebe, in a discussion of Progressive-era reformers, called a “search for order” (1967: viii). Realist/naturalist novelists seek to construct “a cohesive social world to contain the threats of social change” (Kaplan 1988: 12, 160). Yet this social instability cannot be fully contained. In aiming for order, the novels “pose problems they cannot solve” (Kaplan 1988: 160).

The social turmoil that triggers ideological management in naturalism is, most recent critics contend, associated with the economic and cultural shift experienced by US society in its transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. This historical narrative had admittedly long been identified as naturalism’s anchoring ground. Georg Lukács had argued that the passage from realism to naturalism marks the disappearance of the pre-1848 entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and its supersession by monopoly capitalism (1970: 118). US critics, when they describe the demise of Howellsian realism and the rise of naturalism in the 1890s, articulate an American variant of this scenario. Post-1980s scholars revisit this history either by judging it from a novel political angle or by focusing on its hitherto neglected dimensions. Unlike Parrington and Kazin, some fault naturalism for failing to resist capitalistic incorporation (see Howard 1985: 70–103; Bowlby 1985: 1–34; Seltzer 1992: 44).
Conversely, others praise it for perceptively mapping the new corporate realm and for registering the supposedly irreversible passing of the producers’ ethos on which classical realism relied (see Michaels 1987: 40–1).

Gender-focused approaches rewrite the turn-of-the-century transition as a psychosocial shift. Naturalism, in this view, signals the end of puritanical, work-ethic-oriented selfhood. It fosters indeed the advent of a more reckless form of masculinity, tuned to corporate capitalism and imperialism (see Lears 1981: 130–1; Michaels 1987: 198–213; Kaplan 1990: 667–71; Rotundo 1993: 227–32; Den Tandt...
1998: 216, 223). Conversely, naturalism reveals the ability of the consumer market to structure the desire of its patrons – of urban women, particularly. The novels position their characters as urban flâneurs, contemplating quasi-pornographic displays of commodities (see Bowlby 1985: 52–65; Gammel 1994: 66–7; Gelfant 1995: 191–2; Fisher 1985: 162–9). These gender and economic changes are shown to interlink with new definitions of authorship. Naturalist writers have to fashion for themselves a cultural profile matching the destabilizing field of nascent mass literature. The naturalist discourse of masculinity, in this logic, helps male writers to shed the stereotype of the patrician dilettante and to style themselves as literary entrepreneurs, acting as journalists or social-scientist investigators (see Habegger 1982: 256–66; Howard 1985: 138–41; Wilson 1985: 17–39, 142–3; Trachtenberg 1982: 140–1). The construction of a naturalist writerly manhood requires that genres such as domestic fiction or local realism be branded as too feminized for turn-of-the-century conditions (see Campbell 1997: 48–74).

IV

While post-1980s criticism highlights naturalism’s ideological work, it offers only fragmentary insights into genre definition. Circumscribing the nature and the boundaries of realist/naturalist writing has, admittedly, been a perennially unpopular task (see Pizer 1995: 1; Becker 1963: 36–8; Bell 1993: 4–5). Still, I believe the issue worth investigating. On the one hand, the new criticism occasionally foregrounds questions of classification previously left unanswered. On the other, by hesitating to embark on a remapping of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century field, recent essays have sometimes merely reinscribed previous corpus definitions that lacked adequate grounding.

