Naturalism Study Guide

Naturalism

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Naturalism applies both to scientific ideas and principles, such as instinct and Darwin's theory of evolution, and to fiction. Authors in this movement wrote stories in which the characters behave in accordance with the impulses and drives of animals in nature. The tone is generally objective and distant, like that of a botanist or biologist taking notes or preparing a treatise. Naturalist writers believe that truth is found in nature, and because nature operates within consistent principles, patterns, and rules, truth is consistent.

Because the focus of Naturalism is human nature, stories in this movement are character-driven rather than plot-driven. Although Naturalism was inspired by the work of the French writer Émile Zola, it reached the peak of its accomplishment in the United States. In France, Naturalism was strongest in the late 1870s and early 1880s, but it emerged in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and extended up to the first world war.

The fundamental naturalist doctrine is presented in Zola's 1880 essay "Le roman experimental" (meaning the experimental□or experiential□ novel). In it, Zola claims that the naturalist writer should subject believable characters and events to experimental conditions. In other words, take the known (such as a character) and introduce it into the unknown (such as an unfamiliar place). Another major principle of Naturalism that Zola explains in this essay is the idea of determinism, which is the theory that a person's fate is determined solely by heredity and environment.

While the French initiated and began to develop Naturalism, Americans are credited with bringing it to fruition. American Naturalist writers include the novelists Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Hamlin Garland, and Jack London; the short story writer O. Henry (William Sydney Porter); and the poets Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edgar Lee Masters. Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* is considered the pinnacle of naturalist achievement. Other representative works are Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, London's *The Call of the Wild*, Norris's *McTeague*, and Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Themes

Scientific Principles

Naturalist writers apply scientific principles and methods to the writing of fiction. Like scientists conducting experiments, they introduce readers to a character or characters and then set the events of the novel in motion to see how the characters' inherited traits and environmental influences will determine their outcomes. In some cases, an unexpected opportunity is also introduced to give the character a chance to take it or to ignore it. Given extreme circumstances or desires or needs, characters make decisions they would not otherwise make. The naturalist writer believes that the characters' true natures emerge in these situations.

Another scientific idea used in naturalist writing is conditioned behavior. Characters learn how to behave when they are exposed repeatedly to the same environmental influences. A character such as Henry in *The Red Badge of Courage* quickly learns how to behave in order to survive in the extreme circumstances of war. Buck in *The Call of the Wild* is first conditioned to hate people but later learns to trust the right man.

Darwinian processes are sometimes evident in naturalist writing. In *Sister Carrie*, for example, Carrie is inherently stronger than Hurstwood; as a result of his weakness, he abandons all of his comforts and ultimately commits suicide, while Carrie enjoys a successful stage career and self-reliance. Society is unforgiving and harsh toward the weak but offers rewards to the strongest members of society. This suggests that civilized society is as much a forum for competition among its members as nature is for animals.

Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances

Novels of the naturalist movement feature common, everyday people. There are no members of royalty, titans of the business world, or great minds. Instead, naturalist authors choose protagonists like McTeague, a would-be dentist; Carrie, a rural Midwestern girl; and Buck, a mixed-breed dog. These characters lead simple lives, uncluttered by the good fortune and distractions of glamour, wealth, or adventure. They are left only with their limited resources and their innate natures. In rare cases such as Carrie's, a character attains an extraordinary life but finds it ultimately unsatisfying. These characters learn that there are more similarities than differences between the common and the uncommon.

Naturalist authors place these ordinary characters in extraordinary situations. Carrie finds herself first in the big city of Chicago and eventually in New York City, enjoying a glamorous career as an actress. In contrast, her lover, Hurstwood, descends from a lavish lifestyle to living on the street. In the end, his dramatic decision to take his own life is in sharp contrast to the cheap motel where he does it.

Henry in *The Red Badge of Courage* is an ordinary young man who makes a decision to seek out the extraordinary by enlisting to fight in the Civil War. He discovers that it is he who is extraordinary in his courage and that war consists of common ugliness.

By placing ordinary people in extreme situations, naturalist writers show their readers that they, too, could find themselves in extraordinary situations. They also show that while some people become extraordinary due to their circumstances, others are destined to remain common.

Style

Symbolism

Naturalist authors use symbolism to subtly convey a wealth of meaning in a few words or images. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, Norris uses McTeague's tooth-shaped sign as a symbol of how the character would like to perceive himself and be perceived by others. Although he has no license to practice dentistry, he wants the respectability such a profession would bring him. The tooth is gold, which symbolizes McTeague's drive to acquire wealth. In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser introduces the rocking chair as a symbol during key moments in Carrie's life. Her rocking in it symbolizes her solitude in the world. As she rocks, she thinks about the state of her life, and the chair moves but never goes anywhere. Still another example of naturalist symbolism is the mountain in *The Red Badge of Courage*. It is ominous and immovable, and represents the power and permanence of nature.

Details

Naturalists are similar to realists in their attention to detail. Naturalist works contain detailed passages describing settings, backgrounds, appearances, and emotions. This helps the reader get a specific and fully formed perception of the characters' lives. Details also give the work a realistic feeling. Naturalists include details of every kind, not just those that are considered artistic or beautiful. If a character's attire is shabby, the naturalist author will describe it as shabby, not cast in a romantic or sentimental light. The objective is to depict a subject wholly and factually. Dreiser uses details to give the reader insight into his characters in *Sister Carrie*. By describing Carrie's clothing and furnishings in detail, he suggests to the reader how important appearance is to Carrie and to her first lover, Drouet.

A common naturalist pattern is to present a great deal of information at the beginning of the novel and then let the events unfold. *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* adheres to this pattern. Norris provides a great deal of information at the beginning, and the events of the story flow from this information. There are no plot twists, shocking turns of events, or unexpected characters. Further, the information given at the beginning is reliable, so the reader is a fully informed observer from the start.

Historical Context

Realistic Period in American Literature

Realism preceded Naturalism in American literature, and the two are closely related. Both aim for realistic portrayals of everyday life, and both incorporate a great deal of detail. Realism arose after the Civil War, a traumatic period in history in which Americans fought one another over basic issues such as unity and freedom. After the Civil war, Americans were less idealistic and more interested in politics, science, and economics. A new kind of American fiction had to emerge in the wake of widespread disillusionment.

The expansion of education created a broader readership, and new laws helped protect copyrights. These developments meant that more writers could enjoy viable careers. Authors of fiction found ready audiences for their unsentimental works. Within Realism, minor movements such as pragmatism and historical novels emerged. The prominent authors during the realistic movement included Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. In poetry, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Sidney Lanier are considered the prominent writers of the time. In drama, little change was evident. The melodrama and fanfare that typified drama prior to Realism continued to find audiences.

