

# A Proposal to Study on the Businessman in American Novels at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Lee, Kwangjin

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## I. Introduction

In *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, Alan Trachtenberg maintains that the “economic incorporation” of postbellum America brought fundamental cultural changes to Americans. Though the major driving force of the incorporation was the rising business — or rather precisely, big business which emerged after the war — its influence did not remain within the boundary of the economic sector of American society. Rather, it brought a full-scale transformation of the society in general. As Christopher P. Wilson clearly shows, for example, even the creation of fiction was under heavy influence of the basic

principles that dominated the American industrialization — division of labor, cost management per “manufactured” piece, and exploitation of laborers.

One noticeable phenomenon that accompanied the incorporation was popularization of the images of businessman such as Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, Jay Gould, Henry Frick, and J. P. Morgan, to name a few. Of course, the name of such businessmen almost invariably had a negative connotation such as the “robber baron” image promoted by muckrakers. It is undeniable, however, that those names also symbolized the American dream of achieving economic success. In spite of his negative view of technology and industrialization, Trachtenberg admits that in the second half of the nineteenth century “[men] of business” were “the epitome of the era” and “were also portrayed as models of virtue in ‘rags to riches’ fiction and in the literature of advice and exhortation . . .” (80).

Another thing that came with the incorporation was, as Alfred D. Chandler presents in *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (1977) and *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (1990), the emergence of large and effective business organizations and the managerial class that ran the organizations. Though they were not as conspicuous in popular culture as the images of business figures and as such did not draw much attention from people, Americans in that era were involved in business organizations directly or indirectly. The number of people who participated in such organizations increased rapidly. While the majority of them were factory workers, many others were managers — not only at the lower or middle level but also at the top level. In short, business organizations were much more important elements in everyday life of Americans in general than the famous business figures. By the end of the nineteenth century, business organizations became an indispensable core of the American life. Accordingly, we cannot fully

understand the life and culture of Americans since the Civil War without taking this aspect into serious consideration.

Such increasing visibility and importance of business in American society are also found in American literature — American novels in particular. Businessman characters that had remained almost completely invisible or minor in importance became central in some novels. For example, the protagonist of William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1884) — arguably the first “business novel” in America — is a businessman. The main figure Silas Lapham owns a painting manufacturing business and runs it until he sells it at the end of the novel. Its plot portrays office scenes and business transactions, thereby identifying itself as a business novel.

After the publication of *Silas Lapham*, many American writers followed suit. *The Financier* (1912) and its sequel, *The Titan* (1914) — the first two of Theodore Dreiser's Trilogy of Desire — are cases in point. The two novels share the protagonist, Frank Algernon Cowperwood. A genius financier since youth, he is a person of cold intelligence but lacking normal moral principles. His only highest value is on money. He is selfish; he satisfies only himself. He drops out of high school early, starting his businessman career. In a few companies, he works as a bookkeeper and broker, satisfying his employers beyond their expectations. Finally, he establishes his own company and prospers. Dreiser describes him in the first novel as a corrupt but shrewd and adventurous businessman in Philadelphia whereas in the second as a titan with great power and money who insatiably and relentlessly desires to dominate the business world of Chicago. *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) by Abraham Cahan, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, is another example. It is a story of a Jewish immigrant who eventually becomes a successful businessman who, at the end of the novel, feels empty and lonely in spite of the enviable success.

*If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis* (1997), the recently published collection of Sinclair Lewis's business stories, shows this novelist integrated the social change into his fictions. Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) can be counted as a business novel in that Hank Morgan, the protagonist and senior level manager, attempts to "manage" the Arthurian country as he does a business organization in the nineteenth century.

Though the role of business became much more prominent than before, literary scholars paid little attention to this phenomenon. Rather, it was left mainly to economists and economic historians, whose discussion rarely went beyond whether business figures were described negatively or positively in American fiction. Such debates among the scholars lack of training in literature were inevitably based on fairly superficial interpretation (or understanding) which in turn led to misleading conclusions. Thus, participation of literary scholars will not only contribute to more fruitful and profound discussions of the image of business figures in American fictions but also widen the scope of discussion on business in the fictions, which will help readers to understand more about the fictions themselves as well as the American society into which they were created.

