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In an October 1928 letter to Marianne Von Schön, who had translated several of Dreiser's novels for the German publisher Paul Zsolnay, Theodore Dreiser revealed his feelings about the role that literary naturalism and he as one of its practitioners would play in American literary history. Dreiser sent Von Schön a copy of *A Book About Myself*, indicating that it was the second volume (*Dawn* being the first) in his projected larger series of four or five books to be titled "A History of Myself." In his letter to Von Schön, Dreiser described the series as "a running history of myself and the America that I knew during the period covered" (136). He claimed, somewhat optimistically, that the third volume of his planned series would detail the "conclusion of the puritanical regime in American letters," while the fourth volume would "cover the break in literature as represented by the realistic school" (136). In his letter to Von Schön, Dreiser requested that the series, which he never completed, be released as a set in Germany (in contrast to the separate publication of the two early volumes in the U.S.), an approach he believed would emphasize the "completeness and significance" of the series (136) and, perhaps implicitly, the importance of the naturalist movement and of his own contributions to it. Dreiser's sense of personal and literary history as revealed in this letter suggests his belief in the critical and aesthetic importance of his work to U. S. literature, echoing the opinion of critics such as H. L. Mencken, who in a November 1911 *Smart Set* review had deemed *Jennie Gerhardt* to be the most important American novel to date (excepting *Huckleberry Finn*) (153). Moreover, his letter countered the view of those who did not ascribe the same significance to his life's work and activities, one of the most well-rehearsed examples being Stuart P. Sherman, who, reviewing Dreiser's work up to 1915, famously claimed that Dreiser's "crude . . . naturalistic philosophy" had "reduce[d] the problem of the novelist to the lowest possible terms" (649).

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Other naturalist writers also considered the place that they and their work might occupy in literary history. Some, like Frank Norris, did so glibly, as in a postscript to a December 1901 letter to Frank Gelett Burgess: "Dont this look like the kind of letter a real live literary man would write[.] The kind they reproduce in the autobiographies[?]" (84). While the postscript appears to be meant as a joke, it also belies an interest in the process by which writers are remembered and the sort of autobiographical texts that writers leave behind to insure that they and their works are not lost to history. Stephen Crane demonstrated similar sentiments when he sent a copy of *The Black Riders* to the Paris reviewer, Henri D. Davray. Crane noted in a November 1897 letter to Davray his "dearest wish . . . to see these simples translated into French" in the hope that the book would be better received in France than it had been in England or the United States (150). Crane explained to Davray that he desired "the distinction of appearing just for a moment to the minds of a few of your great and wise artistic public," and again, near the end of the letter, he reiterated "[w]hat I wish is the distinction" (151). As is revealed in Crane's other letters written around the same time, he could have used the income that a translated volume might bring, and thus his flattery of France's "great and wise" public might seem an attempt to insure publication, but by expressing the desire that he and his work attain a certain distinction abroad he also suggests his interest in the processes through which one's work is brought to the attention of, makes a lasting impression on, and is remembered by the public.

When we consider naturalism's histories, we are reminded of episodes such as those recounted above in which writers express interest in how they might be remembered in the annals of literary history. Even though Dreiser implies in his 1928 letter that he is willing on his own to do the work required to leave a literary legacy (and often disapproved of the efforts of others to promote his work),[1] his letter to Von Schön reminds us of the various cultural processes by which writers and their work acquire critical and historical weight. This special issue concerns itself with the histories of such processes as they relate to the writers and critics of American literary naturalism. The authors of the essays in this special issue have interviewed leading scholars of the early writers most often associated with the formation and promotion of the genre and movement of literary naturalism at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, including Jack London, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. In addition, essays are included on the evolution of scholarship related to the defining of American literary naturalism and on twentieth-century manifestations of the genre.

Although Mary E. Papke's essay on James R. Giles and twentieth-century naturalism touches on the contributions of writers of color to naturalism, particularly African-American writers, this special issue does not cover in depth the contributions of writers of color or of women writers to the genre of literary naturalism in the United States. During the planning of this volume, these omissions were carefully considered, and it was decided that an entire issue or volume might better be devoted to each group rather than attempting in a brief essay to treat the important work that has been and continues to be done on writers of color and women writers working within literary naturalism. In a recent *SAN* essay on women naturalists, Donna M. Campbell examines the naturalism of women writers such as Edith Summers Kelley, Ellen Glasgow, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Edith Wharton. In addition to Campbell, Jennifer L. Fleissner, Barbara Hochman, Donald Pizer, Monika Elbert, and Sharon M. Harris are among those who have turned our attention to the work of women naturalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in relation to women writers in the late twentieth century, Elaine Showalter has recently identified Annie Proulx's "gritty naturalism" (509) in the stories of her 1999 collection, *Close Range*. Perhaps one reason for women's exclusion from discussions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary naturalism is, as Campbell observes, that women naturalists did not usually write essays defining the period and aesthetic, as did male counterparts such as Frank Norris ("Where" 152). Elizabeth Ammons has noted that when we "throw out the standard categories of periodization" in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century and pay attention to the connections suggested "by the careers of women writers themselves," figures such as Edith Wharton become part of a "rich contemporary context" in which patterns of "literary historical continuity and coherence" appear. When made to conform to the period's "inherited categories" and compared to male writers such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, or Faulkner (especially in the genre of short fiction), Wharton is sometimes marginalized or viewed as an "oddball" ("New" 208). We might make the same argument in regard to the relationship of Wharton and other women writers to literary naturalism at the turn of the century, suggesting that definitions of naturalism may need to be adapted as the work of women naturalists is further studied. Campbell, Fleissner, and others have begun this important work of re-imagining American literary naturalism's aesthetic and cultural boundaries in light of the perspectives and experiences of women.