Technology and Science

The early 1900s was a period marked by advances in technology and science, creating a social environment in which the intellect was considered superior to emotions and to traditional, blindly accepted beliefs. In 1900 Max Planck opened up a new world of physics when he discovered the quantum nature of energy. Five years later, Albert Einstein developed the Special Theory of Relativity, and in 1915 he developed the general theory. Together, these advances in physics revolutionized scientific thought. This new way of thinking shaped not only the sciences but also the arts, economics, and politics. By the turn of the century, America was well on its way to being an industrialized nation. After the Civil War, the spirit of industrialism that had been born in the North took on new fervor. It was time to repair the nation and its economy. Progress was made in the fields of communication, transportation, and manufacturing. In transportation, Henry Ford founded Ford Motor Company in 1903 (the same year that Orville and Wilbur Wright successfully flew the first motorized plane) and opened the first automotive assembly line in 1913. As a result of the competition encouraged by free market economics, General Motors Corporation was founded in 1908.

In the intellectual world, new thinkers revolutionized the ways in which people understood their world. Charles Darwin challenged the traditional religious concept of the origin of human beings; Karl Marx challenged traditional views on economics and social class; and Auguste Comte initiated the philosophy of positivism (which claims that the purpose of knowledge is merely to describe, not to explain, the world) and the field

of sociology (which focuses on observing, quantifying, and predicting social phenomena).

Advances in science and technology led to widespread acceptance of rationalism and scientific inquiry. Among the arts, this attitude was especially noticeable in literature. Moving away from the realms of feelings and relationships, writers approached their craft as a medium for understanding the human psyche. Writers were inspired less by the desire to provide readers with escape and and more by a desire to find truth.

Movement Variations

France

Naturalism began in France in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the early 1880s. The principal figure of French Naturalism is Zola, whose 1880 essay "Le roman experimental" was instrumental in the spread of Naturalism to the United States. Zola describes human existence as being determined by environment and genetics, and he adheres to the belief that people behave basically as animals in nature do.

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt were brothers who also wrote in the naturalist style in France during Zola's time. The Goncourt brothers adhered to certain tenets of Romanticism, such as the elite status of the artist, as they explored the realistic tone of Naturalism. Their application of scientific ideas in fiction was a major contribution to the naturalist movement.

England

The term naturalist is not generally used to describe English literature during the American naturalist period. The Edwardian period (1901-14), however, shares certain characteristics of Naturalism, indicating that attitudes and reading habits were similar among Americans and the British in the years leading up to World War I. Edwardian writers were cynical and questioned authority, religion, art, and social institutions. This is akin to the naturalist method of observing and testing human behavior in an inquisitive manner rather than accepting traditional beliefs uncritically. Both Naturalism and the Edwardian period were dominated by fiction writers rather than by dramatists or poets.

Drama

Naturalism in drama was a minor movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Playwrights of this style paid special attention to detail in costume, set design, and acting in order to re- move as much artificiality as possible. They sought to break down barriers between the audience and the stage, and they were especially opposed to the melodrama that was so popular with audiences at the time. Some naturalist playwrights embraced social causes of the day, preferring to inform and alarm audiences rather than to provide them with mindless entertainment. As a result of removing artifice from the theater, they hoped that the audience would have a sense that they were watching and learning from real people. Playwrights associated with this style include Henri Becque (French), Eugene Brieux (French), Gerhart Hauptmann (German- Polish), and Maxim Gorky (Russian).

Representative Authors

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

Best remembered for his Civil War narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane was born on November 1, 1871, six years after the war ended. He was born in Newark, New Jersey, and later launched his career in New York as a journalist for the *New York Herald, New York Tribune*, and *New York Journal*. His first story, the novella, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, was self-published when he was twenty-two years old. In 1895 *The Red Badge of Courage* was published, making Crane internationally famous and enabling him to focus on writing fiction for the rest of his short life. Crane died of tuberculosis on June 5, 1900, in Badenweiler, Germany. He is buried in Hillside, New Jersey.

Crane's major contribution to American literature is *The Red Badge of Courage*. It is the story of Henry Fleming, a young man who enlists to fight in the Civil War. Through his experiences, he discovers that he possesses courage and that war is less glamorous than he imagined it would be. With this narrative, Crane takes the characteristics of Naturalism and applies them to a critical period in American history. The result is a work that was immediately embraced by Americans at the time of publication and continues to be admired and taught today.

Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945)

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 27, 1871, Theodore Dreiser enjoyed a career as a respected journalist and novelist. Dreiser left Indiana as a young man and found work in Chicago as a journalist. When his first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was a failure, he was plagued by self-doubt. His doubt proved to be unfounded, however, as he rose to prominence in literary circles, was a finalist for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1930, and received an Award of Merit from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1945. Dreiser died of a heart attack in Los Angeles, California, on December 28, 1945.

In *An American Tragedy* and *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser depicts the dark side of the myth of the American dream. This is a recurring theme in his work. Both novels feature tragic characters who are the victims of their own desires. In any discussion of Naturalism, *An American Tragedy* is generally held up as the best example. But *Sister Carrie* is also a strong representative of the movement and, as Dreiser's first novel, demonstrates how naturally the style came to him.

Frank Norris (1870-1902)

Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 5, 1870. He was an artistic and well-educated man, having studied painting in 1887 at the Atelier Julien in Paris and attended the University of California at Berkeley (1890-94) and Harvard

University (1894-95). Like many of the naturalist writers, he worked in journalism as a foreign correspondent. Norris wrote from South Africa for *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1895 to 1896, and from Cuba for S. S. McClure Syndicate of New York City as a war correspondent in 1898. He died of appendicitis in San Francisco, California, on October 25, 1902.

Norris is respected as one of the major writers who developed American Naturalism. Critics regard his work as being the closest to the pure Naturalism described by Zola. His most notable works are *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, *The Octopus: A Story of California*, and *The Pit: A Story of Chicago*. Although *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* was written early in Norris's career, many scholars consider it his masterpiece despite its violent content. *The Octopus: A Story of California* and *The Pit: A Story of Chicago* are two volumes of an unfinished trilogy. In addition to novels, Norris wrote numerous short stories that appeared in publications for a wide range of audiences.

Émile Zola (1840-1902)

Émile Zola was born in Paris, France, on April 2, 1840. During his career Zola wrote novels, short stories, plays, translations, and criticism. He was awarded the position of Officer of Legion d'Honneur in 1888-89. This position was revoked, however, because of Zola's disputes with the French government. Always a controversial figure, Zola had a wide audience among his contemporaries and remains a major figure in French literature today. He died of accidental asphyxiation on September 29, 1902, in Paris. Although he was buried in Paris, his ashes were later moved to the Pantheon in Rome, Italy, home to the tombs of many of the greatest thinkers in the world.

Considered the most prominent theorist of Naturalism, Zola wrote the essay "Le roman experimental" (meaning "the experimental□or experiential□ novel") in 1880. In it, Zola explains that the role of the naturalist is to subject believable incidents to experimental conditions in the novel in order to find truth. The author, in a sense, becomes a scientist. Zola also claims that character is conditioned and determined by heredity and environment. Although Zola is credited as the father of Naturalism, his views are often considered to represent the extremes of the style.

Representative Works

An American Tragedy

Published in 1925, *An American Tragedy* is loosely based on a true story and is considered the best example of American Naturalism. It is the story of Clyde Griffiths, whose desire to see the American dream made manifest in his life almost leads him to commit murder. In just one of the novel's examples of irony, Clyde is found guilty of committing murder, even though his intended victim died accidentally.

