

# Naturalism

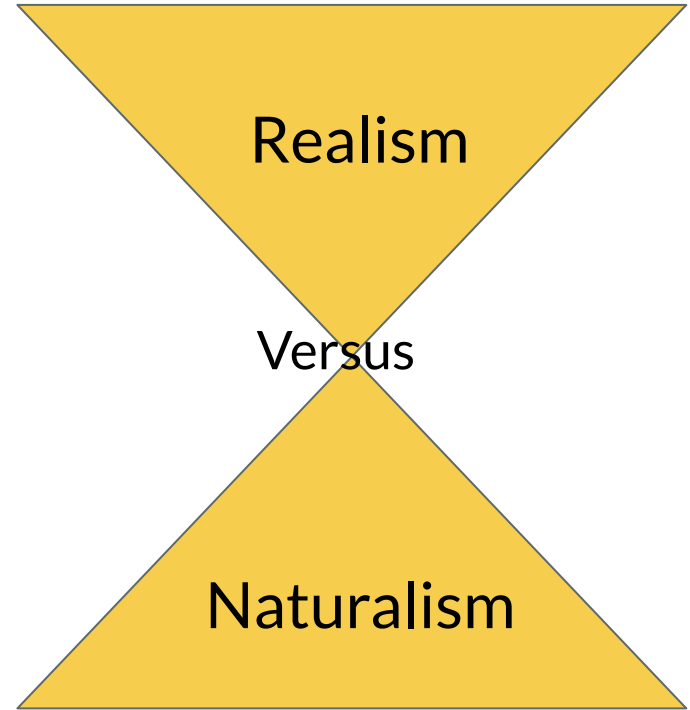
A Branch of Realism



# Realism Recap - Naturalism Intro

After we watch the video, your job is to respond to the following prompts on your notes page:

1. In your own words, give a quick overview of what Realism is in American lit. What kinds of things would be in a Realist story or poem?
2. In your own words, write down two things you learned about Naturalism from the video.



# The Rise of Naturalism

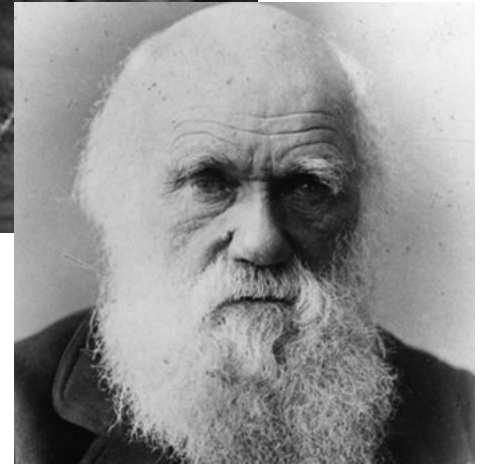
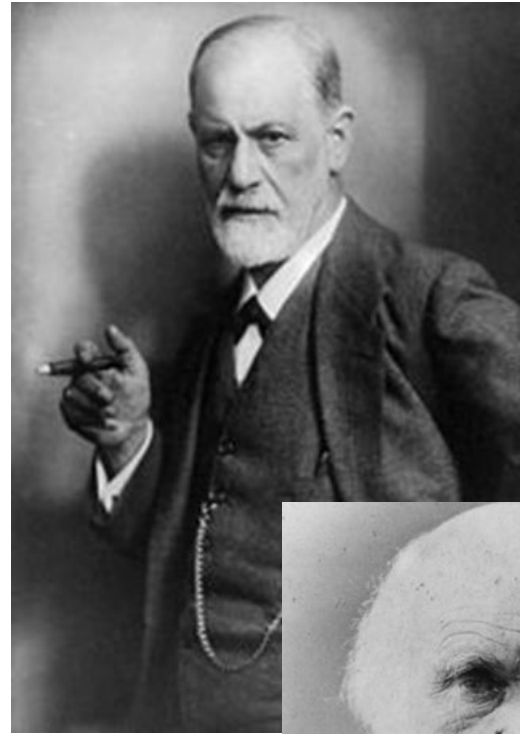
Remember, Realism was on the rise because people were tired of Romantic/Gothic literature. They wanted relatable characters who dealt with the everyday issues the common people experienced in their own lives.

During Realism's rise, the works of scientists and philosophers like Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud reached the United States, which influence Realist literature in a big way.

