It is easy enough to quarrel with some of Byerly's readings and with the implicit teleology of her narrative. But certainly she is right that realism has always had a complex relation to the arts and is, as she claims, trapped by a tension between the need for immediate relationship with the real world and the need for the authority that only art can give. In tracing the transformation of these aesthetic preoccupations from realism to aestheticism, she makes an important contribution to the study of realistic narrative and, perhaps, to the development of modernism.

Taking Hardy as a key transitional figure who regards the arts not as "artificial" but as "natural manifestations of reality," Byerly argues that Hardy achieves what the others strove for, a "reconciliation of 'realism' and fiction" (183). While this seems to me to be largely correct, it doesn't seem to me that it is quite for the reason Byerly is seeking to affirm. Hardy believed, as the narrator says somewhere in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, that the world is a "psychological phenomenon." He does not, however, mean that the world yields to or is simply created by the mind. The mind gives whatever meaning there is in the world, but the world rather cruelly and obdurately does its job, whatever fictions we create. Art for Hardy is the fortress against the brutality of nature. Art is natural because there is, from the perspective of human consciousness, nothing else. But a realist narrative always ironises its own art, and certainly the ideals and art of its characters.

Nevertheless, the narrative Byerly gives us is a valuable one and provides yet another modification of our sense of realism, that persistent and impossible mode, that keeps asserting itself through the mechanisms of the art that belies it.

Response
Alison Byerly

It would be entertaining to write the sort of response one reads all too frequently in the "Letters" section of book reviews: "Professor X has completely failed to grasp the intricacies of my argument, if indeed he has actually read my book at all." However, the lucidity and generosity of the three reviews at hand make such a course impossible. I appreciate the care each author has taken to read the book carefully and do justice to its argument even when taking issue with aspects of that argument. Although the approaches of the three reviews differ, they share a willingness to look at the broad outlines of my thesis, rather than getting caught up in disputing specific readings of specific passages, which no doubt they could have done. I will try, in turn, to comment primarily on the general questions that seem to me to be generated by the reviews, both individually and collectively.

George Levine's review provides a useful starting point by situating my project in the context of the critical history of realism. He points out that realism was "rendered suspect" by post-structuralist theory, and that recent approaches take for granted that realism is "not what it seems, or tries to seem." His wry statement that "since the 1960s, traditional realists of the nineteenth century seem always to have known the impossibility of their enterprise" underlines the extent to which my study is necessarily a product of a particular time and place. Nevertheless he supports my claim that the

authors I discuss understood the artificiality of art and implicitly acknowledged that artificiality through their own narrative strategies. James Heffernan's comment that my book "drastically reformulates George Levine's argument [in *The Realistic Imagination*] that realistic fiction is characterised by . . . its awareness of its own unreality" might seem to suggest a fundamental disagreement, but I don't dispute the idea that these novelists were aware of the unreality of their fictions; I simply describe their attempts to circumvent the reader's awareness of that unreality.

In fact many of the issues raised in these reviews have to do with the question of where exactly we locate a sense of "awareness" of the problems of representation, and to what degree awareness constitutes acknowledgment or even correction of those problems. Patricia O'Neill sees my book as confronting "cultural assumptions about the truth or falsehood of literary representation," and describes "realism" as "a culturally and historically-specific style or attitude rather than . . . a mode of representation." Levine, on the other hand, is interested in precisely that: realism as a mode of representation, the formal qualities of realism, the question of "how realism achieves its authenticity as art." While O'Neill is somewhat disappointed that the book "rarely engage[s] the social or cultural conditions that shaped Victorian artists' interest in the 'real,'" Levine is relieved that the question of reality is put behind us. In his view it is a strength of the book that "the epistemological crisis is almost a given," and the question of how accurately these novels can expect to reproduce reality is not the primary focus. Levine refers several times, as I do in my book, to the "authority of art," whereas O'Neill remains somewhat suspicious of the "autonomy of artistic modes of representation."

O'Neill questions the utility of distinguishing artistic representation from "other realistic discourses like science or journalism," when they may produce similar "moral effects." I would maintain that for these novelists at any rate, there is a significant difference. They were very conscious of the fact that novels can say things that are not real in the sense of being literally "true" but are as effective and genuine as if they were real, in fact more so, because novels can present ideas with a compactness and coherence not often found in reality. But I agree with O'Neill's general point that it is important to see all of these representations within the larger social and cultural context. She suggests, for example, that the issue of "literary art as authentic discourse" could have been addressed explicitly by looking at "the ways in which reading is represented in the Victorian novel." My point in relation to the novels I discuss is partly that they don't themselves foreground the act of reading, as Aesthetic novels do, choosing instead to contrast literature implicitly with the other arts they represent; but O'Neill is right to stress the cultural significance of reading in this society, of course (and I have commented on some of the reading scenes from other novels that she may have in mind in an article on reading aloud in the Victorian period).

As might be expected, given his expertise in interart comparisons, James Heffernan makes detailed comments on aspects of my argument that relate to specific artworks and genres of art. His puzzlement at the fact that I "curiously decline to investigate Eliot's use of specified artworks," such as the Ariadne, is something I anticipated and attempted to address in the book itself. In relation to Eliot in particular, I noted that there has been excellent commentary already (some of it cited by Heffernan)

on the significance of the particular artworks to which Eliot refers—not that the existence of commentary is necessarily a deterrent to more commentary, as we know. In a more general way though I tried to emphasise that the book is focused on the formal qualities of the different types of art, rather than the "content" of individual works. The symbolic meaning of works like the Ariadne is an important area of study, but I chose to focus instead on the way in which these authors distinguish between forms and genres of art.

Heffernan is also troubled by my discussion of the picturesque, as he is unconvinced by the claim that it "ultimately represents a static, ahistorical, elitist mode of vision." How, he asks, can the picturesque be truly ahistorical? The answer, I would agree, is that it is not. In writing about the general associations raised by the picturesque, as cited above, I was perhaps not as clear as I tried to be elsewhere, when I suggested that "picturesque landscape . . . aspires to precisely this sort of ahistorical fantasy" (21). That is, in theory the picturesque presents itself as ahistorical; the carefully contrived ruins of picturesque gardens suggest a generalised, timeless "historicalness" not a specific history. In reality, of course, it was not, and this is precisely what later writers objected to. Heffernan's more general suggestion that the claims I make about the capacity of music for "transcendence" and "authenticity" are somewhat overstated is a legitimate one, and one I can only respond to by saying that I am speaking at such moments from within the perspectives of the works themselves, and again describing what they aspire to as much as what they achieve.

Looking at these reviews makes it clear to me that the most vulnerable portions of my argument are those that attempt to describe or account for what these works are doing or what effects they create. At such moments, it is difficult to specify the degree to which the qualities I describe—qualities such as authenticity, transcendence, authority, and, of course, realism—are goals that one attributes to the authors, effects generated by the texts, or broader cultural ideals that we ourselves locate in the novels. These reviews have been very useful in showing me that the claims I make about these novelists tend to reflect my sense that the claims these novelists make about their own art often come down in the end to a matter of faith. In the final analysis we accept these novels as realistic because, through a variety of gestures, they ask us to. As these reviews demonstrate, critics may not agree on the extent to which a realist novel does or should mimic an externally verifiable reality. But all three readers seem to agree that it is a strength of the realist novel that it developed strategies, such as the artistic allusions I discuss in my book, that allowed it to verify itself.