An American Tragedy is typical of Dreiser's work in demythologizing the American dream. Dreiser felt that believing in the American dream led to heartbreak, disappointment, and cynicism. *An American Tragedy* typifies Naturalism because it concerns an ordinary middle-class man whose circumstances push him to make extreme choices. Having always dreamed of a better life and having always been told he could create that life, he is finally on the brink of entering the upper echelons of society when a wealthy woman becomes romantically interested in him. The problem is that he already has planned to marry a poor woman who has had his child. This situation is devastating for Clyde because he sees his long-awaited opportunity to fulfill his dreams slipping away. The lure of the American dream proves too strong, and he plans to kill his betrothed.

Upon publication, *An American Tragedy* received popular and critical acclaim. Some critics suggest that the novel's popular success was due to the post-World War I public's desire to read about individual accountability in society. After all, Clyde is found guilty of a crime he intended to commit. Critically, the novel is declared a masterpiece and is deemed Dreiser's best work. Although some reviewers claim that the book is inelegantly written, contains bad grammar, and is overly melodramatic, most enthusiastically recommend it.

The Call of the Wild

Although it started as a short story, London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) soon became a wildly popular novel. The money London made by selling the rights to the novel enabled him to purchase a boat on which he could disappear and write without distraction. Read all over the world and taught in schools, *The Call of the Wild* is now considered a classic of American fiction.

The Call of the Wild is about a dog named Buck who is taken from his home in California and put on a dog team in the Yukon. In his new environment, he must assert himself among the other dogs to survive. He is eventually adopted by a loving man named John Thornton, whose patience and kindness teach Buck to trust and love. This novel is unique among naturalist novels because its main character is not a person, but this is also why it is a good example of Naturalism. The laws and forces of nature are

laid bare in the story of Buck. His interaction with the pack, nature, and people reveals the laws of nature.

McTeague: A Story of San Francisco

In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899), Norris disputes the image of the self-reliant American in charge of his or her own fate. Instead, Norris takes a typically naturalist approach and portrays people as the products of their environments, genetic traits, and chance occurrences. Norris took almost a decade to complete this novel, and it stands as his most prominent work. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, the title character is an unlicensed dentist of below average morality and intelligence. He is an ideal naturalistic character because he is guided by his impulses rather than by careful deliberation or acts of will. In the end, he loses his practice and beats his wife to death when she refuses to tell him where she has hidden money she inherited. Both characters are portrayed as victims. While she is the victim of violence, he is the victim of his own bestial nature.

Readers and critics found the book to be unnecessarily violent in its pessimistic portrayal of what human beings are capable of doing. While other naturalist books included violence (most notably *The Red Badge of Courage*), none were as descriptive or explicit. The novel is important, however, as a key work of the naturalist movement and as the masterpiece of one of its dominant figures.

The Red Badge of Courage

The Civil War narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) made Crane internationally famous. The style and the stirring, emotional voice of a young soldier captivated critics and readers alike. Veterans of the Civil War praised the book's realistic account of the experience. Although numerous books containing Civil War narratives had been published since the 1860s, *The Red Badge of Courage* stood out for Crane's contemporaries. The book's ability to capture such a vivid time in American history is evident in the fact that it is still read today in classrooms all over the country. The book is not only a classic of Naturalism, but it is also a testament to Crane's imagination; born in 1871 (six years after the war's end), he never served in the war, and everything he knew of it was from secondary sources.

The story is about a young man named Henry Fleming who is full of youthful adventure and longing to be part of the war. He enlists, only to face doubts about his own courage and romantic attitudes. Crane uses the war as the fictional "laboratory" into which he places his young protagonist. The war is an extreme set of environmental variables, and Henry's experiences lead him from uncertainty to confidence in his own character. In the true spirit of Naturalism, Crane portrays Henry's fate as a set of outcomes based on his inborn traits (his drive to be a part of the adventure) and his new environment (the pressures of the war). Crane utilizes many typical naturalist techniques such as symbolism, third-person point-of-view, and use of detail.

Sister Carrie

Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in 1900. After publication, there was controversy surrounding the novel because of the lack of morality of the main character and the fact that the outcome suggests that she is rewarded for her sinful ways. Still, many readers and critics find it to be a moving and honest portrayal of a young woman who leaves her rural home to make a life for herself in Chicago. After briefly working in a factory, she moves in with a well-to-do salesman and becomes his mistress. Soon, however, she catches the eye of a wealthier older man who leaves his wife and career in order to run away with Carrie. They end up in New York, where they part ways and Carrie successfully pursues a stage career.

As a naturalist writer, Dreiser sought to reveal the harshness of life and the ways in which individuals can seize opportunities to alleviate much of that harshness. While some of Dreiser's contemporaries found the depiction of Carrie's amoral life inappropriate, others found it refreshingly realistic. This novel is also important because it shows Dreiser's early tendencies toward the naturalist style. For example, he takes Carrie out of her comfortable environment (the Midwest) and places her in the unfamiliar big city of Chicago to see how her wants and needs will affect her decision-making. The setting, in essence, becomes a set of conditions in which the reader can observe the changes taking place in the character. Other aspects of the novel, such as Dreiser's attention to detail and his portrayal of the struggling lower class, are consistent with the naturalist style.

Critical Overview

Although naturalist novels such as *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Call of the Wild* are now considered classics, critics are often torn on the merits of the movement as a whole. The movement was initially met with suspicion because it was regarded as irrelevant to the American culture and its values. Perhaps because of its French roots, Naturalism was perceived as having little to offer an American readership. The lack of a strong morality presented in many naturalist novels further alienated critics and readers who looked to literature to enlighten and inspire. In his book *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth- Century American Literature*, Donald Pizer provides a retrospective comment: "We are coming to realize that a generation of American critics has approached American literary Naturalism with beliefs about man and art which have frequently distorted rather than cast light upon the object before them." Conservative reviewers denounced the works of Dreiser, for example, for his unfavorable depiction of the modern American man and woman. Still others, like Joseph Warren Beach in his book *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, praise Dreiser for his negative depictions. Beach commends Dreiser's "fearlessness, his honesty, his determination to have done with conventional posturings and evasions."

In the 1940s and 1950s, critics were quick to distance themselves from naturalist writers because some of them (such as Dreiser) were associated with the Communist Party. During that time, there was intense distrust of anyone with communist leanings. Today, critics legitimize the movement on its own terms, crediting it as a significant and coherent movement that resulted in great literary works.

Many critics have difficulty discussing Naturalism without reference to its predecessor, Realism. The two movements share many characteristics (such as attention to detail, common people as subjects, and portrayals of harsh circumstances), but most scholars see Naturalism's reliance on the principle of determinism as its main distinguishing feature. This refers to the belief among naturalist writers that people's fates are determined by their environments and/or their genetics. Pizer declares:

> The common belief is that the naturalists were like the realists in their fidelity to the details of contemporary life but that they depicted everyday life with a greater sense of the role of such causal forces as heredity and environment in determining behavior and belief.

Critics find Naturalism to be the more pessimistic of the two movements. Pizer comments that another important difference is the way human nature is perceived. He explains:

> A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of Realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers

in this material the extraordinary and excessive
in human nature.