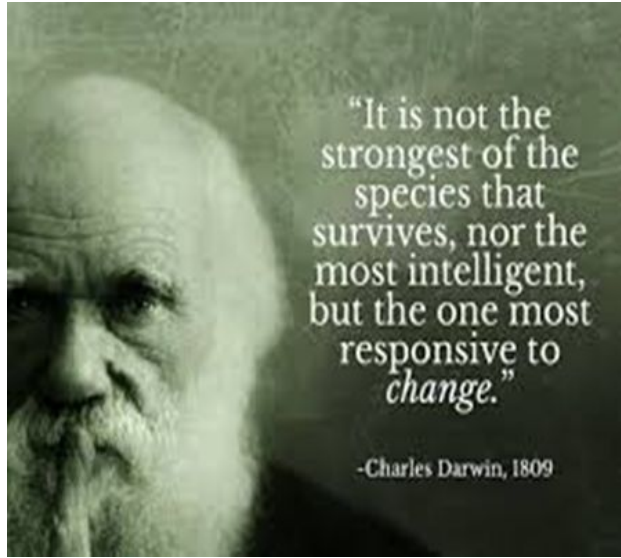
# The Rise of Naturalism

Sigmund Freud – Psychologist who conducted studies on human behavior and sexuality. Suddenly, things that Romantics liked to leave undefined and mysterious (love, terror, compassion, ect.) were suddenly able to be explained by our biology, hormones, and instincts

Charles Darwin – Scientist who conducted studies on evolution. Darwin suggested that humans are not special – we’re just very intelligent animals. Also coined the “survival of the fittest” theory



# Naturalist Philosophy



"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to *change*."

-Charles Darwin, 1809

According to Naturalists, our human world and society is as much of a jungle as anything nature ever created. In fact, the wild natural world is perfectly paralleled in modern human life.

In our human world, the "strong" are still the likeliest to survive. The world, in all aspects, is for the "fittest."

Naturalists also believe that biological urges guide man, even when it may not seem obvious. Humans are by nature selfish and are always looking out for themselves.

# Naturalist Philosophy

Since Naturalism holds that our nature is at the basis of what we do, free will would then be very questionable.

Our heredity and the environment around us would be moving us much like pawns. We think we are doing what we want according to our individual will, but this is only an illusion since we are following our instincts. Ultimately, we are smart animals who are simply subject to the scientific laws of cause and effect.



# Naturalist Philosophy

## **A Man Said to the Universe**

A man said to the universe:  
“Sir, I exist!”  
“However,” replied the universe,  
“The fact has not created in me  
A sense of obligation.”

(Stephen Crane, 1899)

Naturalists weren't necessarily atheists; however, they believed that God would not intervene in our world but just stand watching us from a distance. Essentially, God does not care.

# Naturalist Philosophy

According to Naturalists, our fates are determined by three things:

- Natural Environment (the physical world): The world around us and its impact on us cannot be underestimated; from the weather to the physical features, our ability to adapt to this place has a direct impact on our survival.
- Biological Environment (or heredity): Our bodies, its urges, our intelligence, and of course our adaptability to the physical world is a major factor.
- Social Environment (or class): While not obvious, our relationships to one another can be seen at the same level as “the jungle.” Who wins, who loses? Who is most fit to survive in this jungle? Note the social “pecking order” that is present in our social world.

All of these things work together to determine who we are and what happens to us. We have little to no choice in the matter.



# Realism vs. Naturalism

## Similarities:

Focus on Reality – In both Naturalism and Realism, there are no supernatural elements, no exaggerated characters, no forces of good or evil. There are only every day characters with realistic problems.

Focus on Unheard Voices – Both Naturalism and Realism focuses on the lower and middle classes, as well as characters who weren't previously focused on in literature (immigrants, escaped/freed former slaves, prostitutes, criminals, suffragettes, homeless people, etc. Basically, everyone besides wealthy white men)

# Realism vs. Naturalism

## Differences:

Beauty in the Ordinary – While Realism has a more positive outlook on its characters (they're usually good people, despite their flaws), Naturalism takes a more neutral approach. Naturalist literature often looks at its characters in a detached, almost scientific way. They believe that all human behavior is guided by instinct and biology – there is no “good” or “bad.” We are only animals trying to survive.

# Realism vs. Naturalism

## Differences:

Aim for Social Change – Realists often showed the overlooked in their literature because they wanted to change how society viewed them – they might show the good in an escaped slave to get across an abolitionist agenda, or they might show the struggles of a lower class housewife to show the reader that society should treat women as equals, ect.

Naturalists, on the other hand, did not aim for social change because they did not think society was capable of changing. They believed society is a reflection of nature, and survival of the fittest is natural law - something no one can change. Instead, they focused on the “unfit”, those unheard voices, as a way of honoring them (while also accepting that there is no changing their fate)

# Realism vs. Naturalism

## Differences:

Fate – In Realist pieces, the characters are able to control their destinies. It is their good and bad qualities that allow them to influence their lives and those around them.

In Naturalism, however, the characters are helpless against the controlling forces in their lives. Again, in Naturalist fiction, those forces include Nature, Biology/Hereditry, and Social Class.

In other words, while both Realism and Naturalism believe they are portraying “reality” as honestly as possible, Realists believed that humans are in control of their destinies, and Naturalists believed our fates are controlled by outside (non supernatural) forces.