Orthodox definitions of naturalism relied on two criteria: generational change (the 1890s) and specificity of philosophical outlook – naturalism as a realist sub-genre, inflected by “pessimistic materialistic determinism” (Becker 1963: 35). Late-twentieth-century criticism challenges the generational component of this definition. The generational narrative receives little backing from what June Howard calls naturalism’s “generic text” – the writers’ pronouncements on their own practice (1985: 10). Dreiser, the pivotal figure of US naturalism, still described himself as a realist. His European model was Balzac, not Zola (see Elias 1970: 73–7). The only first-generation novelist to endorse the naturalist label is Norris (see Norris 1964: 71–2). Turn-of-the-twentieth-century fiction might therefore be dominated by several variants of one single realist movement. Uncertainties about the novelists’s self-characterization increase if one expands the corpus beyond the authors discussed in early essays. Less reputed canonical authors blur the logic of the generational paradigm: the so-called “Chicago realists,” Henry Blake Fuller and Robert Herrick, appear after Howells, during the naturalist decade. Multiculturalist canon revision raises even thornier issues (see Ammons 1995: 105–11). The late nineteenth-century
women, minorities, and radicals that are added to the corpus – Cahan, Cather, Charles
Waddell Chesnutt, Kate Chopin, Sui Sin Far, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ellen
Glasgow, Pauline Hopkins, James Weldon Johnson, Poole, Teller, Edith Wharton,
and Zitkala Ša – fit in literary traditions that do not necessarily follow the chronology
of canonical naturalism.

Recent criticism positions itself more ambiguously on the possibility of defining
what, in Frederic Jameson’s terminology, might be called naturalism’s “semantic”
genre (1981: 107) – its thematic unity. On the one hand, determinism loses its
primacy as a defining parameter. It is still regarded as a symptom of social disinte-
gration – indeed, as the nexus of a thematics of proletarianization (see Howard 1985:
95–103). Yet its dehumanizing pathos is less relevant to neo-Marxist/historicist
approaches, which lend little credence to the autonomous self in the first place (see
Howard 1985: 63–9; Seltzer 1992: 43; Gammel 1994: 79). On the other hand, we
have seen above that the passage from mid- to late-nineteenth-century economic and
cultural configurations does serve as covert support for a thematic definition: natur-
alism may be characterized as the fiction fitting the later stage of this historical
transition.

Post-1980s scholars cannot, however, build a full-fledged literary classification on
this historical basis. They face methodological barriers as well as obstacles inherent to
the realist/naturalist corpus. First, the recent criticism’s anti-mimetic stance makes it
difficult to identify (sub)-genres within turn-of-the-twentieth-century literature. On
the contrary, it fosters the intertextual dissemination of this literary field. Tradition-
ally, realist/naturalist works marked themselves off from other forms of writing – Lew
Wallace’s *Ben-Hur* (1880), say – by their dedication to literary truth. Yet when
concerns over referentiality are de-emphasized, genre definitions based on verisimili-
tude become porous. In Walter Benn Michaels’s *Gold Standard*, for instance,
Howells’s, Dreiser’s, and Norris’s fiction is shown to have affinities with such diverse
works as treatises on the Gold Standard and bimetallism, Populist tracts, late-
nineteenth-century trompe l’œil painting, abstract expressionism, Richard von Krafft-
Ebing’s treatises on sexual pathology, and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*
(see Michaels 1987: 115, 150, 161, 165). Within such variegated cultural constella-
tions, naturalist novels can no longer be distinguished from non-realistic fiction
(romance), referential non-fiction (late-nineteenth-century science), even non-fiction
romance (the fantasy world of advertising and economic theory). Neo-historicism’s
unprecedented capacity to chart links among fictional and historical texts is based
precisely on this flouting of generic divides.

Second, efforts at classification are defeated by the internal heterogeneity of
naturalist texts. Georg Lukács wanted literary realism to be a discourse of cognitive
authority expressing the whole of the world in one voice (see Lukács 1970: 142–3).
Yet naturalism is, in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology, more polyphonic than “mono-
logic” (1981: 270). The novels lapse into a multiplicity of idioms (romance, senti-
mentalism, the gothic) that, as we have seen, they also ostensibly debunk. Whereas
*Maggie* ridicules music-hall sentimentality, *Carrie* suggests without apparent irony
that plays of “suffering and tears,” graced with “tremolo music [and] long, explanatory, cumulative addresses” (Dreiser 1986: ch. 17, 161), help Carrie “rise to a finer state of feeling” (ch. 17, 163). Small wonder, then, that Norris should argue as early as the 1890s that Zola, far from creating an “inner circle of realism” (Norris 1964: 72), fashioned himself into a “romantic writer” (p. 71). Later critics concur with Norris. Pizer points out that naturalism mixes the “commonplace” with the “sensational” (1984: 19; see also 34–8). Walcutt describes Norris’s and Dreiser’s idiom as a “divided stream,” mingling realism with the literary tradition derived from mid-nineteenth-century Transcendentalism (1956: i).