Critics like Pizer find Naturalism to be empowering because it reveals the humanity, experiences, and emotional states of common and lowly characters.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey asserts that Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie *is important because it makes Naturalism accessible and relevant to American women*.

A survey of Naturalism reveals that women are underrepresented in this movement, both as authors and as protagonists. Of the major authors□Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris□none are women. Previous movements, most notably Romanticism, included women as contributors and as heroines, yet Naturalism is almost exclusively masculine. This is not to imply that the omission of women was intentional but rather that something about the movement itself spoke to men more meaningfully than to women. Some of the best-known naturalist works represent experiences that, at the time, were exclusive to men. Crane's moving Civil War story, *The Red Badge of Courage*, is set during the war and relates a soldier's experiences. London's *The Call of the Wild* is about a dog in the Yukon, where living conditions are harsh and the culture revolves around heavy drinking, gambling, and dog fights. Where in all of this is there a place for women? The answer, ironically, comes from one of the male authors, Theodore Dreiser, in his novel *Sister Carrie*.

Sister Carrie is unique among the prominent naturalist works because it is about a woman and it speaks to the difficult decisions many women were forced to make in turn-of-the century urban America. The story concerns Caroline Meeber, known as Carrie or Sister Carrie by her friends and family. She leaves her rural home to live with her sister in Chicago, where she hopes to find work and establish her independence. This change of scenery embodies the Naturalist technique of transplanting a character to create a fictional laboratory in which the reader can observe the character's behaviors and reactions.

After working briefly in a factory she becomes a salesman's mistress, sharing an apartment with him and enjoying a nicer lifestyle than she had with her sister. While this choice is not the most moral one, it enables her to get what she wants (a better way of life) by providing what someone else wants (the company of a pretty girl). Given Carrie's standing as a woman in turn-of-the-century Chicago, she reacts to her new environment within her limited choices. When a wealthier man shows interest in her, she readily transfers her loyalties to him. He eventually disappoints her, however, and having moved to New York with him, she finds that she has more options. She makes a career for herself in the theater, and no longer needing the security of a man, she leaves him. In the end, Carrie has all the things she thought she wanted, but she remains vaguely unsatisfied with the trappings of her new, independent life.

Carrie is an important character in American literature because she begins as typical of many women of her time: average and faced with few opportunities. Because she is ordinary, she was accessible to women readers at the time and is accessible to women today. She is also a believable character. Dreiser gives her a share of virtue and

principle but does not hide her weaknesses and flaws. She is ambitious, unwilling to be involved with a married man, and ultimately self-sufficient, but she is also materialistic, selfish, and jaded. She is, in many ways, a typical naturalistic character, and in this way she has much in common with her male counterparts in other prominent naturalist novels.

In *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser introduces Clyde Griffiths, whose lack of emotional attachments (even in his romantic life), desire to be a social climber, and opportunism are also manifest in the character of Carrie. Both characters make morally questionable decisions, and while Carrie's decision-making does not have criminal intent as Griffiths's does, she is ultimately rewarded for it rather than punished.

In Frank Norris's *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, the title character loves money, acts impulsively and selfishly, and sustains false appearances to try to recreate himself. He is also quick to sacrifice actual respectability for the appearance of respectability. All of these characteristics are seen in Carrie as well. She longs for a better life, which she defines as a life of material wealth and societal approval. She, however, realizes what McTeague does not: that a better life is only attained when a person's inner world is content and fulfilled. Carrie and Henry Fleming from Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* share qualities, too. Both are innocents introduced into environments that are totally foreign to them, and they both have romantic ideals at the onset. The harshness of their new environments soon becomes evident, however, and these characters surprise themselves by how they react to, and function in, their new realities. Both are, in their own ways, heroic in the end.

Carrie even has something in common with the canine protagonist, Buck, in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. Both experience a dramatic change of environment and are highly distrustful as a result. Unfortunately for Carrie, she does not encounter someone whom she can learn to trust, as Buck does when he is adopted by John Thornton.

Despite the common threads that unite Carrie with the male protagonists of Naturalism, she is unique because of the realities of being a woman. She faces a different array of choices than the male characters face. She cannot learn basic dentistry and practice as an unlicensed dentist like Norris's title character in *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, and she cannot decide between staying home to seek work or becoming a soldier like Henry Fleming in Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Her choices are to become a rural housewife or to move to the city and work in a factory or find a wealthy man.

What is heroic about Carrie is that she accepts her limited choices and through them creates a new set of choices for herself. Her relationships with Drouet and Hurstwood ultimately lead her to becoming a successful stage actress in New York, which enables her to provide for herself in a career she genuinely enjoys. She is inspiring as a woman because of whom she becomes and the circumstances she seeks out, not because she displays nobility in the narrow confines of her given circumstances.

In contrast to Carrie is Crane's title character in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Maggie comes from a poor and violent background, but rather than find her way out of it, she becomes a victim of it. Maggie becomes a prostitute and commits suicide in the end. She does not seek self-sufficiency but rather survival. Granted, Maggie's situation is more dire than Carrie's is, but Maggie's character is one who would not seek out or, possibly, even recognize an opportunity for something better. In the eyes of readers at the turn of the century, both characters trade on their feminine wiles to get what they need from men, and although Carrie remains more socially respectable than Maggie does, the premise is the same. Both characters were seen as leading immoral lives for material gain. This may be true, but judgments aside, Carrie finds a way to provide for herself so she no longer has to trade on her virtue to have what she needs. Maggie, on the other hand, loses her battle with hopelessness and ends her life.

Without Carrie, the only major female protagonist in Naturalism might have been Maggie. How unfortunate if the portrayal of women and their experiences in turn-of-the-century America had been limited to Maggie. Although Carrie's story has its share of sorrow, it is hopeful and as optimistic as such a story can realistically be. In the end, she still feels empty; the objects and luxuries she longed to have do not fill her heart or nurture her spirit. She has come to understand this, however, which means there is the possibility that she will seek out what she truly needs as fervently as she sought out what she thought she needed. These feelings of loneliness and confusion are common, and women can certainly relate to them now just as they could then. Carrie is a new kind of heroine in American literature. She is flawed, fallen, and lost, but knows herself better at the end of the story. In this light, she is as important a character to the naturalist movement as the men who dominate it.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on Naturalism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Loomis defends the major points of Naturalism and argues that its impact on morality and human feeling can be seen more than ever today.

Naturalism is a word with as many phases of meaning as pacifism or patriotism, and about it rages nearly as fierce a conflict. When Zola issued his well-known pronunciamento that Naturalistic art was Nature seen through a temperament, he stressed the word "Nature." Nature and Nature only must be the subject of art: to face Nature frankly and openly, to present her dulnesses and stupidities and shames with scrupulous impartiality must be the aim of the artist. Now modern English criticism has preferred to call such full-length and unflattering portraiture of Dame Nature, even the emphasis upon her wry neck, bow legs, and squint eyes, by the name of Realism. Accordingly, when the critic nowadays quotes Zola's definition of Naturalism, he stresses the word "temperament." Naturalistic art is Nature seen through a certain temperament, or through a certain formula created by that temperament. Naturalism, we are told, is not simply a reproduction of the homely and repulsive side of Nature's physiognomy, but an attempt to read in it a certain character.

