REALISM

- Realism opposed Romanticism, which was considered too idealized to reflect the new post-war society. Realism tried to show life exactly as it was lived and events exactly as they occurred.

- In Realistic literature, the protagonist is usually an ordinary person living an ordinary life. These protagonists could exhibit heroism but were not the classic heroes of the past.

- Modern American problems of sweatshops, labor strife, urban poverty, “robber barons,” corrupt politicians, and crime were born during this era.

NATURALISM

- Developed by French novelist Emile Zola in the 1870s.

- A further development of the elements of Realism. Naturalism goes beyond realism in its dissection of human instincts and behavior, and of the social environment that was believed to “condition” people to be what they are.

- Sets the central character in a mechanized world where he/she is the victim of forces over which there is no control.

- The character is unable to determine his/her own fate. He/She is a pawn of his/her heredity, environment, and nature.

- The character ceases to be a completely free agent.

- The naturalistic writer is always objective, never revealing any personal bias of prejudice.

- No ethical responsibility is present.

- No subject matter is barred from naturalists’ discussion: sex and inner drives are dealt with frankly.

- Presentation of these themes needs characters of strong animal drives and weak minds.

“[The naturalists] consider that man cannot be separated from his surroundings, that he is completed by his clothes, his house, his city, and his country; and hence we shall not note a single phenomenon of his brain or heart without looking for the causes or the consequences in his surroundings.”

Emile Zola