This paper traces briefly how business became one of the most important sectors of American society and then introduces in detail the discussions of scholars on the image of businessman in American novels at the turn of the twentieth century. It also presents the two important problems of the discussions among the scholars — lack of clear definition of "businessman" in fiction and lack of effective methodology for the research. In so doing, it shows how lack of clear definition of "businessman" has led the discussion on the topic to confusion. It does not simply point weak points but also presents possible solutions for them. Particularly, it suggests a new definition of businessman in literature;

businessman is a person who works for profit-making organization(s) as a leader.

## II. The Rise of Business in American Society

In *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*, David Potter defines Americans in terms of mobility, equality, and democracy. He asserts that abundance, not the frontier as Frederick Jackson Turner once argued, is the most important factor that created American national characters. Potter's "abundance" refers less to natural resources than to agricultural or industrial products for the market. He thus values American businessmen who were mediators of commodity production and distribution (78–90).

In fact, American history even from its beginning foresaw the rise of the businessman-centered society which began in the late nineteenth century. Business motivated the colonization of North America, early industrialization of New England, and the formation of the large scale plantations in the South. Most of all, it prepared the nationwide industrialization in postbellum America. The most important drive was the transportation revolution. It drastically changed the American scenery in the process of market integration. George Rogers Taylor's *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* deftly shows how agricultural and commercial capitalism changed into industrial and financial one as a result of the development of transportation.

In particular, the railroad played a major role in this social transformation. According to Keith L. Bryant and Henry C. Dethloff, before the railroad "virtually no basic changes in transportation had taken place for two thousand years" (112). The railroads were indeed revolutionary

and, as such, provided passages for various goods to be delivered, thereby paving the way for the emergence of big businesses. The more the regional markets were integrated into the greater national level market, the larger became the manufacturing scale. This phenomenon in turn expanded the market by increasing the number of workers and their wages. American industrialization was thus reinforced, thereby providing an excellent environment for the rise of big businesses and businessmen. In fact, railroad became the first “big” business as well as the major vein of business.

Scholars have offered different cultural interpretations of the place and technology in U.S. society, best represented by the expansion of the railroads. Some have interpreted the new technological phenomena rather positively. For example, Leo Marx maintained that technology contributed to the survival of American pastoral ideal — the democratic and egalitarian middle-class society. He said, “[The machine] enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power” (226). To others, however, the advancement of technology was a great concern. For example, John F. Kasson pointed out that “[technology] raised equally vital questions for the imaginative and cultural life of the nation. New machinery and modes of communication enormously expanded the range of human perceptions, but they also threatened to dull the individual conscience and creative spirit” (vii). The hideous and merciless image of the train and the railroad in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* clearly symbolizes such a negative point of view.

However it may have been received by contemporaries or scholars in later periods, as mentioned above, the railroad contributed to the rise of American business and especially the rise of big businesses. In addition to the integration of market and pioneering of pioneer of the business model

in the coming age, the railroad companies also played a role of cradling the ambitious upstarts in business. Like Oliver Tappan, the protagonist in Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen's *The Golden Calf* (1890) who began his career as a clerk in a railroad company and later became a prominent business figure in New York, many young smart men including Andrew Carnegie were recruited to the railroad companies. There they experienced advance management, and then later started their own business.

Other business sectors such as steel, cotton, oil and tobacco followed the example of railroad. For example, Standard Oil Company that John D. Rockefeller started in 1870 rapidly grew into an immense corporation. It was the dominating oil manufacturer in the United States during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Andrew Carnegie's steel company founded also in the 1870s became a Standard Oil in steel business later though the two tycoons adopted different strategies for the domination of the market.

