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Howells to London

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DONALD PIZER

Introduction: The Problem of Definition

Anyone seeking, as are the contributors to this volume, to write about American literature between the Civil War and World War I in relation to the literary movements known as realism and naturalism faces a twofold initial difficulty. First, there exists a traditional suspicion, often arising from the very attempt to write literary history, of large-scale classifying rubrics. Is there any advantage, one might ask, in conceptualizing the richly diverse expression of this period in terms of such inherent simplification as realism and naturalism? A second problem derives from the recent theorizing of literary study. The attraction, for many theorists, of a deconstructive stance has bred skepticism toward interpretive enterprises that posit such communities of belief and expression as those subsumed under the headings of realism and naturalism. And, from a somewhat different theoretical viewpoint, recent scholars of a New Historicist bent have tended to discount traditional historical divisions in the study of American literature on the ground that they obscure underlying ideological similarities present in all American writing since the Civil War.

Yet, as this volume testifies, the effort to describe and understand a historical phase of American writing in terms of major shared characteristics of that writing continues. At its deepest and probably most significant level of implication, this attempt derives from the same reservoir of humanistic faith which feeds the act of creative expression itself. The artist, putting pen to paper, is expressing a belief in the human capacity to overcome such obstacles to understanding as the existence in all communication acts of unconscious motive and value in both writer and reader, the inherent ambiguity of the symbolic expression which is language, and the heartbreaking distinction in human utterance between intent and effect. He or she does so, despite these difficulties, because of faith in the value of striving to create threads of shared experience and meaning out of the inchoate mix of life. The literary historian, in his or her own way, also functions within this charged field of doubt and faith. Indeed, the literary historian can profit

from the increased appreciation in recent decades of the difficulties inherent in the effort to interpret. An awareness of the hazards and complexities of textual and historical analysis can lead, not to abandonment of the attempt to understand the past, but rather to a refining of that undertaking.

As a minor reflection of this awareness, I would like briefly to describe the assumptions that underlie the contents and organization of this collection of essays devoted to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American writing. The general notion of the volume is that of an exercise in literary history in which various conflicting impulses in the writing of literary history are paired off against each other – a method, in other words, that dramatizes some of the opposing pulls in the construction of history rather than one which assumes that they are somehow resolved within a single seamless narrative. One such opposition is social and intellectual history versus the close reading of texts. Another is the older modes of critical and historical analysis versus those currently in fashion. And a third is the traditional canon versus an emerging alternative canon. The first pair of tendencies is represented by the opening essays on American and European intellectual and social background and by the studies devoted to specific works of the period. The next is found in the review of earlier criticism of the period undertaken later in this introduction and in the essay on recent critical approaches. And the last is reflected in the traditional texts examined at length and in the essay on expanding the canon as well as in the final case studies on works by Johnson and Du Bois. The controlling strategy of this book, in brief, is that of dialectic. It is hoped that this approach suggests something of the dynamic nature of literary history, that it is an interpretive act in process, and (more specifically) that it will contribute to an understanding of some of the distinctive characteristics of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American literature.

Michael Anesko, in his essay “Recent Critical Approaches,” will be discussing basic tendencies in the study of American realism and naturalism since approximately the early 1970s. It remains for me, therefore, to describe several areas of interest in earlier efforts to come to grips with the nature of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American fiction. One is the always troublesome issue of whether *realism* and *naturalism* are indeed satisfactory critical and historical terms in relation to the writing of the period. Another is the presence of distinctive phases in the critical interpretation of realism and naturalism since the emergence of the movements in the late nineteenth century. In addition, although this volume is devoted to discussions of fiction written between the Civil War and World War I, it

may be useful to comment briefly on critical attempts to describe the existence of naturalistic strains in American literature since 1918.

