Syntheses are often preceded by apologies designed to disarm the potential critic. This one is no exception. It represents a subjective, ad hoc selection of observations made by speakers and discussants at the fourth comparative literature conference sponsored by the American-Hungarian Commission on the Humanities, working under the joint auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which was held on the campus of Stanford University from June 21 to 23, 1987. At all of these conferences, the author of these pages has ventured, on the last morning of the meeting, some final comments without any claim to sum up the state of research on the question but with the hope that a review and a brief elaboration of what seemed to him particularly interesting points raised during the two preceding days of presentation and discussion might help us focus on representative aspects of Realism. Such modest crystallizations are needed, we think, to prevent our efforts from gliding irretrievably into the quagmire of innumerable, idiosyncratic, semi-private analyses devoid of multicultural perspectives, all too characteristic of present research. The clear and present danger of current literary scholarship is not the bugaboo of authoritarian canonization: it is our fragmentation and relativization ad infinitum.

There will be no attribution by name of remarks utilized in my concluding comments to the speaker(s) or discussant(s) that raised them. Our basis is, in the best sense of the word, a collective one. Neither is any participant responsible for my
interpretation of her or his observations—which may not at all be the speaker's! "Cultural" similarities or differences, as I use the notion, are, of course, not pre-established, deterministic givens; they are not "either-or" but "more or less"; they are the result and the cause of particular historical and environmental conditions, useful in tracing convergences and divergences in the past, not binding for the future. I am not intimidated by the possible charge of "reductionism". No conclusions, however tentative, are possible without reduction, without simplification, at least in the Humanities. We must strive for differentiated, historically and culturally based patterns to balance out the claims of deductive theoretical constructs as well as the cult of complexity. We are not proclaiming truths or demolishing falsities: we are trying to work out plausible experiential hypotheses. We are coming much closer to this, it occurs to me, in our teaching than in our writing: does the desire to make a splash with our publications perhaps bring with it an excessive temptation to indulge in accentuated dialectics? Agreement with previous findings, even though it may be substantially justified and reached by different methods of verification, is not seen as academically rewarding in comparison to disagreement. There may be a distortion at work here to which we should be alert.

Nineteenth century Realism scholarship in the last three decades may have suffered, in part, as a result of this reward system favoring conjectural innovation. Roughly, Realism may be divided into social and psychological realism. Social realism is more amenable to historical verification than psychological realism. Research in the period of Realism based on a wide variety of records from all angles and phases of life is likely to lead to highly differentiated, qualified conclusions of reduced dialectical glamour. Such inductive constructs have not as good a chance to gain renown as interpretations of more speculative, experimental, aesthetically daring movements such as Romanticism, Symbolism, or Expressionism—or, for that matter, psychological realism.