Orthodox critics interpret naturalism’s straying from classical realism as a breach of verisimilitude (see Berthoff 1965: 31, 246; Lukács 1970: 140) or, conversely, as a welcome return to the romance tradition – an idiom often characterized as more innate to American letters than realism itself (see Pizer 1984: 34–40; Walcutt 1956: i; Walcutt 1974: 10–11). Recent scholars reach similar conclusions through a different path. Naturalism is sometimes presented as the genre that precipitates the entropic “disintegration” of realism (Baguley 1990: 208). Against such non-referential interpretations, I think it useful to aim for a definition of realism and naturalism that makes allowances for the texts’ polyphony without dismissing their ambition to map the social world. Anti-mimetic readings have admittedly enriched our sense of naturalism’s internal make-up and of its complex cultural entanglements. Yet, as Jameson suggests, they miss their target if they fail to account for the prolonged success of realism and naturalism in making readers assent to its portrayal of social reality (Jameson 1991: 209).

A definition of realism and naturalism that balances out post-structuralist and referential concerns is sketched out in Amy Kaplan’s discussion of Carrie. Kaplan adopts a logic reminiscent of Bakhtinian dialogism (see 1988: 158–60). She contends that Carrie’s interweaving of realism, sentimentalism, and romance does not amount to a surrender to fantasy. Instead, it sets up “a debate with competing definitions of reality” (p. 160). It would in this logic be misguided to expect Dreiser to depict a “more hard-boiled, dirty reality” (p. 160). His shifts into romance are not lapses but symptoms: they indicate that no single idiom in the text can express a totalizing truth. Dreiser’s realism is meta-literary and pragmatically oriented: it comments on its own limits and pursues its goal through multiple discourses.

Kaplan, whose object of investigation is realism proper, sees no need for naturalism as a separate category, even in her characterization of Dreiser. Yet her dialogic model suggests how a differentiation may be traced out between literary discourses that more markedly embody respectively a realistic and a naturalistic practice. We should envisage realism and naturalism as overlapping discourses, developing side by side throughout the naturalist decades, and indeed coexisting within the same texts. Predominantly realist or naturalist works draw on a common stock of literary devices, though they do so in different proportions and to different ends. The novels that stand at the realist end of this continuum focus on what Kaplan, borrowing the term from Raymond Williams, calls “knowable communities” – circumscribed social spaces
equivalent to the family settings of novels of manners (1988: 47). This is the universe of Lily Bart’s Old New York in Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), of Chesnutt’s upper-middle-class African Americans, or of Zitkala Ša’s Indian childhood on the Dakota prairie (“Impressions,” 1900). Because of their local scope, such texts support a realism of demystification: they show observers who are well acquainted with a familiar universe uncovering its hidden logic. Lily resists the upper-class marriage market whose subtleties she perfectly masters. Mr. Ryder, the protagonist of Chesnutt’s “The Wife of his Youth” (1899), exposes the African American bourgeoisie’s class prejudices by acknowledging the wife he married under slavery. Zitkala Ša, as a child narrator, understands that the dignified life on the prairie is being threatened by the outside force of Anglo-American colonization. Yet this realist clear-sightedness remains bounded. The effort to dispel illusions encounters areas that resist elucidation. Lily Bart’s exile from upper-class New York brings her “near the dizzy brink of the unreal” (Wharton 1986: ch. 13, 321). To Chesnutt’s Mr. Ryder, slavery exists as a repressed, ghostly past. Young Zitkala Ša views both her tribe’s rituals and the paleface’s iron horse as awesome mysteries.