A major problem inherent in the use of the terms *realism* and *naturalism* in discussions of literature is the fact that both words also have distinctive meanings in philosophical discourse that can spill over into literary analysis, with awkward consequences. For example, metaphysical and epistemological inquiries as to what is real, or the ethical implications of what is natural, can be used to undermine almost any act of literary historiography or criticism. This destabilization arises, not from the efforts of scholars who seek a meaningful engagement with the possible philosophical implications of a literary work, but rather from the attempts of various writers from the mid-nineteenth century onward to ridicule the pretensions of works purporting to be realistic or naturalistic by noting the emptiness, in relation to philosophical usage, of any such claims. As a result of this conventional stance of critics instinctively hostile to realistic or naturalistic expression, it has become common to preface serious discussions of the literary dimensions of realism or naturalism with statements disclaiming any relationship between the literary and philosophical usages of the terms.¹

Another, somewhat related, problem is that the terms bear social and moral valences that are frequently attached to any work designated as realistic or naturalistic, whatever the specific character of that work. The real and natural, on the one hand, suggest the genuine and actual shorn of pretension and subterfuge. The real, especially in America, has therefore also had a positive political inflection, as is revealed by several generations of Howells scholars who have related his literary beliefs and practices to democratic values.² On the other hand, realism and naturalism imply, through their association with the concrete immediacies of experience, a literature unmediated by the intellect or spirit, and therefore lacking in those qualities necessary to sustain the mind or soul of man. Naturalism in particular is thus held to be morally culpable because it appears to concentrate on the physical in man's nature and experience.³ (Theodore Dreiser's naturalism, Stuart P. Sherman stated in a famous pronouncement, derived from an animal theory of human conduct.)⁴ Thus, it is assumed by critics seeking to exploit the negative associations conjured up by the terms *realism* and *naturalism* that any literature so designated proclaims the shallowness of mind and spirit of its creator.

Realism and *naturalism* have therefore often served as shibboleths in social and literary controversy – comparable to *liberal* and *reactionary* in present-day political affairs – at various moments in American cultural history. The terms played a central role during late-nineteenth-century de-

bates on the value of the ideal versus the commonplace in experience, and they recurred in 1920s arguments about whether the writer should depict the rational or the irrational as central to human behavior. They reappeared in 1930s discussions about the need for literature to serve a social purpose rather than fulfill an aesthetic need, as well as in disputes during the 1960s and 1970s over whether or not the romance or novel is the distinctive form of American fiction.⁵ Each of these controversies has usually cast more light on the polemical preoccupations of the moment than the literature under discussion. Of course, it can be maintained that the inseparability of subject from object, of the knower from what he wishes to know, is inherent in the act of seeking to know, and can therefore no more be avoided in the effort to “know” realism and naturalism than it can in any similar enterprise. The issue in this instance, however, is the blatant irrelevancy of much that has been imposed on *realism* and *naturalism* as terms by critics preoccupied with polemical ends. In other words, given this history in the use of the terms, can we have any faith in the possibility of a more “objective” use?

A final major problem in the use of *realism* and *naturalism* as key terms in American literary historiography arises from several significant differences in the way the terms have been used in European literary history. It has often been remarked that realism and naturalism occurred earlier in Europe than in America (from the late 1850s to the late 1880s in France); that they contained – in the pronouncements of Flaubert and Zola, for example – self-conscious and full-scale ideologies; and that they functioned within a coherent network of personal relationships for much of their existence. In America, on the other hand, it is noted that the boundaries of the period are the Civil War and World War I, which suggests a substitution of historical event for ideology as the significant basis for understanding literary production; that critical discussion, as characterized by Howells’s definition of realism as “the truthful treatment of material,”⁶ lacks depth; and that the movements also lacked a social base or center. For some critics, the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from these differences is that it is inappropriate and poor criticism to attempt to apply terms with a body of specific meaning derived from the specific characteristics of their European origin to a very different set of circumstances in American literary history.⁷

George J. Becker, who took the lead during the 1960s in this effort to dismiss the credibility of *realism* and *naturalism* as terms in American literary history, also noted another troublesome issue in their varying European and American usage. In Europe the terms were used interchangeably in the late nineteenth century and often still are, while in America they have served

to distinguish between the fiction of the generation of Howells and James (the 1870s and 1880s) and that of Norris and Dreiser (the 1890s). To Becker, a reliance on this distinction is further evidence that both terms have been distorted in their application to American literary conditions and should therefore be discarded by American literary historians.⁸

Becker's objections, however, have not prevented the continued use of the terms *realism* and *naturalism* in American literary historiography. They are too deeply implanted to be dislodged, and their removal would leave unanswered the question of what would replace them. But Becker's attempt, as well as those made by such scholars as Harry Levin and René Wellek,⁹ to describe Continental realism and naturalism as a body of belief and practice has clarified both the difference between the movements in Europe and America and what is distinctive in the American movements. In short, it is now generally held that American realism and naturalism are not similar to the European varieties, but that the differences between them should lead, not to a rejection of the use of the terms in America, but rather to studies that will exploit an understanding of these differences in order to help us interpret the American literary phenomena designated by the terms.