With Zola's profession faithfully to portray Nature the critics have now no quarrel, but with his practice of giving a certain interpretation of her character they and a great body of readers beg leave, more or less politely, to differ. Realism, though not admitted to so high a seat as idealizing poetry and romance, has been received into the company of the immortals, and Howells and Bennett are permitted to sit down to dinner with self-respecting critics. But Naturalism, Zola's interpretation of Nature, the high priests of criticism hold up to mocking and execration. Flaubert, Ibsen, Hardy, Moore, Brieux, and Masters were all at first denounced in the reputable journals as devils from the pit: and they are still ostracized by good society as if a sulphurous vapor hung around them.

To the question, "What is this interpretation, this formula which brings down upon its enunciators the formidable wrath of the critics?" we are likely to receive several answers. The first genial and rubicund gentleman of letters whom we interrogate over a bottle of Burgundy is apt to reply simply: "These fellows are arrant pessimists. They do not assure us that 'God's in his heaven all's right with the world.' They are notoriously addicted to depressing surroundings and unhappy endings. Literature should not upset one's ideas about anything, and should be either soothing, inspiring, or funny." Apparently, for all his assumed superiority the genial critic demands just about the same remoteness from the workaday world and the same comfortable ending as the tired business man, whom he professes to despise.

If we approach some gentleman who has perhaps felt a little more than our genial friend the brunt of pain and perplexity, we are likely to get a somewhat more illuminating answer. "Naturalism is Bestialism. Man is not a beast." To be sure, Zola has much to say of the Bête Humaine, and undoubtedly does stress in us the ape and tiger strains. But will anyone deny that the strains are there? Now and then a human being sprouts an atavistic tail or fell of hair. So, too, now and then, human beings commit atrocities at

Louvain or East St. Louis. Let him that is without a streak of the beast in him cast the first stone at the Bête Humaine. After all, what most critics of this class object to is not the recognition of the animal, but the recognition of the animal as a serious problem. The em- phasis on the beast in *L'Assommoir*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Spoon River* shocks the conventional critic, who is accustomed to hear such things mentioned only over his after-dinner cigar: he feels it very deeply when he sees them in print where they can be read by ladies, and where apparently they are treated not as jests to roll under his tongue but as grit to break his teeth on. He is ready enough to recognize the beast, but only as a joke or a German. So long as it can be laughed away or blown to bits with high explosive, he is quite ready to appreciate it in his Boccaccio or his Bryce reports. But when the naturalistic author shows him the beast everywhere about him, in the office, the church, and the home, and by no means to be got rid of by such simple methods as laughter or trinitrotoluol, and he realizes that only a reorganization of all his ideas in the light of what sociological, economic, and psychological experts tell him can make this abundant *èlan vital* galvanize rather than blast our society, he kicks like a Missouri mule and refuses to recognize the Bête Humaine.

Perhaps, however, we have put our question to some more rational critic and he replies that he confesses the beast in man, but that he also finds a demigod: Naturalism denies the demigod. True enough, if by the demigod is meant some infusion of a supernatural or mystical element into the beast. But if by the demigod be meant simply those qualities which men have ascribed to gods as their chief and worthiest title to worship□justice and love, beauty and reason□then, of course, the Naturalist does not deny the demigod, though like the Nazarene he often discovers him in the less reputable circles of society. Furthermore, he finds embryonic even in the beast all that is popularly considered peculiar to man□art, altruism, remorse, some of the simpler forms of reasoning and foresight. In the most primitive types of humanity he finds a religion claiming as much supernatural sanction as the Roman Church or Bahaism. When confronted, then, with the fact that even animals possess the supposedly divine traits, and that as divine revelation the totem pole and the Cross claim equal authority, the Naturalist comes to the conclusion that the supernatural is only a development of the natural, and that mystical experience, however valuable as a dynamic, is worthless as a directive. Only reason acting upon the facts supplied by experience can guide us to the truth.

Accordingly the Naturalist discards as obsolete three supernaturalistic concepts□Providence, absolute morality, and freedom of the will. In his novels and plays Providence is represented as a blind bungler, conventional morality is scouted and even flouted and man is displayed as a puppet worked by the forces of Heredity and Environment. It is about these three phases of the Naturalistic interpretation of Nature that the battle of the critics still rages. What may be said in defense of these tenets of Naturalistic doctrine trine□a cosmic order without justice, a morality without sanction or stability, and a will, free within limits to choose what it likes best, but determined as to what it likes best?

The idea of a Providence in the affairs of men, working out a sort of poetical justice, has, to be sure, a certain basis in fact. No one can help observing that certain acts

cause pain, directly to himself or indirectly through others. The relation is far from being uniform and inevitable, but despite the exceptions certain general causal relations are recognized. It is obvious that to overindulge in Welsh rarebit to spoil a child with petting brings its own retribution with it. But Nemesis as an instrument of God's jealous vengeance upon the mortal who dares disobey his fiat seems a superfluous explanation of these facts. For it occurs to the Naturalist that a sane ethics calls only those deeds evil which generally bring suffering in their train: and if occasionally that suffering falls upon the evildoer there is no occasion for seeking an explanation in some mysterious Nemesis. Surely never was an absurder piece of writing than Emerson's dithyramb on *Compensation*. To him it would be a cause for wonder and awful speculation that Providence had provided a dark brown taste in the mouth to balance the exhilaration of drunkenness, and had made fire burn to punish the child for putting its finger in the flame. The fundamental idea is worthy of the good old lady who thanked the dear Lord for providing such excellent harbors where the cities of New York and San Francisco were to spring up. Nemesis is a law, just as gravitation is a law; but like gravitation it is offset a billion times a minute by other laws: and inasmuch as it is therefore less successful than any human penal system in saddling the heaviest penalty on the worst offender, it scarcely deserves all the mystified veneration that has been lavished upon it.

Let us turn next to the Naturalist's morality. We have noted that whether an act is right or wrong depends upon whether joy or pain the long run follows. This, in turn, depends upon the human and other sentient beings involved. These, in turn, will be affected by climate, heredity, education, and a thousand other things. Naturalistic morality differs, then, from orthodox morality in its relativity. The notion of an eternal code, confided by Infallible Wisdom to the visions of seers and the conscience of every individual, does not appeal to the Naturalistic thinker. If conscience be an infallible guide to right conduct, why did the conscience 1700 encourage duelling, the conscience of ancient Sparta stealing, the conscience of the devout Mohammedan polygamy, and why was what we now regard as a loathsome sexual perversion practised unblushingly in Periclean Athens? The Naturalist has come to believe that conscience, an emotional assurance of the rightness of one's action, varies so uniformly with the social conventions about it that it can no more be relied on than a compass in the neighborhood of masses of iron. If the moral law is carved on tables of adamant for all times and all places, why is it that when the moral law interferes too severely with the right to life or happiness, we all by common consent make and approve exceptions thereto? We agree that the starving child cannot be blamed for stealing, the invalid must be kept alive by falsehoods, self-defense justifies killing, a noble purpose takes the taint from suicide. I know a clergyman, who had one of the greatest shocks of his life when I wrote him that I believed in comparative freedom of divorce, who yet not long after met with a case of domestic unhappiness, which not only led him to approve a divorce but actually to officiate at the remarriage of the divorced wife. The unpardonable sin, to use a manner of speaking, for the Naturalist is to let a taboo stand in the way of human happiness.