As big businesses emerged and more small and medium-sized businesses increased rapidly in number, business culture became a social phenomenon. When Trachtenberg called businessmen in the late nineteenth century "the epitome of the era," he did not simply mean that they were real models that confirmed the Horatio Alger style Rags-to-Riches myth (80). It also meant that the social status of the businessman had lifted, and more importantly, that he embodied the essence of a post-bellum American cultural value system.

### III. A Brief Overview of the Research on the Businessman in the American Novel

In spite of the importance of the businessman in the post-bellum America, there have not been enough meaningful studies on American

businessmen and business culture. Most research interests have focused on the rise of capitalism and the rise of the American middle class. Stuart M. Blumin's *The Emergency of the Middle Class*, C. Wright Mills's *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, and Olivier Zunz's *Making America Corporate* are examples of the interest in the middle class. On the other hand, others have been interested in big business and the market.

It was John Chamberlain who stimulated intellectual interest in the fictional image of the individual American businessman. In his article in *Fortune* magazine in 1948, he asserts that the "American novelist continues to regard him as a villainous creature" (134). His interest in the image of businessman in American novels appears to have started when he heard a complaint of a Mr. Tinker, Chairman of the Board of Illinois & Union Paper Co., Rock Island, Illinois. In fact, Chamberlain wrote the article from Mr. Tinker's perspective. It begins with how Mr. Tinker read a book that described the businessman as a villain who ignores civic duties. Chamberlain explores the novels of late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, most of which are minor novels and novelists. From this exploration, he comes to a conclusion that the American novelists were indulged in their own idealism with the influence of Marxism, and it made them view the businessman negatively. Chamberlain states that this is a serious mistake:

In his anti-business animus, the modern novelist seems never to have reflected that a comparative audit of systems might show that free capitalism, if highly imperfect, is still not only the most productive but also the least bloody system the world has ever known. ... Since the modern anti-business novelist has never paused to make a comparative audit of systems, he tends to contrast the world of free capitalism with a perfect socialized order that has no existence outside of his



own head. Naturally the anti-business novelist wins easy victories; no mere human businessman can stand up against a perfect figment of the idealist's mind. But if the novelist would ever stop to explore the actual operative mechanics of socialism, a mechanics that reduces the human being to living by permission of the political arm, he might lose his lust for easy victories. (148)

Chamberlain's criticism stimulated several scholarly responses. One of them was from Howard R. Smith, an economic historian and the twenty-seventh president of the Southern Economic Association. In his journal article titled "The American Businessman in the American Novel," which was also the presidential address delivered at the Twenty-Eighth Annual Conference of the Southern Economic Association, he raises a question about the selection of the novels in Chamberlain's article. To him, the selection was fairly arbitrary. He criticizes Chamberlain for selecting less significant novels, and that he did not give fair consideration to the major novelists (H. R. Smith 266-71).

What Smith did was to test if Chamberlain's so-called "villain hypothesis" could be applied to "the businessman characterizations of America's ranking realist novelists" (275). For this, he carefully selected the novels to study. With the help of professors specialized in American novels, he generated a list of sixty-six novels by thirty novelists. The selected novelists, whom he calls "realists,"<sup>1)</sup> wrote more than four

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1) What Smith means by "realists" is vague and not defined clearly. Judging from his list, the term includes not only Realists like William Dean Howells and Henry James, but also Naturalists such as Jack London and Frank Norris and even F. Scott Fitzgerald, a Modernist. It seems that he calls the novelists in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century as "realists." The following is the complete list of the novelists and their novels on Smith's list:

Sherwood Anderson (*Windy McPherson's Son*, *Marching Men*, *Poor White*, *Many Marriages*), Erskine Caldwell (*A Lamp For Nightfall*), Willa Cather (*Lucy*

hundred and fifty novels in total. And among them, only sixty-six novels — only 14.7 percent — have one or more “prominent” business characters. Next, he questioned if the novelists’ depictions of the businessmen in their novels were overtly negative. Such a question was based on the assumption that, according to the Chamberlain’s thesis, if novelists were strongly negative to businessman, they would do their best to “depict him in the most unfavorable light possible” (Smith 275).

