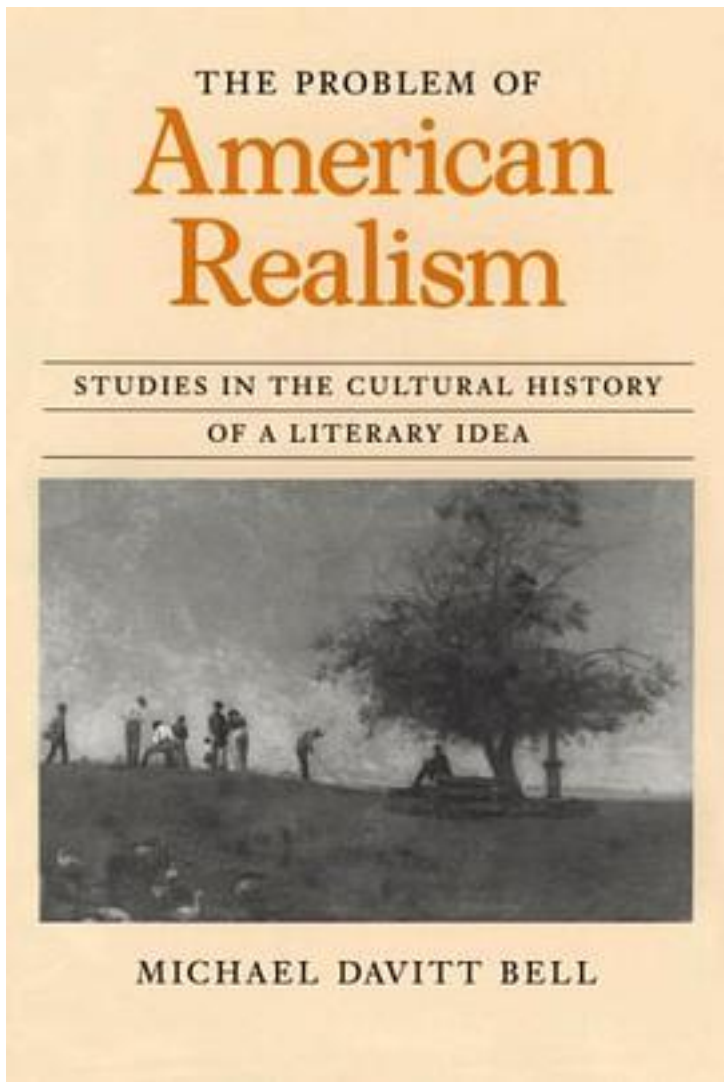


The Problem of American Realism



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Ever since William Dean Howells declared his "realism war" in the 1880s, literary historians have regarded the rise of realism and naturalism as the signal development in post-Civil War American fiction. Questioning this generalization, Michael Davitt Bell investigates the role that these terms played in the social and literary discourse of the 1880s and 1890s. He argues that "realism" and "naturalism" were ideological categories used to promote a version of "reality" based on radically anti-"literary" and heavily gendered assumptions. In chapters on William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, Mark Twain, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser and Sarah Orne Jewett, the author examines the effects that ideas about realism and naturalism had on writers. He demonstrates that, for many of them, claiming to be a realist or a naturalist was a way to provide assurance that one was a "real" man rather than an "effeminate" artist.

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