Naturalistic ethics, then, are hedonistic. The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the end and criterion of action. But the Naturalistic thinker does not believe that to obey each moment's passing whim brings the maximum of happiness either for the

individual or for the group. He perceives that man is a highly complex organism, whose nature includes, besides the passions, a social instinct, an artistic instinct, and a reason. In the harmonizing of all these factors lies happiness. To give controlled expression to the passions and to sublimate them, to enjoy the pleasures of social intercourse and social approval, to do all things beautifully, and viewing all these things in their relation, to harmonize them by reason,□this is the art of living. Individuals here and there may attain degrees of happiness in spite of, even by the partial denial of one or another of these four elements. One may even kill the artistic impulse and yet live in moderate pleasure. But to deny the fundamental passions or the claims of society or of reason is to court destruction. On the other hand, to follow too eagerly the seductions of any one is to distort the growth of the organism, and evil results appear either in the later development of the individual or in the society which imitates him.

What does duty mean to the Naturalistic thinker? The root of the word supplies the key. Duty is simply the debt which the individual owes to society. If society gives him much,□wealth, power, education,□society has a right to demand much. If it gives him little, it should demand little. The product of the slum, the ten hour day, and the gin palace, owes nothing to society. Society's demand that he make himself an intelligent human being and refrain from burglary, rape, and murder is an impossible impertinence on the part of society; though society will doubtless continue to enforce the payment of loans which it never made. Duty, then, is simply a claim by society upon the individual.

Since, however, the individual craves happiness and the way to complete happiness does not lie in antagonism to society and wholesale infringement of social interests, it will always be expedient for him, no matter how little society has done for him, to work for social ends. On the whole, it pays to cash up when society sends in a bill.

What have the Naturalistic writers done for morality? We may admit at once that they have done more to throw down rotting conventions than to build up new moral and social laws. But the former service is not to be minimized. Zola built his ponderous engines of destruction up against the walls of clerical imposture and vice in many forms; Hardy battered at the undemocratic walls of Oxford colleges and laid bare the shallowness of revivalism; Wells in his Naturalistic period exploded the bladder of the patent medicine and the whole vast imposture of advertising; Galsworthy attacked a jingoistic patriotism, and enacted for us the farcetragedy that is sometimes played under the title of "Justice"; and Masters in his *Spoon River Anthology* has pierced to the root of nearly every wrong and folly and sham that festers in the modern social body.

Greatest has been the service of the Naturalistic school to the cause of labor and the cause of women. There are Naturalists who have been indifferent or hostile to both, but they form a small minority. From Zola to Verhæren, from Arthur Morrison to Ernest Poole, the majority of Naturalists have insistently claimed or labor that right to the pursuit of happiness which is so tantalizingly offered in our revolutionary Declaration of Independence.

For women Naturalistic literature has done the enormous service of telling the truth and the whole truth about sex. Conventional literature gave glimpses of purple mountain

peaks, encircled with clouds of gold; it told besides of a vast tract hidden by sulphurous vapors, where the unwary wanderer felt the earth's crust crumble beneath him, and sank into a seething cauldron. Conventional literature charted only the most obvious parts of this region: where the concealed dangers were perhaps greatest it gave no direction. It prescribed for women one entrance only, a gate called marriage, and gave many details of the route thither. But for all the tract that lay beyond or outside of it the details were meagre and sometimes false. Now all this region has been faithfully charted and published abroad. I venture to say the reading of half a dozen novels of the Naturalist school will exhibit more of the rationale of sex than any other body of literature ever written. Wifely subjection, the double standard of morals, prostitution, the seduction of working-girls, long sanctioned or condoned in much conventional literature, have received no quarter here. Among what school of writers are we to find one particular form of criminal folly so scarified as in *Ghosts, Damaged Goods*, and "Willard Fluke" of the *Spoon River Anthology*? Burke's famous generalization that no discoveries are to be made in morality breaks down before such a case. For while, doubtless, the ethical principle of which this is an application is as old as society, yet the perception of its application and the forcible presentation of the evil and its consequences, leading at last to recognition in our legislatures, is new and may be placed in large measure to the credit of the Naturalists.

Look at Tom Jones, the hero of what has been called by the conventionalists the greatest English novel. Tom is scarcely more than a slave of the moment's appetite. To be sure, he has too much sense of fair play ever to seduce women, but women have not the slightest difficulty in seducing him. The possibility that any of his adventures may have dire consequences is never faced, except when the sensational possibility of committing incest for a time horrifies him. This amiable gentleman, rather than soil his hands, resolves to sell himself to a lady in return for his keep. At last, he marries the chaste Sophia and rears a lusty brood. I should like to know what those who charge the Naturalistic novel with a predilection for feeble heroes and heroines have to say for this flabby protagonist of their greatest English novel. As a picture of random sex relations it betrays a facile optimism that no realist would be capable of.

Now by way of contrast let us look at a novel of the Naturalistic extreme, *Sanine*, by Artzybasheff. The book is not a typical example of Naturalism, for the author derides the exercise of reason and humanitarian effort. But even though in these respects it falls short of the saner Naturalism characteristic of Zola, Ibsen, Hardy, and Masters, even though it glorifies sexual experiences as the greatest thing in the world, yet it is so far superior to *Tom Jones* as a criticism of life that it does not flinch from the tragic possibilities in such experience, and it makes a sharp differentiation between the putrescent koprophagy of the garrison town and the artistic expression of a healthy desire. While in my opinion the author does not sufficiently recognize that human nature has other summits than those reached in the culmination of the mightiest elemental passion, and does not realize the limitations which society has a right to place upon mating, yet in his demand that passion be beautiful as a Greek statue is beautiful, and in his recognition of the woman, not as a plaything but as a personality, he admits the place of the artistic and social impulses and justifies his classification as a Naturalist. Neither *Sanine* nor *Tom Jones* gives us anything like an exhaustive study of sex, but

Sanine penetrates beneath the crust of convention; *Tom Jones* does not: *Sanine* has an idealism of sex; *Tom Jones* has none.

The larger Naturalism, then, founded upon the view of happiness as the goal of life, of the all round development of the individual as the way, and of the golden mean as the guiding principle, has been gradually making over our morality, ridding it of the relics of primitive taboos, and establishing it upon the demands of human nature.

But the third fundamental principle of Naturalism, determinism, is a stumbling block to many. The conventionalist is sure to object. "Granted that Naturalism has laid bare the ulcers and cancerous growths in the body of society, and has been as plain-spoken as the Old Testament or Shakespeare about things that are never mentioned in polite society, it destroys all incentive to salve those sores because it denies the freedom of the human will. It so impresses on us the thorough corruption of society that we feel that it is condemned to an eternity of disease. We see these men, as one reverend critic phrases it, 'concentrating attention on the shadiness and seaminess of life, exploiting sewers and cesspools, dabbling in beastliness and putrefaction, dragging to light the ghastly and gruesome, poring over the scurvy and unreportable side of things, bending in lingering analysis over every phase of mania and morbidity, going down into the swamps and marshes to watch the phosphorescence of decay and the jack-o'-lanterns that dance on rottenness'; and we conclude forsooth that if this is life, there is no hope for the world."