Smith’s major finding in this study is that the villain hypothesis is simply not valid. He found that except only one case the novelists were not particularly negative to their businessmen characters. He asserts that it is improper, therefore, to apply Chamberlain’s thesis to the novels of “quality” novelists because they did not have particularly negative prejudices against businessmen. He emphasizes that their main interests were in “creating ‘real’ persons” (292).

Methodologically better than Chamberlain’s approach to the image of the

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*Gayheart*), James Gould Cozzens (*Cock Pit, The Son of Perdition*), John Dos Passos (*The Big Money*), Theodore Dreiser (*The Financier, The Titan, The Stoic, The Bulwark*), Edward Eggleston (*The Mystery of Metropolisville*), F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby, The Last Tycoon*), Mary Wilkins Freeman (*The Portion of Labor, The Debtor*), Henry Blake Fuller (*The Cliff-Dwellers, With the Procession, On the Stairs*), Ellen Glasgow (*The Wheel of Life, The Ancient Law, The Romance of a Plain Man, The Builders, In This Our Life*), Robert Herrick (*The Memoirs of an American Citizen, Together, A Life for a Life*), William Dean Howells (*The Rise of Silas Lapham, A Hazard of New Fortunes, The Quality of Mercy, Letters Home*), Henry James (*The American*), Sinclair Lewis (*Babbitt, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, Dodsworth, The Prodigal Parents*), Jack London (*Burning Daylight*), J. P. Marquand (*H. M. Pulham, Esquire, B. F.’s Daughter, Point of No Return, Sincerely, Willis Wayde*), S. Wier Mitchell (*John Sherwood, Ironmaster*), Frank Norris (*The Octopus, The Pit*), Upton Sinclair (*King Midas, The Moneychangers, King Coal, A Captain of Industry, Oil, Boston, Mountain City, Little Steel, The Lannie Budd series*), Booth Tarkington (*The Turmoil, The Magnificent Ambersons, The Midlander, The Plutocrat, Rumbin Galleries*), Mark Twain (*The Gilded Age*), Robert Penn Warren (*At Heaven’s Gate*), and Edith Wharton (*The House of Mirth, Madame De Treymes, The Fruit of the Tree, A Son at the Front*)

businessman in American novels, Smith's study remains limited by his predecessor. Smith does not doubt whether the dichotomy of good and bad images is a proper question to ask. Neither does he clarify what the "good image" means, nor does he think about the possibility of the "grey" area where goodness and badness are so intermixed that it is impossible to tell them apart. However, it was not only Chamberlain and Smith who represented the dominating dichotomy of the academic conversation. In *Businessmen in Fiction: The Capitalist and Executive in American Novels*, Robert A Kavesh, an economist, concludes that, after reading one hundred novels, the novelists invariably described businessmen negatively while their descriptions of other professionals such as physicians, politicians and lawyers varied in characteristics. Kavesh also remains in the dichotomy, arguing that businessmen were portrayed critically.

Henry Nash Smith, too, had an approach to the topic of businessmen in American fiction similar to that of other scholars in that he was interested in the image of businessman in fiction and whether novelists depicted the figure negatively. What was different was that he saw the change in the novelists' attitude toward businessmen. In his article, Smith asserts that the judgment of the businessman in American fiction changed affirmatively between the 1880s and the publication of *The Financier*, and the change was not about the businessman himself but the view, in other words, "the value systems" from which people formulate their views (78). He argues that the negative descriptions were mainly due to the influence of old value system—aristocratic and anti-pragmatic—that was represented by New England. According to him, as the culturally dominant power of the New England weakened, the negative tone turned neutral, and in some cases, even positive. Though his emphasis on the change of perspective is new, he basically belongs to the group of scholars who based their argument on the dichotomy.

