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Approved by:

William S. Clark
George H. Ford
Paul V. Kreider

ELLEN GLASGOW:
SOUTHERN OPPONENT TO THE PHILISTINE

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Thomas McRoberts Kreider

A. B. University of Cincinnati 1947
M. A. Harvard University 1947
M. A. University of Cincinnati 1949

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Preface

No critic as yet has made a thoroughly satisfactory examination of the art and thought of Ellen Glasgow. This study attempts to show in detail her accomplishments and her failures as a literary craftsman, and to gather together for the first time her widely scattered observations about life. Miss Glasgow's technique and, to a lesser extent, her thought developed over the half-century during which she wrote. This development culminated in Vein of Iron.

To understand Miss Glasgow's achievement fully, the critic must also recognize her relation to other contemporary novelists of manners and to nineteenth-century Southern romantic writers. Only when these connections are comprehended, can the critic properly estimate her role in literary history. This dissertation has a dual purpose: to examine and evaluate Miss Glasgow's ideas and her art and to show her significance in American literature.

Such an undertaking as the present one needs, and has received, coöperation from many people. The Library of the University of Cincinnati purchased for my use the beautiful Virginia Edition of Ellen Glasgow's novels. I wish especially to thank Miss Jane Bertenshaw for arranging inter-library loans with numerous institutions: the University of Chicago, the Cleveland Public Library, Columbia University, Emory University, Harvard University, The Library of Congress, and the University of Virginia. Dr. George H. Ford and Dr. Paul V. Kreider offered most helpful suggestions on the style and organization of this study. I owe my greatest debt to Dr. William S. Clark II, who has directed my efforts. Professor Clark's

guidance has always been companionable rather than magisterial, and his knowledge of literature and of literary art has been of inestimable value. Some of my interpretations of Miss Glasgow's technique and thought differ from those expressed by other critics. Responsibility for my judgments must rest with me, not with the gentleman who has patiently supervised my work.

It is always easy to challenge the value of making a study of this sort. Against the outraged Philistine's complaint that literary criticism is "impractical," the lover of literature need only reply in the words of John Henry Newman that "knowledge is its own reward." Intelligent enjoyment of literary art forms a major portion of a liberal education, which is "simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence."

Chapter I

Ellen Glasgow and the Critics

Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow is a neglected and undervalued novelist. Few critics, anthologists, and literary historians have deigned to notice her at all.¹ Scholars who do mention her are frequently disparaging. One critic writes that her style is, after all, really inferior;² another dismisses her by saying that she "need not be accepted very seriously as a thinker."³ Southerners have tended either to ignore her work or to be highly critical of it. William Fuller Taylor, Professor of American Literature at Mississippi College, recognizes the existence of Miss Glasgow only in the bibliographical section of his history of American literature.⁴

¹Anthologies of Southern literature which exclude Miss Glasgow's work or relegate it to an insignificant position include: W. P. Trent, Southern Writers: Selections in Prose and Verse (New York, 1914); Maurice Garland Fulton, Southern Life in Southern Literature: Selections of Representative Prose and Poetry (Boston, 1917); and William T. Wynn, Southern Literature: Selections and Biographies (New York, 1932). Among the more important critical and historical studies of American literature which ignore her novels or dismiss them in a line or two are: William Peterfield Trent, John Erskine, Stuart P. Sherman, Carl Van Doren, The Cambridge History of American Literature (New York, 1917); Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1927-1930); Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York, 1932); Malcolm Cowley, ed., After the Genteel Tradition: American Writers since 1910 (New York, 1937); W. J. Cash, "Literature and the South," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXIII (December 28, 1940), pp. 3-4, 18; Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction (Chicago, 1940); Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction, 1920-1940 (New York, 1941); and Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel between Two Wars (Boston, 1942).

²Henry Seidel Canby, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironic Tragedian," The Saturday Review of Literature, XVIII (September 10, 1938), p. 14.

³N. Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel and Society: A Critical Study of the Modern Novel (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1941), p. 151.

⁴William Fuller Taylor, A History of American Letters (Boston, 1936).

In Segments of Southern Thought (1938) Edd Winfield Parks has three references to the novelist, of which only one is of the least significance: "Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell have quietly worked their particular Virginia fields, with brilliant results...."⁵ The John Peale Bishop memorial volume, edited by Allen Tate, refers to her once.⁶ Though Gregory Paine discusses her briefly in the introduction to Southern Prose Writers (1947), one of the volumes in the American Writers Series, he includes none of her work in the body of his book, where he does find room for her contemporaries James Lane Allen, O. Henry, and Woodrow Wilson.⁷ In I'll Take My Stand (1930), the statement of the Southern Agrarians, Donald Davidson mentions her in his article "A Mirror for Artists."