With regard to writers of color within the naturalist tradition, James

Giles, who is featured in Mary Papke's essay in this issue on twentieth-century naturalism, has furthered our understanding of the literary naturalism of African American writers such as Richard Wright, Willard Motley, and Toni Morrison. Giles also implies in his interview with Mary Papke that the literary naturalism of Native American writers such as James Welch and Louise Erdrich is an important untapped subject of study that offers rich possibilities for future scholarship. Giles's work on John Rechy and William Kennedy suggests ways that sexual orientation or ethnicity might further complicate the traditional parameters of naturalist scholarship.

Given the many directions in which one might pursue naturalist inquiry, this special issue does not attempt to establish the definitive critical history of naturalism but rather aims to explore some of naturalism's various histories and thus provoke further study. By revisiting the definitions and scholarly trajectories of naturalism, and while recognizing the proliferation of "naturalisms," to adapt Ammons's terminology for multiple and alternate "realisms" at the turn of the twentieth century ("Expanding" 103), this special issue seeks to encourage critics' further consideration of naturalism's various histories so that the histories contained in this issue might be woven into those still under construction. Ultimately, as David Perkins suggests, literary histories may be best regarded as "provisional statements in our ongoing dialogue with the past and with each other about the past" (14), and this special issue has been undertaken in the spirit of encouraging such ongoing dialogue about American literary naturalism.

In preparing the essays for this special issue, the authors and the scholars they interviewed have explored four main topics. The first is the early days of study on the particular author or subject, including the major archives for author's papers, how they were created, and which individuals played a key role in their creation. Important discoveries related to the archives are also taken into account, as well as early difficulties, if any, in the study of the author or subject and the scholar's personal experiences and anecdotes that might illuminate these early histories. The second topic is the major milestones in the study of the author or subject and how these milestones affected subsequent scholarship. The third topic is the evolution of scholarship on the author or subject, how initial approaches and assumptions have been revised and what initial approaches and assumptions have remained the same, and, in each case, why. The authors have explored with those interviewed what questions critics must ask now that were not considered earlier, what questions are no longer valid (and why), what questions have remained unanswered, and what constitute the most exciting developments in current scholarship on the author or subject.

The fourth topic is future profitable directions for inquiry, specifically, where the scholarship should be directed, how our current critical climate promotes or impedes future inquiry, and what factors will sustain healthy interest in and scholarship on the author or subject.

As the resulting essays reveal, the conversations provide us with rich accounts of the study of American literary naturalism. In addition, the essays provide an interesting perspective on such processes as canon formation and authorial reputation and the role that critics play in creating and maintaining scholarly interest in a writer's work and in a literary movement. The essays also emphasize the sometimes unpredictable trajectories of critical opinion and of our critical poetics. The hard work of laying out critical pathways and of maintaining public interest in the lives and work of various writers is also clear from these essays, as are the rewards of such work.

In considering future direction for scholarship, the essays reveal exciting possibilities. Several of the scholars interviewed emphasize the need to broaden the field of analysis by examining a writer's lesser-read works and genres (including short fiction, nonfiction essays, literary criticism, or travel writing) and by using newly available correspondence and other biographical materials to read both lesser- and well-known works. More work can also be done to examine the ways in which naturalist writers influenced and were influenced by their contemporaries or how the influence of earlier literary traditions is reflected in their work. In some cases, the writer's connection to other arts offers useful avenues for study (Norris's interest in the visual arts, for example). Other recommendations include critical reception studies, pedagogical studies (to encourage the teaching of and thus continued interest in these writers), biographical studies, further scholarly editions, a continued emphasis on culturally informed analyses, studies of naturalist writers' relationship to modernism, and studies of the international reputations of naturalist writers. All of the scholars interviewed seem to agree that there is a good deal of important work still to be done.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Keith Newlin, who suggested the topic for the special issue and offered good advice during the production process. I extend thanks to the scholars of American literary naturalism who recognized the importance of this special journal issue and readily and graciously agreed to share their time and wealth of knowledge about their respective fields: Donald Pizer, Earle Labor, George Monteiro, Eric Carl Link, Thomas Riggio, and James Giles. Their willingness to share reminiscences and insights reflects the generosity, broad-mindedness, and collegial nature of the community of scholars working in this

area of literary studies. I am especially grateful to the scholars who wrote the essays, all of whom enthusiastically embraced the idea of the special issue and took on the task of writing within a scholarly genre that was hard to define (i.e., weaving information from interviews with their own sense of the past, present, and future of their respective fields) to produce fascinating and cogent articles: Stephen C. Brennan, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Robert M. Dowling, Jessica Schubert McCarthy, Roark Mulligan, and Mary E. Papke. As histories and future projections of the critical trajectories of these important naturalist writers, the essays in this issue provide a sense of how we arrived at the point where we now find ourselves in the study of these authors, specifically, and of the genre of literary naturalism, generally, and suggest exciting possibilities for future work.

NOTE

1. For example, Dreiser's letters to Harper & Bros. about the advertising of *Jennie Gerhardt* reveal his anxiety about leaving the promotion of his work in the hands of others (see Totten).

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