However, there were some other scholars who wanted to see the businessman from different angles. Robert Bauman suggests that since William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, American novelists tried to locate the character of American businessmen somewhere between two extremes: gentleman and machine. For example, Lapham is eventually too gentlemanly to become a businessman, and that is why he gives up his business. In contrast, Shelgrim of *The Octopus* is just a part of the large machine of capitalism and the relentless structure of business. Within the machine, even the CEO of a large company cannot control the business. There, only the law of profit controls it. Frank Cowperwood of Theodore Dreiser's *Trilogy* is different from those two in that he dominates the business world, but, in a larger sense, he is described to be the person who is driven by his biologically innate nature (Bauman 89–96). To Kenneth S. Lynn, who asserts that the writers were rather sympathetic toward businessman, such a debate based on the goodness and badness dichotomy is meaningless because the novelists' imagination failed to reach the real businessman and his world:

Yet the history of the American imagination from [Henry] James to the present testifies that no writer has ever succeeded in conveying in a literary work of art what goes on in the daily lives of millions of Americans. Whether this is the fault of the writers or of the subject is not clear. Books, conversational reminiscences, the briefest glimpse, the least hint, have proved sufficient for the imaginative recreation of other forms of human endeavor; Stephen Crane had never been under fire when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, perhaps the finest of all American war novels. But, for whatever mysterious reason, no stimulus has similarly kindled the imagination of the writer about business. (Lynn 124)

Such studies provide rather expanded perspectives on businessmen, and together with those based on the dichotomy, they shed some new light on the images of business in American culture. Yet, all models have two critical shortcomings in their studies. And those become clearer when the research question is “what was the businessman in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century?”

#### IV. Critical Problems and Suggested Solutions

One critical problem of the previous studies is that they do not define “businessman.” Lacking a clear definition, their subjects are inevitably arbitrary. In most cases, a businessman refers to an individual whose job *happens to be* doing business. In many cases, even if the individual’s job is not business, it barely makes any difference. In other words, businessmanliness of a character in the novel is hardly treated as important factor. For example, Jay Gatsby was a businessman. However, he is never exposed to a business environment, nor is the kind of business he was in clearly revealed in the novel. What matters is that he makes an enormous amount of money, which empowers him to regain his old love, Daisy. Besides that, his “businessmanliness” has little significance.

S. Berhman and Shelgrim in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* are rather different in that their “businessmanliness” matters significantly. They represent the merciless capitalism — or business world — in which they are merely cogs of a big gear wheel. However, their images in the novel are at best individualized embodiment of the perceived harmful influence of relentless capitalism. The images are not about businessman but about the system.

Most studies on businessman — particularly, in American “business”

novels — include indiscriminately such characters. It might be valid to a degree to have the all-encompassing so-called “businessman characters” in the novels when the main research interest is, as that of John Chamberlain and Howard R. Smith, in whether the American novelists had bad or good impressions and thus intended to create businessman stereotypes. But the apparently clear term can be related to or identified with many other terms including, but not limited to, entrepreneur, self-employed small shop owner, merchant, industrialist, manufacturer, CEO or senior manager, and big business owner. Therefore, if we want to avoid the dichotomy and want to see who they really were as businessmen, then the definition of “businessman”<sup>2)</sup> should be clearer, and, accordingly, the subjects should be more carefully selected.

Bryant and Dethloff have summarized two major perspectives among business historians on American businessmen. One group of business scholars see businessmen as people whose creativity results in an enterprise in which it can be realized to produce profit. In short, they are pioneers who launch business ventures with charismatic leadership. The second group of scholars emphasize that an enterprise is an organization which is rarely dominated by a leader’s influence. They assert that, though a leader is important, there are many others who contribute to the pursuit of profit. This group’s image of businessmen is that of an organizational leader who is both a part of a larger system and the organizer of it (Bryant and Dethloff 15). Though the difference does exist between the first group of scholars who emphasize the individual hero and the second who stress the organizational man, it is not quite convincing, however, if

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2) I fully understand that “businessperson” or “businesspeople” is more acceptable in our contemporary gender-sensitive society, and I think it is correct expression. But partly because “businessman” or “businessmen” was the term that was used in the time span at the turn of the twentieth century and partly because virtually all the characters of the novels in the era are men, I believe it is more proper use the term “businessman”.

the two perspectives of business historians are exclusive from each other. In fact, while we could admit that the second image overlapped and dominated the first as time went on in American history, those two characteristics were what contemporary Americans saw from the newly emerging businessman in the nineteenth century, and as such we can find the two features in the businessman at the turn of the twentieth century.

