This excellent book throws new light on the Gilded Age preoccupation with philanthropy and how to do it properly (“the difficult art of giving,” as John D. Rockefeller put it in 1909), and argues persuasively that patronage remained important in literary publishing well into the twentieth century, long after the supposed integration of that particular capitalist activity into an industrial market economy. A chapter is devoted to each of five writers, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, and Theodore Dreiser, who engaged with patronage and philanthropy in their personal and professional relations and went on to depict them in works such as James’s *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court* (1889) and *Which Was It?* (composed c.1899–1902), Chesnutt’s *The Colonel’s Dream* (1905), and Dreiser’s *Trilogy of Desire* (1912–47).

The nexus of literature and business has proved a fertile ground for critical debate, especially since the New Americanists, and Sawaya positions herself as building on Peter Messent’s work on Mark Twain and male friendship, while bringing to bear a more rigorous political sensibility on the arguments of critics such as Bruce Robbins and Walter Benn Michaels.¹ The pairing of patronage and philanthropy is an inspired move. With regard to literary history, demonstrating the continued importance of patronage relations in the mediation of realist literature complicates assumptions of the emergence of the literary marketplace in the late nineteenth century, and the writer–readership binary that it has undergirded, and sets out philosophical- and material-historical contexts that seem more illuminating than the overfamiliar categorizations of realism, sentiment, and naturalism. Of wider importance, Sawaya’s central point is that the late nineteenth-century preoccupation with patronage and corporate-based philanthropy “cannot help but bear witness to the failures of market capitalism” (2). The book is grounded in the observation that for literary figures and for contemporaries such as Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie with whom, as she shows, they were often in dialogue, the very notion of philanthropy proves “difficult” precisely because it signals that market forces alone are insufficient to deal with the economic and social dislocations of capitalism—what Herbert Spencer, the major authority for social Darwinists, described as “the miseries everywhere being suffered” (quoted at 14). By highlighting the fictive nature of neoclassical economics, Sawaya aligns herself with the work of historians such as Philip Mirowski and Naomi Klein, whose *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) is

discussed in the Coda to *The Difficult Art of Giving*, but Sawaya’s main achievement is not so much to critique as to follow through the implications of a practically universal dissatisfaction with capitalism; in this case, that the novels are arenas for the testing of ideas about agency, social and economic relations, and amelioration.

Sawaya treats patronage and philanthropy, then, as instantiations of Progressive Era negotiations between corporate power and reform. As a result, she avoids the older cul-de-sacs of questions of “oppositional” literature, and the more recently asked non-questions whether Howells, Twain, or Dreiser (for example) were pro- or anti-capitalist. If so many influential writers, from Rockefeller and Carnegie back to Spencer, were motivated by a dissatisfaction with capitalism, what count are the forms that that dissatisfaction takes – and to understand these forms Sawaya utilizes a judicious selection of thinking from critical theory, and draws upon biographies and published collections of correspondence and fugitive writing, to scaffold her readings of selected, mostly canonical, novels. Thus, for example, she invokes Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* to frame *The Princess Casamassima* as explaining elite women’s philanthropy as the personal product of gendered and classed frustrations (33), and *The Golden Bowl* as positioning Adam Verver’s imperialist cultural philanthropy within an international competition for art between American and British Empires (59).

Then, via Fredric Jameson’s rereading of *ressentiment* as an “unavoidably autoreferential structure” (44), Sawaya argues that James acknowledges something akin to this in the ways that his own authorial persona is unavoidably perspectival. Such summaries are, however, inadequate to convey the nuances of Sawaya’s often multilayered argument, which produces finely tuned, precise, and persuasive readings, especially of James, Howells, Twain, and Chesnutt.

The focus on patronage and philanthropy illuminates discussions of agency, social justice, gender, and class, and revitalizes familiar issues such as Howells’s politics, the multiple ironies of Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* and *Which Was It*, Chesnutt’s critical sense of the racial politics of philanthropy in his unpublished novels of white life and *The Colonel’s Dream*, and Dreiser’s preoccupation with self-interest and agency. If there is a reservation to be noted, it is that the approach to the novels as “testing” concepts or as working through “paradoxes” might have been supplemented by a more detailed and comparative sense of them as narrative texts. However, Sawaya’s argument is cumulative and the book’s structure allows her to make precise comparisons, as when she points up the similarities and differences between what she finds in Chesnutt, an urgent attention to white philanthropy as deeply problematic but the best hope in the absence of the political will to extirpate racial hierarchy, and the open-ended and unpredictable results of self-interest depicted in Dreiser’s *Trilogy of Desire*.

Along the way, Sawaya has insights to offer on a range of supporting issues. *The Difficult Art of Giving* succinctly delineates Herbert Spencer’s multifaceted influence on the intellectual climate defining literature around the turn of the nineteenth century, and observes that Nietzsche’s exposure of the self-interest of altruism is “meat and drink” to Spencer, who devoted pages of *The Data of Ethics* (1879) to unpacking the relation between altruism and egotism. Summarizing recent work in sociology, Sawaya points out that the more a society is invested in ideas of competition, social mobility, and self-help, the more important are networks of family, friendship, and patronage. So Horatio Alger, so, one might add, LinkedIn.

This is a measured book but also one whose enthusiasm for intellectual debate is infectious. Shaped by contemporary critical issues, it immerses itself in biographical and historical contexts. Very rarely, Sawaya’s detailed engagement with the latter
goes slightly awry, in a couple of the asides on Dreiser, for example, but these serve only to underline the intensity that one has come to take for granted in the volume.

Finally, while the book stands up on its own terms, largely those of economic class, and also race, it also contributes to the historical understanding of masculinity, and in that sense constitutes a neat parallel to Sawaya’s earlier *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890–1950* (2003).

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