Why does Miss Glasgow, self-styled the 'social historian' of Virginia, propagate ideas that would be more quickly approved by Oswald Garrison Villard than by the descendants of the first families?⁸

In a later book he refers to the "reserved and plaintive condemnations of Ellen Glasgow."⁹ And in his recent essay "Why the Modern South Has

⁵Edd Winfield Parks, Segments of Southern Thought (Athens, Georgia, 1938), p. 127.

⁶Allen Tate, ed., A Southern Vanguard: The John Peale Bishop Memorial Volume (New York, 1947), p. 116.

⁷Gregory Paine, Southern Prose Writers (New York, 1947).

⁸Donald Davidson, "A Mirror for Artists" in I'll Take My Stand by Twelve Southerners (New York and London, 1930), p. 58.

⁹Donald Davidson, The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1938), p. 280.

a Great Literature" in the Vanderbilt Studies in the Humanities (1951) the same critic takes no notice of her at all though he mentions Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, John Ransom, Allen Tate, Julia Peterkin, Stark Young, Eudora Walty, Jesse Stuart, and Elizabeth Roberts.¹⁰

Even the most incurious reader must pause to wonder at this lack of appreciation. He is tempted to ask as did one of Miss Glasgow's characters when confronted by the ideas and habits of the rising middle class, "Is it possible?"

Several writers have offered explanations for this phenomenon. In his usual vigorous way H. L. Mencken explains why Ellen Glasgow is not popular with many readers in the South.

Frankly, I do not blame the Virginians for stopping cautiously short of taking Miss Glasgow to their arms, and covering her with proud kisses. For the plain fact is that the whole canon of her works is little more or less than a magnificent reductio ad absurdum of their traditional metaphysic....In her gallery all of the salient figures of the Virginia zoology stalk about under glaring lights, and when she has done with them there is little left to know about them—and not too much that is made known is reassuring.¹¹

There is no need to determine the accuracy of Mr. Mencken's own analysis of the novels of Ellen Glasgow. His is the common interpretation and perhaps represents the attitude of the general reading public. More scholarly explanations of the reason for the lack of critical attention

¹⁰ Donald Davidson, "Why the Modern South Has a Great Literature" in Vanderbilt Studies in the Humanities, Vol. I, ed., Richmond C. Beatty, J. Philip Hyatt, and Monroe K. Spears (Nashville, Tennessee, 1951), pp. 1-17.

¹¹ H. L. Mencken, "A Southern Skeptic," The American Mercury, XXIX (August, 1933), p. 505.

have been offered by other writers. Henry S. Canby, one of Miss Glasgow's most consistent admirers, writes:

One reason why Miss Glasgow has had inadequate critical estimation is that she belongs to the great classical tradition of the novel. The great subject for the novel since its beginning in the eighteenth century has been manners, and when the novels have also been great these manners have been no superficialities of behavior, but a code, a habitual philosophy of living according to which men and women proceed;--a philosophy, like all philosophies, sooner or later beaten upon, undercut, crumbled away by the insidious waves of new manners, new ideas, new codes in the making.¹²

Much the same argument has been advanced by Lionel Trilling to explain the failure of several recent attempts to revive interest in the novels of William Dean Howells.

We are lovers of what James calls the rare and strange, and in our literature we are not responsive to the common, the immediate, the familiar, and the vulgar elements of life.¹³

Much less favorably inclined toward Ellen Glasgow than Henry Canby is N. Elizabeth Monroe, who states in The Novel and Society (1941):

If she is not given due honor today, it is because critics harken to louder and more immediate voices. It is natural for the critic to want to be in the forefront of social change--if a new era is at hand he must herald it in the novels of today. There seems to him to be something old fashioned about Ellen Glasgow's brittle comedies, her adherence to standards, and the chiselled beauty of her style. A generation of critics that can set Faulkner down as a traditional moralist and a master of form, Dos Passos as brother to the poor and disinherited, and

¹² Henry Seidel Canby, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironic Tragedian," The Saturday Review of Literature, XVIII (September 10, 1938), p. 3.

¹³ Lionel Trilling, "W. D. Howells and the Roots of Modern Taste," Partisan Review, XVIII (September-October, 1951), p. 524.