My suggested definition is, as mentioned before, that businessman is a person who works for at least one profit – oriented organization as a leader. He or she is either an owner of a business or a hired person as a CEO or a lead member of management group. Whatever the person's status is, he or she must be an active and final – or close-to-final – decision maker in his or her organization. In other words, the simple fact that he or she belongs to a business organization does not make the person as the object of a study on “businessman” in American novel at the turn of the twentieth century. If the person is an owner who is not involved in “doing business,” – or day-to-day business decision – then he or she is not a businessman. If the person is engaged in business, but if he or she is not a decision-maker but follows the order of a superior, then he or she is not a businessman, either. For example, S. Berhman in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, the representative of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, is, strictly speaking, not a businessman, whereas Shelgrim is. Powerful as he appears in the novel, Berhman's power comes not from his own decision-making status but from the company that he is representing. He simply executes the decision made by the company.

In addition, there is one more mistake in the unclear definition of businessman that has led scholars in the wrong direction. The word “man” of businessman invariably misled them to assume that businessman is always a human being. Yet, considering that allegory and metaphor have long been novelists' favorite tools to represent their ideas and

perspectives, “businessman” cannot be limited to a human character. For example, much as S. Berhman and Shelgrim represent the cruel and mechanical system of business world, so does the train:

Then, faint and prolonged, across the levels of the ranch, he heard the engine whistling for Bonneville. Again and again, at rapid intervals in its flying course, it whistled for road crossings, for sharp curves, for trestles; ominous notes, hoarse, bellowing, ringing with the accents of menace and defiance; and abruptly Presely saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, Cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus. (Norris 32–33)

Almost all those who studied the businessman in American novels ignored the animal or machine characters which can be interpreted as the representation of businessman.

The second problem with past studies on businessmen in American novels is the absence of proper theoretical framework through which they can analyze the businessman. Some researchers’ interests in good or bad image dichotomy or in businessmen’s ideology or their major interests might have prevented scholars from paying more attention to how they should approach them than the subjects they study. However, even in such cases, considering that most quality novelists rarely create one dimensional character — particularly, if he or she is one of the main characters — who



can simply be categorized into one group of researcher's dichotomy, the theories that will help us to avoid viewing a character as one-dimensional being are necessary to provide principles for correct and just classification. For example, Theodore Dreiser's attitude toward Frank Cowperwood, the hero of *The Financier* and *The Titan*, is complex. Apparently, he is a heartless, shrewd, and corrupt businessman. At a glance, he may deserve to be categorized as a "bad" businessman. However, a different reading of Cowperwood can come from the tradition of Realism and Naturalism. I do not have much space to discuss this in detail here. Suffice it to say that Dreiser's characterization of Cowperwood is three-dimensional, which means that, as all the real human beings do, he has bad, good, and neutral features even when we see him as a businessman. In short, there is no simple way to categorize a fictional character into "bad" and "good," and in many cases, the dichotomy is improper. This difficulty requires a new approach to view business characters in American novels. Clearly, it should not be based on dichotomy but should help us to understand them holistically and in the context in which they were created.

For extensive and correct understanding of characterization of businessman in American novel and the significance of it, of course, literary approaches rarely adopted up to now are indispensable. Other approaches that have not been used but are expected to contribute to the research are those of Management — particularly, Organizational Behavior (OB). OB studies how individuals or groups behave in organizational settings. It is generally agreed that Frederick Winslow Taylor's scientific management theory contributed greatly to the beginning of OB. In his historic book, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, he emphasizes the role of managers and the importance of management not by intuition or tradition but by scientific methods. Workers are no longer left alone to execute their task and judged by what they yield. They are given detailed

instructions, and they are managed to produce the best possible result. For that, it becomes necessary to analyze a worker's behavior scientifically, which marks the beginning of the behavioral science of OB (F. W. Taylor).

