



The Vast and Terrible Drama: American Literary Naturalism in the Late Nineteenth Century (Amer Lit Realism & Naturalism)

Eric Carl Link

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A broad treatment of the cultural, social, political, and literary under-pinnings of an entire period and movement in American letters.

The Vast and Terrible Drama is a critical study of the context in which authors such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London created their most significant work. In 1896 Frank Norris wrote: "Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary . . . and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama." There could be "no teacup tragedies here." This volume broadens our understanding of literary naturalism as a response to these and other aesthetic concerns of the 19th century.

Themes addressed include the traditionally close connection between French naturalism and American literary naturalism; relationships between the movement and the romance tradition in American literature, as well as with utopian fictions of the 19th century; narrative strategies employed by the key writers; the dominant naturalist theme of determinism; and textual readings that provide broad examples of the role of the reader. By examining these and other aspects of American literary naturalism, Link counters a century of criticism that has perhaps viewed literary naturalism too narrowly, as a subset of realism, bound by the conventions of realistic narration.

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