Thus, in the long debate on the advantages and disadvantages of using the terms *realism* and *naturalism*, a rough operative (rather than fully articulated) consensus has emerged. (Not to say that there are not vigorous dissenters to this consensus.) Efforts to dispose of the terms because of the various semantic confusions that have adhered to them over the last hundred years have been rejected. Whatever the philosophical, moral, and social baggage that encumbers them, they will have to do; including, indeed, this baggage itself as a profitable object of study. In addition, efforts to confine the meaning of the terms to normative definitions derived from European expression have also been rejected. Rather, it is now generally accepted that the terms can be used to historical and critical advantage to designate a body of writing produced during a distinctive phase of American expression. Or, to put it another way, that the historian can accept the premise that whatever was being produced in fiction during the 1870s and 1880s that was new, interesting, and roughly similar in a number of ways can be designated as *realism*, and that an equally new, interesting, and roughly similar body of writing produced at the turn of the century can be designated as *naturalism*. This is not, of course, an entirely satisfactory "solution" to the various problems inherent in the use of the terms *realism* and *naturalism* in American literary history. But when the evidence provided both by the texts themselves and by a complex cultural and intellectual history (as will be seen) cannot itself produce precise and uniform

definitions, we must accept the fact that the definitions must be adapted to the evidence, and that an amorphous, flexible, and ultimately “undefinable” terminology is in itself a contribution to the understanding of what occurred.¹⁰

Literary historians of the 1920s and 1930s, following the lead of V. L. Parrington, tended to describe realism as a new phenomenon unleashed upon the American scene during the 1870s and 1880s by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of America in the post-Civil War period. But as Robert Falk and others have demonstrated, no such swift and complete rejection of earlier nineteenth-century literary beliefs and practices occurred. In particular, critical pronouncements during this period about the new writing were firmly Victorian in their basic assumptions about life and literature.¹¹

One of the most important of these assumptions is closely identified with the critical views of W. D. Howells during the late 1880s, though it appears as well in the literary journalism of a number of other writers seeking to defend and promote the new fiction. Literature, Howells argued in his “Editor’s Study” columns in *Harper’s Monthly*, ought to reflect and play a major role in encouraging the social and political progress that characterized nineteenth-century life, progress that had received its fullest expression in the American effort to unite scientific inquiry and political democracy into a means for a better life for all men. Howells and such figures as Hamlin Garland, T. S. Perry, and H. H. Boyesen thus accepted wholeheartedly the central evolutionary premise of much nineteenth-century thought that loosely joined social, material, and intellectual life into a triumphant forward march.¹² The function of literature in this universal progress was to reject the outworn values of the past in favor of those of the present. Or, in more literary terms, the writer was to reject the romantic material and formulas of earlier fiction, as these derived from the limited beliefs and social life of their moment of origin, in favor of a realistic aesthetic which demanded that the subject matter of contemporary life be objectively depicted, no matter how “unliterary” the product of this aesthetic might seem to be. “Nothing is stable,” Garland wrote in 1882, “nothing absolute, all changes, all is relative. Poetry, painting, the drama, these too are always being modified or left behind by the changes in society from which they spring.”¹³

Garland’s pronouncement, and many like it, appears to require a radical dismissal of traditional literary belief and practice. (The title of his 1894 collection of essays, *Crumbling Idols*, reflects a similar radical aura.) But in

fact, when separated from its polemic posturing and examined for its specific proposals about fiction, criticism of this kind discloses a far less revolutionary cast than its rhetoric suggests. Howells's famous grasshopper analogy, in his 1891 collection of "Editor's Study" columns, *Criticism and Fiction*, is revealing in this context. All is to be true and honest in fiction, Howells states, within a realistic aesthetic in which the writer, like a scientist with democratic values, discards the old heroic and ideal, and therefore false, cardboard model of a grasshopper and depicts the commonplace activities of a commonplace grasshopper. This engaging plea, however, disguises the tameness, and indeed often the superficiality, of much fiction subsumed under the notion of the commonplace or realistic. For Howells and others, the "progressive realism of American fiction" (to use H. H. Boyesen's language) lay principally in portraying "the widely divergent phases of our American civilization,"¹⁴ that is, a local-color literature. In addition, these "phases" were to be depicted normatively in the negative sense of omitting areas of human nature and social life that were "barbaric" in nature. The new literature, Garland announced in *Crumbling Idols*, "will not deal with crime and abnormalities, nor with diseased persons. It will deal . . . with the wholesome love of honest men for honest women, with the heroism of labor . . . , a drama of average types of character. . . ."¹⁵