Naturalism may at once plead guilty to the doctrine of determinism: but it does not admit that the doctrine is inconsistent with optimism of the future or that it robs man of incentive to moral action. The argument that optimism can be justified only by belief in an outside power pumping virtue into humanity by slow degrees is not convincing to anyone who realizes what is meant by potential energy. It is not necessary to believe that if a pound of radium could emit electrical energy for thousands of years it must be connected with a celestial dynamo. Neither is it necessary to believe that the human race is incapable of improving itself, however unhappy its present condition. No man can tell the potential energies latent in the human race, energies that may express themselves through reason, social feeling, and the love of beauty to make the superman. Determinism is no foe to an optimism of the future. Professor Santayana puts the theory admirably: "We are a part of the blind energy behind Nature, but by virtue of that energy we impose our purposes on that part of Nature which we constitute or control. We can turn from the stupefying contemplation of an alien universe to the building of our own house, knowing that, alien as it is, that universe has chanced to blow its energy also into our will and to allow itself to be partially dominated by our intelligence. Our mere existence and the modicum of success we have attained in society, science and art, are the living proofs of this human power. The exercise of this power is the task appointed for us by the indomitable promptings of our own spirit, a task in which we need not labor without hope."

The conventionalist pursues his point. "This all sounds mighty fine. But experience shows that a belief in the freedom of the will and moral responsibility is all that keeps us from wallowing in a sensual sty." As the Rev. Dr. S. Law Wilson puts it, "What, we ask,

would be the effect of persuading the masses of mankind to believe that all the evil of which they are guilty is necessitated, and all the blame must be laid to the door of blood, or birth, or environment, or the tyranny of impulse? Indoctrinate the masses of our population with this pestiferous teaching, and there be some of us who shall not taste of death till we see the reign of moral anarchy and disintegration set in."

Now let us see what the real effect of acting upon the doctrine of free will is as contrasted with the effect of acting upon its denial. The theory of the freedom of the will, apart from its incompatibility with the generally accepted law of causation as implying an agent that, without being itself caused, initiates or causes action, involves the doctrine of complete responsibility. For if the will could have refrained just as well as not from the immoral act, no matter how powerful the pressure of heredity and environment, the man is absolutely responsible. His guilt has no extenuation. Punishment heavy and merciless is but his due. The only thing for society to do is impress upon him the enormity of his crime and urge him to repentance.

Now the old penal methods were in entire accord with this theory. Criminals were in prison to be punished. No treatment was too bad for them. The prison chaplain dilated on their essential wickedness, and told them that they had only themselves to thank for the plight in which they found themselves. If they would freely confess their guilt and accept the inspiration of religion, though society would not forgive them, God would. Now the results of such a logical application of the doctrine of moral responsibility to the criminal class are notorious. Everyone knows that the men who went to the penitentiary did not come out penitent, far less did they come out with any propensity to good. These men had learned what the doctrine of free will was in its application to them. Somehow there seems to have been a perverse conspiracy among criminals throughout the world to discredit the doctrine of free will and its corollary, moral responsibility.

What, however, are the results of determinism as applied to these same men? Mr. Osborne, whose work at Sing Sing we all know, has without knowing it acted upon this principle. He has brought into the prison pleasure and social life and a system of stimuli in the form of rewards. He has created a society where the criminal naturally did his duty to society because society had done something for him. He has taught the men trades and made openings for them in the world, and as a result he has made citizens out of outlaws. Of his success there can be no question. What here the individual could not do for himself, enviromnent did for him. It mattered little whether he thought his will free or not: it responded inevitably to the right stimuli. Little need have we to fear the spread of the determinist theory among the masses, if only we have intelligence enough to practice as well as to preach it.

The conventionalist once more objects. "But turn away from life to your own Naturalistic novels. Are they not shrieking in our ears that man is feeble and doomed to failure? Are not their heroes and heroines weaklings who fall unresisting under the bludgeonings of Fate?"

Now it may well be admitted that the Naturalists, in order to show where the rocks lie, have usually represented their human barks as breaking upon the reefs rather than

gliding smoothly into harbor. But in doing so the Naturalists have done only what every tragic writer has done. If the Mayor of Casterbridge or Madame Bovary fell through a combination of defects of character with adverse circumstances, what else may we say of Hamlet and Lear? Are we to despise Tess of the D'Urbervilles because though she often showed great strength of character, at certain crises of her fate timidity prevailed over purpose? When the conventionalists begin to call the great tragedies decadent on the same grounds that they condemn the Naturalistic novels; when they scorn Desdemona because when her husband suspected her she did not call up the Pinkerton's detective agency of Cyprus and probe the matter to the bottom, and because on her deathbed she did not wrestle courageously, but murmured merely, "A guiltless death I die," then we may listen patiently when they apply these standards to works not in the classic tradition. Until then some of us are inclined to believe that these critics unconsciously act upon the principle that any stick is good enough to beat a dog with.

Dr. Johnson once said that if he had no duties and no reference to futurity he would spend his life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman. To such a declaration the appropriate Johnsonian reply is, "You lie, sir." If the Doctor would permit of any further explanation, we might go on to say: "In the first place Fate might refuse. Fate, in the form of the pretty woman, might politely decline the invitation. She might prefer other company to that of the hectoring oracle of the Mitre, the polysyllabic proser of the *Rambler* papers: she might object to being referred to as an unidea-ed girl. In the second place, if the woman found it agreeable, the Doctor himself would soon have found it disagreeable. It may be an impertinence to presume that we know the Doctor better than he knew himself, but Boswell has made the claim possible. Now the Doctor had certain hereditary traits that would never have been satisfied for long with sitting in a postchaise beside a pretty woman. He had too active a brain, he was too much of a clubman and, as a matter of fact, despite all his complaints of indolence, he had an instinct for work. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that Samuel Johnson would have let the American Revolution go by without leaping from the post-chaise and scratching off *Taxation No Tyranny*. At the very least, he would have had to stop for a moment, stretch his limbs, and perhaps roll down a hill for the fun of it. Without disparaging the worthy Doctor's sincerity, one may say that, granted his pecuniary and other restrictions, he would have lived much the same life if he had had no theories duty beyond what every social being holds, and no more reference to futurity than the desire that the rest of life contain as much happiness as he could put into it.

Moreover, one cannot help thinking that if Doctor Johnson had exerted his great influence, not as a conventionalist and Tory, but as a Naturalist and democrat, the whole course of events in Europe might have been changed. His posthumous power might have offset the Bourbonism of Burke; England might not have thrown her strength on the side of that Holy Alliance of Prussian, Austrian and Russian despotisms; the contagion of a liberal England and France might have liberalized Europe; and the world might have been made safe for democracy a hundred years ago. But it was not to be.