Novels where naturalist discourse predominates resort to romance in their attempt to represent the very objects realism cannot bring into focus – the realm *film noir* critic James Naremore calls “the social fantastic” (1998: 16). In these works, romance is an epistemological back-up: it offers a fuzzy map of what Norris calls the “secretest [sic] life” (1964: 77). In *The House of Mirth*, the switch to romance occurs when the author evokes the ill-understood forces shaping Lily’s destiny. The heroine is dragged into death by “an invisible hand [making] magic passes over her in the darkness” (Wharton 1986: bk. II, ch. 13, 322). Such metaphors are infrequent in Wharton. They are systematically used in Norris’s naturalistic *The Pit*. Here, the Chicago Board of Trade is a continental nexus where money and produce flow with “the appalling fury of [a] Maelstrom” (Norris 1971: ch. 3, 80). The “Pit,” the trading floor hub, is a “tremendous cloaca, the maw of some colossal sewer” (ch. 3, 79). Norris’s novel does contain documentary essays on the mechanics of speculation. Yet the predominance of romance thwarts the depiction of determinate social relationships. The interaction of business and marriage is taken for granted, not analysed. Finance wrecks Jadwin’s household merely because it possesses a power “coeval with the earthquake” (ch. 7, 259; ch. 10, 387).

Twentieth-century readers are tempted to dismiss Norris’s rhetoric as heaps of “melodramatic cliché[s]” (Bell 1993: 81). Yet it constitutes a likely fallback solution for writers subjected to what Marxist theorists call reification – the dehumanizing illegibility of capitalist societies (see Kadarkay 1995: 233). Lukácsian Marxism prescribes that realistic fiction should portray society as a transparent, organic community of concrete human relations. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century novels suggest instead that the urban world cannot be captured in such rational terms. Logically, their romance idiom should remain an index of the limits of their realist vision. Yet it is also used as a medium of social mapping in its own right – as romance knowledge, so to speak. This paradoxical strategy can be traced back to the origins of urban
fiction, indeed, as early as Balzac – Lukács’s favorite realist and Dreiser’s main European inspiration. It is central to the corpus of urban gothic from which naturalists derive their romance tropes – Eugène Sue’s, Edgar Allan Poe’s, and George Lippard’s mid-nineteenth-century mysteries of the city (see Trachtenberg 1982: 103–5; Denning 1987: 85–117). It is also common in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century social sciences, which constantly allude to the dizzying abysses of atavism and evolutionary time. Herbert Spencer’s sociology is backed by philosophical reflections on “the Unknowable” (Bannister 1979: 44). Dreiser, a Spencerian, launches Carrie in quest of the mysteries of “the other half of life, in which we have no part” (1986: ch. 19, 176).

The romance discourse of turn-of-the-twentieth-century novels differs from earlier equivalents in its deployment of a vitalist rhetoric. Naturalist writers make sense of the urban sphere by means of such quasi-mystical social Darwinian concepts as “forces” (Sister Carrie; Dreiser 1986: ch. 13, 118), “instincts” (White Fang; London 1987: 247), and “Life” itself (The Titan; Dreiser 1965: ch. 1, 12). This makes urban communities the locus of what Robert Herrick calls a mysterious “web of life” (1900: ch. 12, 348). Norris’s biologically embodied economic metaphors (the “Wheat”) or Sinclair’s depiction of the life-grinding slaughterhouses of Packingtown are aspects of this urban vitalism (Norris 1986: ch. 8, 576; see Martin 1981: 160–1). Dreiser sums up its outlook in The Titan, when he writes that the building of Chicago is a process that allows “Life” to do “something new” (1965: ch. 1, 12). Poole’s sprawling socialist novel The Harbor marks a late climax of this pre-World War I tradition. It locates the “rushing chaos of life” successively in the New York sex underworld, in “the homes of the Big Companies” on Wall Street (Poole 1915: bk II, ch. 10, 154), and in the “great spirit” of the “surging multitudes” of proletarian strikers (bk III, ch. 13, 315; bk III, ch. 12, 304).