In short, the underlying beliefs of this first generation of critics of realism were firmly middle-class. Literature had a job of work to do: to make us known to each other in our common political and social progress (and also, in Howells's later modification of his views, our defects). It was to serve social ends as these ends were defined by the socially responsible. It is therefore not surprising to find a disparity between the radical implications of the realists' ideal of change and the actual themes and forms of the literature proposed as meeting this ideal. We have a realistic fiction that "every year [grows] more virile, independent, and significant," announced Boyesen, who cited as examples of this expression the work of such thin and pastiche local colorists as Thomas Nelson Page, H. C. Bunner, and Edgar Fawcett.¹⁶

To put this distinction between critical pronouncement and literary production in somewhat different terms, Howells, Garland, Boyesen, and others appeared to have confused the proliferation and acceptance of local color, a literature expressive above all of middle-class taste and values, with their call for a fiction reflective of the radical changes occurring in American life. Something new and exciting was indeed happening in fiction, but it was happening principally in the work of the major novelists of the day, Henry James, Twain, and Howells, who, except for Howells, were writing outside

the parameters of the commonplace, as well as in the largely neglected work of women and minority authors. In slighting these forms of expression in favor of the "positive" social work performed by a normative local color, Howells and others were misfiring in ways that had a permanent effect on the conception of American realism.

Realism, because of Howells's prominence as critic and novelist and because of its widespread public acceptance in the form of local color, attracted a considerable body of critical commentary during the late nineteenth century. But naturalism, as it emerged as a major new form of expression at the turn of the century, was often ignored, or, when not ignored, condemned out of hand. Socially and morally suspect because of its subject matter, and handicapped as well by the early deaths of Stephen Crane and Frank Norris and the long silence of Dreiser after the "suppression" of *Sister Carrie* in 1900, naturalism was for the most part slighted as a general topic except for Norris's miscellaneous comments in various essays and reviews. Less a profound thinker than a defender of his own work and a popularizer of "ideas in the air," Norris's conception of naturalism is nevertheless significant both for what it contains and what it omits. Naturalism, Norris declares, must abjure the "teacup tragedies"¹⁷ of Howellsian realism and explore instead the irrational and primitive in human nature – "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man"¹⁸ – and it should do so within the large canvas and allegorical framework that permit the expression of abstract ideas about the human condition.

So far so good. Norris is here describing not only *McTeague* and *The Octopus*, his best novels, as two poles of naturalistic inquiry (a chaotic inner life and a panoramic social world) but also suggestively revealing the appeal of this conception of literature for a large number of twentieth-century American writers ranging from Faulkner to Mailer. But Norris's idea of naturalism is also remarkably silent in a key area. For despite his close familiarity with the work of Zola and other French naturalists, nowhere in his criticism does he identify naturalism with a deterministic ideology. Naturalism, to Norris, is a method and a product, but it does not prescribe a specific philosophical base. Norris was thus identifying, in his criticism, the attraction of naturalism in its character as a sensationalistic novel of ideas flexible enough in ideology to absorb the specific ideas of individual writers – and this despite the efforts of several generations of later critics to attach an unyielding deterministic core to the movement.

A basic paradox characterizes much of the criticism of late-nineteenth-century realism produced between the two world wars. On the one hand,

the writing of the period is often applauded for its depiction of the new actualities of post-Civil War America. This celebratory stance is revealed most obviously in the metaphors of progress and success present in the sectional titles of literary histories containing accounts of the period – “The Triumph of Realism” and the like.¹⁹ On the other, critics also wished to register their disapproval of the restraints in choice of subject matter and manner of treatment imposed on writers by the literary and social conventions of late Victorian American life. In this connection, the terms *puritanism* and *genteel tradition* were heavily employed. Writers of the time, in short, were described as seeking to be free but as still largely bound.