There are people who see in Naturalism the origin of this war and in the triumph of the Allies the vindication of Providence. Such a view is only possible through a

misconception of the facts. The insane policies of German imperialism found ready support throughout the ranks of the German supernaturalists, and palliation in that inviolate citadel of supernaturalism, the Vatican. On the other hand, the bitterest and most courageous of the foes of German imperialism were a small group of atheistic socialists in Germany, whose creed was the creed of Naturalism. As for the victory of the Allies I can see nothing but a confirmation of the blunt statement erroneously attributed to Napoleon that God is always on the side of the heaviest battalions. The feeble succor afforded by St. Michael at Mons hardly leads one to rely much upon the heavenly powers for aid. The despairing prayers of millions went unheeded until material force came to the aid of spiritual yearnings. One who can believe in supernaturalism after this war possesses, indeed, a faith which serves as an evidence of things not seen. Let him have his angels of Mons and be happy. But the rest of us, in this time momentous and critical as scarcely any other time in the world's history, can hardly afford to base our hopes for the future on any efforts but our own, or afford to direct those efforts by any but Naturalistic principles: for these must bring happiness in their wake, or *ipso facto* cease to be the principles of Naturalism.

Source: Roger Sherman Loomis, "A Defense of Naturalism," in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, edited by George J. Becker, Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 535-48.

Adaptations

The Call of the Wild was adapted to audio by Naxos Audio Books (abridged) in 1995, read by Garrick Hagon; and by Dercum (unabridged) in 1997, read by Samuel Griffin.

The Call of the Wild was adapted to film in 1908 by Biograph Company; in 1923 by Hal Roach Studios; in 1935 by 20th Century Pictures, starring Clark Gable; and in 1972 by Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer, starring Charlton Heston.

The Call of the Wild was also adapted for television movies in 1976 by Charles Fries Productions; in 1993 by RHI Entertainment, starring Rick Schroder; and in 1997 by Kingsborough Greenlight Pictures. It was adapted as a television series in 2000 by Cinevu Films and Call of the Wild Productions.

Sister Carrie was adapted to audio by Books on Tape in 1997, read by Rebecca Burns; and in 2000 by Blackstone Audio Books, read by C. M. Herbert.

McTeague: A Story of San Francisco was adapted to audio by Audio Book Contractors in 1994.

McTeague: A Story of San Francisco was adapted to film in 1915 by William A. Brady Picture Plays, Inc., and was adapted as a television opera by Robert Altman in 1992 in a production by The Lyric Opera of Chicago aired on Public Broadcasting Station.

The Red Badge of Courage was adapted to audio in 1993 by Bookcassette Sales, read by Roger Dressler.

The Red Badge of Courage was adapted to film in 1951 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, directed by John Huston and starring Audie Murphy.

The Red Badge of Courage was also adapted as a television movie in 1974 by 20th Century Fox Television.

An American Tragedy was adapted to film in 1931 in a production by Paramount. It was again adapted in 1951 as *A Place in the Sun.*

Topics for Further Study

Consider the main identifying characteristics of Naturalism, and choose three films that you believe reflect naturalistic ideas. Write a review of each film, explaining the characteristics of Naturalism that you see in it.

After Naturalism came Modernism, a period that produced fiction, drama, and poetry expressing the experiences and attitudes of wartime and postwar writers. Research this period and its major contributors and create a presentation in which you demonstrate how Modernism grew out of, or in reaction to, Naturalism. Be sure to consider historical influences.

The photography of Edward Curtis is often associated with the naturalist movement. His subject matter was primarily the dwindling Native- American population and culture. Examine some of his photographs and decide if you would classify him with the naturalists or with the romantic Western writers. (You will need to learn a little about the characteristics of romantic Western writing.) Explain your position in a well-organized essay that makes references to specific photographs.

Read a naturalist work of your choice, paying particular attention to the author's use of symbolism. Write an essay discussing examples of symbolism in the work and how the symbols used relate to Naturalism.

Compare and Contrast

Early 1900s: In 1907, Paris is the site of the first cubist painting exhibition in the world. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque spearhead the movement. An artistic manifestation of the age's rationalism, Cubism is embraced by some and staunchly rejected by others. It will be years before it is recognized as a legitimate artistic movement and its influence fully appreciated.

Today: Modern art includes a wide variety of media and styles. Although art lovers are more accepting of innovations and radical new approaches, many artists continue to struggle with society's preconceived notions of what constitutes art. This tension between the artist and society keeps alive the fundamental question: "What is art?"

Early

1900s: In 1903 Henry Ford founds the Ford Motor Company and creates an efficient assembly line ten years later. This revolutionizes both transportation and manufacturing, making it possible for many more people to own cars.

Today: Owning a car is quite common, and prices range from the affordable to the lavish. Car buyers are no longer limited to the "basic black" first offered by Ford or even to American- made vehicles; automobiles are imported from all over the world. Innovations in design often dictate innovations on the factory floor.

Early 1900s: Max Planck and Albert Einstein make major contributions to physics, publishing theories that radically change the way scientists look at the universe.

Today: In 2000 three scientists share the Nobel Prize for physics. For their contributions to the field of modern information technology, Zhores I. Alferov, Herbert Kroemer, and Jack S. Kilby are honored.

What Do I Read Next?

Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) is the startling story of a pretty girl whose life of violence and poverty leads her to prostitution and suicide. Although less well-known than *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Maggie* is considered an excellent example of the naturalist novel.

A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theater (2000), by Christopher Innes, introduces students to the influences of Naturalism on modern theater. He visits Naturalism's roots and analyzes six plays by three playwrights, including full chapters on each play's historical and theatrical context.

Mary Lawlor's *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West* (2000) summarizes early American attitudes about the West and the literature that came out of those perceptions. Lawlor then shows how Naturalism stripped the West of its romantic overtones and forever changed the way it was understood.

Edited by Donald Pizer, *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* (1995) explores Realism and Naturalism in American literature. Pizer addresses the conflict over terminology before providing an overview of critical approaches to these two movements. He also offers in-depth analysis of various texts with reference to their importance to the movements and their historical influences.

Further Study

Brown, Frederick, *Zola: A Life*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

This detailed account of Émile Zola's life demonstrates his importance as a writer, thinker, and political figure. This biography took fifteen years to compile and includes information from Zola's personal correspondence.

Fast, Howard, ed., *The Best Short Stories of Theodore Dreiser*, Elephant Publishers, 1989.

Although he is known mainly for his novels, Dreiser was also a short-story writer. Here, Fast collects the best examples of Dreiser's short fiction.

Kershaw, Alex, *Jack London: A Life*, Griffin, 1999.

Kershaw examines London's exciting, short life in this fast-paced biography. He includes London's literary efforts, his adventurous spirit, his social and environmental concerns, and his unpopular views.

Norris, Frank, *The Best Short Stories of Frank Norris*, Ironweed Press, 1998.

This is the first collection of Norris's short fiction, and critics praise the publisher's selection of these fourteen stories from the more than sixty available. Norris's naturalistic tendencies are evident, even though these stories are a departure from the novels for which he is better known.

Wertheim, Stanley, *A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia*, Greenwood Publishing, 1997.

In this single volume, students will find information about Crane's short life along with analysis of his works, characters, settings, and prominent issues of his work and times.

Bibliography

Beach, Joseph Warren, *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932.

Pizer, Donald, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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