Compared to the realistic practices of naturalization and surveillance, the specific ideological work of naturalist socio-vitalism is the construction of overdetermined mysteries. Urban crowds, sexuality, corporations, or the commodity market are made radically undecipherable by means of polysemic metaphors (see Den Tandt 1998: 146–50). Otherness in this corpus – whether racial, gender-based, or economic – is never self-contained. Any uncanny element interlinks with all other ill-understood energies of the urban field. Norris’s portrayal of Lyman Derrick, the son of the insurgent farmers’ leader in The Octopus, illustrates this device. A melodramatic villain who sells out the farmers to the railroad, Lyman is afflicted with a multilayered aura mingling economic, gender, and racial connotations. He is marked out as a mother’s child, “a well-dressed, city-bred young man” who turned down the virile farmer’s life for the corporate-identified legal profession (Norris 1986: ch. 4, 439). His feminized, citified status is signaled by his dark-complexioned “dago face” (ch. 4, 447) – a feature that in the novel’s context associates him with unruly mobs of Mexican and Mediterranean farmhands. Social science texts cultivate uncanniness by similar means. Jacob Riis, in his survey of the New York slums, empathizes with several immigrant communities yet singles out the Chinese as the nexus of the city’s disquieting
complexity. In his text, immigrants from the Far East are associated simultaneously with white slavery and with the underground drugs economy (see Riis 1971: 78–80).

V

From what precedes, we may sketch out a literary-historical map of turn-of-the-twentieth-century fiction highlighting literary affinities and lines of fracture uncharted by previous periodizations. I contend that the novels traditionally ranked as naturalistic feed, with varying degrees of dominance, on three overlapping strands of writing: the realist and romance discourses described above, as well as an emergent modernist aesthetic. In the first place, this dialogic mapping highlights the continuity of a realist tradition through and beyond the naturalist 1890s. The latter current – the realism of knowable communities – includes authors previously studied as realists (Fuller, Wharton), local realists (Sarah Orne Jewett, Glasgow), African American writers (Chesnutt, Hopkins, Nella Larsen, Petry), muckrakers (Phillips), immigrant writers (Cahan, Yiezerska, Gold), 1920s and 1930s naturalists (Lewis, Steinbeck), or modernists (Fitzgerald). Through these writers, the realism of demystification perpetuates itself even in periods where it is no longer dominant.

Second, we may isolate the constellation of novels that I would be tempted to label naturalism proper, yet that should more accurately be called the fiction of sociological vitalism. This current includes works by canonical naturalists – Dreiser, Norris, and London – as well as quite a few lesser-known figures – Herrick, Johnson, Teller, and Bullard. Their works exist in constant interaction with realism. They are identifiable less by the self-contained consistency of a genre than by a recurrent pattern of dialogization – a specific way of playing out documentary discourse against romance and Darwinian tropes. Socio-vitalism largely dies out after World War I, as modernism becomes hegemonic. Dreiser’s An American Tragedy (1925) and Dos Passos’s fiction pursue its totalizing momentum, yet in an increasingly disenchanted mood stripped of romance intensities.