This view is closely related, of course, to the prevailing winds of 1920s and 1930s social and literary discourse. During the twenties, when the act of rejection of American cultural codes and economic values (a rejection most clearly enacted by the expatriates’ self-exile) was almost a requirement for serious consideration as an artist, it is no wonder that those late-nineteenth-century figures who sought to live out roles of personal and literary alienation – a Mark Twain at his bitterest or a Stephen Crane – were centers of attention,²⁰ while those who were seemingly willing to accept codes of gentility or cultural elitism, a Howells or a James, were relegated, in general accounts of the period, to the role of symbolic reflectors of these limitations. Thus, an entire generation of literary journalists, led by H. L. Mencken, but including such prominent and well-respected figures as John Macy, Van Wyck Brooks, Ludwig Lewisohn, Carl Van Doren, Randolph Bourne, Lewis Mumford, and Henry Seidel Canby, fed off the critical commonplace of a literature attempting to be free to depict American life fully and honestly but deeply flawed by the limitations placed upon this effort by its own time.

This broad-based attitude, because it served contemporary polemic purposes, tended toward the absolute dichotomy as a critical tool. One such polarization, as noted earlier, was that of distinguishing sharply between ante- and postbellum writing in order to dramatize the dramatic differences between a pre- and postindustrial America. Another, as in V. L. Parrington’s *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America* (1930), was to bifurcate American life into those forces contributing either to plutocracy or freedom. But despite the prevalence of these and a number of other widely shared beliefs and strategies, criticism of realism and naturalism during this period was neither monolithic nor static. A significant illustration of one of the shifting perspectives of the time is present in estimations of the work of Howells. To a Mencken, writing in the literary climate of the late teens and early twenties, Howellsian realism epitomized all that must be avoided by the writer seeking to be a meaningful critic of his own time and life.²¹

Mencken thus did not so much attempt to understand Howells as to use him as a negative touchstone. But as economic issues became paramount in the minds of many literary historians and critics, beginning in the late 1920s, Howells's conversion to socialism served the very different role of dramatizing the response of a sensitive and thoughtful writer to the conditions of his day. For Parrington in 1930, and for Granville Hicks somewhat later, Howells assumed almost heroic stature. In Hicks's militant terminology, he was one of those who "marched out upon the field of battle" to struggle against the forces of economic oppression.²²

Discussions of naturalism between the world wars, and especially of the work of Norris and the early Dreiser, were also deeply influenced by the polemic dynamics of the age. Initially, it was the naturalists' choice of material, in particular its more open sexuality, which led to their high standing as "trailblazers" of freedom. But gradually, with the greater prominence given economic and social issues in the 1930s, the naturalists of the 1890s became less valued as exemplars of freedom of expression than as reflectors of the closed and destructive mechanistic and Darwinian world of struggle in which it was assumed most Americans functioned.²³ It was during this stage in the criticism of naturalism that it became obligatory for the critic to spell out the relationship of American naturalism to Zolaesque determinism and firmly to equate the two. Since it was believed that American life at the turn of the century imprisoned the average American in a "moving box" of economic and social deprivation, naturalism (with its deterministic center) was a writer's appropriate, and indeed inevitable, response to this condition. Thus, while it might be acknowledged that Norris and Dreiser were often crude and formless and that their work appeared to be confined to the depiction of man as victim, it was believed as well that naturalism of this kind was an apt expression of late-nineteenth-century American social reality.

From the end of World War II to the watershed years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, realism fared far better on the critical scene than did naturalism. Realistic fiction, whatever its degree of social criticism, was more readily reconcilable than naturalistic writing to the postwar emphasis on the role of American literary expression in affirming democratic values. In addition, with the exception of the work of Stephen Crane, naturalistic fiction, with its assumed defects of form and style, was largely ignored as a result of the New Criticism stress on close reading that dominated much criticism of the period.