Later, Taylor's scientific management theory was applied to a study at the Western Electric's Hawthorne plant in Chicago (Roethlisberger and Dickson). The initial interest of the Hawthorne research was the relationship between the amount of light in a workroom and the productivity of the workers in it. But the research eventually turned the researchers' attention to the informal social relationship and cooperation among the workers. This study opened a new area of study to the OB scholars.

Starting from the two major academic contributions, several research sectors have been developed in OB: motivation theories, leadership theories, organization system theories, bureaucracy-related concepts, and organizational decision-making. Among these, motivation theories and leadership theories provide applicable frameworks through which the businessman in American novels will be effectively and meaningfully analyzed. The motivation theories provide excellent tools to explain an individual's behavior in terms of motivation, and as such, they can be useful not particularly for the study of the characters as a businessman but as a human being. Considering that the American novels describe him mostly outside of the business environment — i.e. his business organization — and that their individualistic features are more emphasized even within the business environment, the tools that will help us to analyze them as individuals are necessary. The leadership theories are, however, about leader's or leadership features, and they are applicable directly to the main question of "What is the businessman in American novels?"<sup>3)</sup>

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3) As all the theories of OB do, those of leadership and motivation are composed of two spheres: analysis of current situation and prescription for better organizational performance. For the literary analysis, the analysis part is useful

## V. Conclusion

“The Business of America is Business.”—Calvin Coolidge

The famous remark of President Coolidge turned out to be an ominous American overconfidence in American business system in the 1920s which eventually led to the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression. Though Schlesinger reminds us that Coolidge also tried to balance his confidence in business with Americans’ traditional dedication to idealism, it is undeniable that he revealed the importance of business in American life at the turn of the twentieth century (239). In fact, the principles of business even replaced (or imitated by) those of public administration, and the trend was strengthened throughout the twentieth century (Hart and Scott 242).

Many American novelists after the late nineteenth century, particularly those of the twentieth century, could sense the change and reflected it in their works in various ways. In most cases, the growing influence of business were represented by businessmen (or businesswomen, though the cases were fairly rare before the 1970s). From this fact, a legitimate assumption that the novelists’ interest in business and businessmen might have influenced not only on the content they wanted to describe but also on the form and the narrative strategies to a certain degree is possible. Thus, the lack of serious discussion of businessmen in fiction among literary scholars means that a significant piece of puzzle in understanding American novel is missing. In addition, left to the scholars lack of literary training, the study in this field has been quite misled. It is time for literary scholars to get involved in the study of this field.

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while prescription part is generally inapplicable.

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Abstract

## **A Proposal to Study on the Businessman in American Novels at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

Lee, Kwangjin

This paper aims at evoking interest in business novels among literary scholars. American industrialization which began in the early nineteenth century gave rise to big business and American businessman in the United States. Even with the much increased influence and visibility of American businessman in American society, he was not prominent in fiction until William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1884) after which the businessman figure became more visible in American fictions. However, literary scholars paid little attention to the businessman figure, and it was economists and economic historians that took interest in it.

Though there were some variations, their main focus was mainly on whether novelists had positive or negative perspective on businessman. The research framework of dichotomy led scholars to view characters in fictions as one dimensional being: bad person or good person. In addition, the researchers neither had proper definition of "businessman," nor effective methodology that would enable them to analyze businessman figure properly. This paper suggests—though not perfect in any sense—a useful definition of the term "businessman" and theories from Organizational Behavior, a branch of Management, particularly motivation theories and leadership theories.

**Key words:** businessman, business novel, American Realism novel,  
American Naturalism novel, Organization Behavior  
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이름: 이광진

소속: 서울대학교

주소: (422-707) 경기도 부천시 소사구 소사본3동 주공아파트 1단지 102동 1504호

이메일: pynchon69@gmail.com