Third, the dialogic approach makes it easier to acknowledge the emergence of premodernist concerns such as the dedication to writing for its own sake, the exploration of inner selfhood, and the development of a bohemian scene of alienated intellectuals. Chief in this current is Henry James, who eludes classification by his plural allegiances to realism, naturalism, and (pre)-modernism (see Seltzer 1982: 96–7; Crowley 1995: 117–21; Wardley 1989: 639–42). Gilman, Chopin, and Cather fit in this category because they use the Darwinian tropes of socio-vitalism in ways that anticipate stream-of-consciousness modernism. Further, Cather is pre-modernistic in her predilection for narratives of artistic education – novels that, like The Song of the Lark (1915) (but also Johnson’s Autobiography, Dreiser’s The “Genius”, and Poole’s Harbor), chronicle the development of turn-of-the-twentieth-century artists. In several respects, Crane, one of the earliest figures of US naturalism, ranks among the premodernists as well. He flaunts a detached narratorial stance that, though often
regarded as the hallmark of naturalism, differs from the quasi-gothic affects of socio-vitalism. Also, unlike his peers, Crane favors a self-consciously patterned literary language: dialogues in Maggie are a carefully wrought imitation of the Irish American vernacular. In this, Crane, together with Sherwood Anderson, anticipates Hemingway’s modernism – arguably the reason for his success among twentieth-century critics.

Finally, it is possible on this basis to define the relevance of naturalism to turn-of-the-twentieth-century women and minority writers. I indicate above that naturalism implies a level of writerly empowerment that seems accessible primarily to white males: it aims for a totalizing grasp of society and models itself on the paradigm of scientific authority. Howellsian realism, on the contrary, seems easier to appropriate: it focuses on community relations familiar to individuals subjected to the restraints of segregation and the domestic sphere (see Warren 1993: 13–14). The turn-of-the-twentieth-century corpus partially verifies this hypothesis. Chesnutt’s stories of the color line and Cahan’s Yekl (1896) portray community rituals. They are Howellsian texts whose focus has shifted from white middle-class parlors to the ballrooms of the African American “Blue Vein Society” (Chesnutt 1968: ch. 1, 1) or to Professor Peltner’s dancing “academy” for East Side Jewish immigrants (Cahan 1896: ch. 2, 36).

Yet naturalism does share one key narrative pattern with women’s and minority fiction: that which relies on picaresque narration and trickster characters. Johnson’s Autobiography follows the itinerary of a light-skinned African American protagonist through locales embodying multiple facets of black middle-class experience. Cahan’s Levinsky, unlike the locally focused Yekl, traces the development of a Jewish businessman from the yeshivas of tsarist Russia to the garment district of the Manhattan East Side. In Cather’s Song of the Lark, Thea Kronborg becomes an opera singer after moving from Moonstone, Colorado to Chicago, the east coast, and Germany. Such stories cannot be narrated within the realist discourse of the knowable community: their successive climaxes occur when the protagonists experience the thrill or threat of unfamiliar worlds – black Harlem, the first glimpse of the New World’s “magic shores” (Cahan 1960: bk 4, ch. 1, 67), or the discovery of Wagner at a Chicago opera. Structurally, they are similar to naturalist novels focusing on figures endowed with the trickster’s ability to adapt to multiple environments – Carrie, London’s Martin Eden (1912), or Phillips’s Susan Lenox: In this light, naturalism would appeal to later minority authors – Wright or even Ralph Ellison – not only because of its concern for poverty, but also because it fits in a tradition of uprooted, mobile protagonists.

Primary Texts

Cather, Willa. The Song of the Lark. 1915.
Chesnutt, Charles W. The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line. 1899.
Chopin, Kate. The Awakening. 1899.


References and Further Reading


rereading of naturalism and turn-of-the-twentieth-century culture, this essay highlights the pro-corporate aspects of Norris's and Dreiser's works.


Thomas, Brook (1997). American Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract. Berkeley: University of California Press. Differentiates realism from naturalism by arguing that the former is based on a democratic ethos relying on contractual practices.

Veblen, Thorstein (1934). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Modern Library. (First publ. 1899.) This pioneering analysis of consumerism reverses the premises of social Darwinism by making modern capitalists the embodiment of archaic, obsolete human traits.