Both the war and its Cold War aftermath generated a commitment on the part of most literary historians to demonstrate the vital presence of the

American democratic tradition in all phases of American expression. Thus, the work of Howells and his contemporaries was discovered to be deeply impregnated with such democratic beliefs as trust in the common vision and in pragmatic values. In addition, as Henry Nash Smith put it in his chapter on realism in the *Literary History of the United States*, by identifying and dramatizing the "problem areas" of American social life, realists were playing a role in the solution of those problems.²⁴ This point of view, with an emphasis on the importance of Howells's beliefs and practices, characterizes Everett Carter's *Howells and the Age of Realism* (1954) and E. H. Cady's work culminating in his *The Light of Common Day* (1971). Much criticism of the period, however, was also increasingly devoted to the fiction of Twain and James, finding in *Huckleberry Finn* and in James's major novels a rich source of formalistic analysis. Striking patterns of symbolic imagery and structure and suggestive currents of irony and ambiguity, it was discovered, could be found in these works as well as in those by Melville and Hawthorne.²⁵ These two strains – a stress on the functional value system underlying realistic portrayals and a revelation of the subtlety and complexity of realistic fictional aesthetics – joined triumphantly in Harold H. Kolb's *The Illusion of Life: American Realism as a Literary Form* (1969). Kolb accepted almost as proven the democratic underpinning of the three novels he concentrated on – *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, and *The Bostonians* – and devoted most of his attention to the ways in which such formal characteristics of the novels as point of view technique and imagery successfully express these foundations of belief.

Everett Carter's landmark study of Howells and his age, in addition to stressing Howells's democratic beliefs, is also noteworthy for its delineation of various stages in his ideas. So, for example, Carter locates the sources of Howells's concept of realism in Comte and Taine and then traces the permutations of the concept in Howells's career and in those of his major contemporaries. Realism, in short, was not a static entity but rather consisted of ideas in motion.²⁶ This appealing notion of the dynamic nature of the beliefs of the period – of writers responding to changing ideas and social life by rethinking their own beliefs – characterizes such major literary histories of the period as Robert Falk's essay in *Transitions in American Literary History* (1953) and (as is suggested by their titles) Warner Berthoff's *The Ferment of Realism* (1965) and Jay Martin's *Harvests of Change* (1967).²⁷

These various threads of criticism – the celebratory democratic, the New Critical, and the dynamic – are related in their common affirmative view of realism as a significant moment in American literary history. No longer was the movement marginalized, as had been true of much criticism of the

previous generation, because of its gentility or imperception. Its importance, centrality, and worth had, in the minds of most scholars, been firmly established.

Naturalism, however, suffered either dismissal or critical neglect for much of the postwar period. The assumed crudity and stylistic incompetence of Norris or Dreiser of course rendered their work suspect within a critical climate deeply affected by New Critical beliefs and methods. Also telling as a negative factor in the estimation of naturalism was the disillusionment, beginning in the mid-1930s, of American intellectuals with what they held to be the mindless authoritarianism of communist ideology. Many writers of the 1930s who had been identified with a resurgence of naturalism – Steinbeck, Dos Passos, and Farrell, for example – were also on the Left, an association confirmed above all by Dreiser's full endorsement of the Communist party and its goals from the early 1930s to his death in 1945. Discussions of naturalism, because of the movement's origins in Zola's beliefs and practice, had always contained a tendency toward considering it a foreign incursion with little relationship to American values and experience. This tendency, as well as other threads in the negative conception of naturalism, received full and influential expression in Oscar Cargill's *Intellectual America* (1941), in which Cargill disposed of naturalism as a crude and thinly derivative fiction with fascistic inclinations.²⁸ By the postwar years, with the revulsion against communism deepened by the Cold War, a powerful antinaturalism stance characterized the criticism of such major voices of the day as Lionel Trilling, Malcolm Cowley, and Philip Rahv.²⁹ As Irving Howe later noted, during the 1940s and 1950s Dreiser's work was "a symbol of everything a superior intelligence was supposed to avoid."³⁰

Despite this hostile critical convention, a counterflow of more sympathetic inquiry into the nature of American naturalism also emerged during the 1950s and 1960s. Willard Thorp and Alfred Kazin, for example, asked the question begged by the rejection of naturalism: If naturalism is inept, intellectually impoverished, and foreign to American values, why has it persisted as a major element in all phases of twentieth-century American fiction?³¹ A number of scholars accepted the challenge implicit in this question and began to examine the relationship between naturalism and American life on a deeper level than the obvious association between naturalistic factuality and American materialism. One influential effort was that by Richard Chase, who in his *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) located naturalism within the American romance tradition because of its union of sensationalism and ideas. On the other hand, Charles C. Walcutt, in his *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream* (1956), rejected the no-