Steinbeck as an artist, cannot even hear Ellen Glasgow's voice.¹⁴

Whether it is the critic's main responsibility to watch, eagle-eyed, for social changes need not be considered here. Following the lead of Mr. Canby and Miss Monroe as to the explanation for the omission of Miss Glasgow's novels from scrutiny, H. Blair Rouse observes:

Lacking the violence of experimentalism in style, structure, or theme, these novels never received the ardent partisanship of the avant garde coteries.¹⁵

Just as critics agree on the cause for the neglect of Ellen Glasgow, so they concur in two other ideas: her relationship to nineteenth-century Southern romantic fiction and her relationship to Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather. Like almost every critic who has discussed Miss Glasgow's novels, Jay B. Hubbell in Virginia Life in Fiction (1922) stresses her break with the sentimental literature of the last century. The hero of her first book, he points out, is not a well-born and polished aristocrat but a bastard. Her plantation-mistresses are not simply charming ladies; they are also efficient managers. Instead of standing reverently before the ruin of the Southern aristocracy, Ellen Glasgow looks cheerfully ahead to a new South controlled by descendants of the poor whites.¹⁶ Writing before such authors as William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell had appeared on the scene, Grant Overton said that

¹⁴ Monroe, The Novel and Society, p. 256.

¹⁵ H. Blair Rouse, "Ellen Glasgow in Retrospect," The Emory University Quarterly, VI (March, 1950), p. 36.

¹⁶ Jay Broadus Hubbell, Virginia Life in Fiction (Dallas, Texas, 1922), pp. 33-36.

Miss Glasgow was "the only writer to break through the sentimental tradition of the south" since 1865.¹⁷ Edwin Mims, continuing the orthodox line of critical opinion which views Miss Glasgow as a rebel, says of The Battle-ground (1902):

The new era has already started in the South with Dan a stagedriver, Levi a free man, Pinetop on his way to an education, and Betty, now the wife of Dan, the forerunner of a self-reliant, radiant line of women. The author recognizes the inevitable result of the war and rejoices in it, unlike the conventional historians of the Lost Cause.¹⁸

Recently Henry Canby has commented about her:

When she began to write at the turn of the nineteenth century, at the very climax of a confident age, the novelists of the South were capitalizing glamour and sentiment. Their favorite characters came from a never-never land of imagination, and they were compensating for the defeat of one way of life by another with whitewash tinted in rose, and success stories where, on such lines, there could be no success. Their realities were the memories of childhood, and their novels had a wide sentimental appeal but not much particular truth. Ellen Glasgow, even as a girl, determined to begin a 'solitary revolt' against the formal, the false, the affected, the sentimental, and the pretentious in Southern writing.¹⁹

Critics also display unanimity when they compare her with other contemporary American novelists. Annie Russell Marble in her Study of the Modern Novel (1928) suggests that Miss Glasgow may be placed with

¹⁷ Grant Overton, "Ellen Glasgow's Arrow," The Bookman, LXI (May, 1925), p. 291.

¹⁸ Edwin Mims, "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow," Social Forces, IV (March, 1926), p. 497.

¹⁹ Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas A. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, ed., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1949), II, p. 1217.

"photographers of contemporary manners" like Henry James and Edith Wharton.²⁰ No critic has seriously disputed Miss Marble's estimate. F. L. Pattee classes the Virginian novelist with Mrs. Wharton and Miss Cather.²¹ William R. Parker observes:

...She has never stooped to the folly of writing in haste for a quick return. Indeed, her work, with that of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, is a perfect refutation of Sherwood Anderson's contention that 'crudity is an inevitable quality in the production of really significant present-day American literature.'²²

Henry Canby asserts that the work of Miss Glasgow, Mrs. Wharton, and Miss Cather proves that the novelist does not have to be a journalist or a sociologist or a psychologist but "only" a master of narrative.²³ In his Short History of American Literature (1940) G. Harrison Orians considers Ellen Glasgow along with Henry James and Mrs. Wharton.²⁴ A writer whose critique of the modern novel has already been mentioned, N. Elizabeth Monroe, notes that both Miss Glasgow and Mrs. Wharton dealt with dying aristocratic societies and that these novelists used a

²⁰ Annie Russell Marble, A Study of the Modern Novel, British and American, since 1900 (New York and London, 1928), p. 314. Some scholars have discussed Miss Glasgow and James Branch Cabell together, but only on the basis that they were contemporary Virginian authors.

²¹ Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature, 1890-1930 (New York, 1930), p. 256.

²² William R. Parker, "Ellen Glasgow: A Gentle Rebel," The English Journal, XX (March, 1931), p. 187.

²³ Henry Seidel Canby, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironic Tragedian," The Saturday Review of Literature, XVIII (September 10, 1938), p. 3.

²⁴ G. Harrison Orians, A Short History of American Literature (New York, 1940), pp. 272-273.

technique similar to that of James.²⁵ Speaking of Ellen Glasgow's concern with the failure of the aristocratic standards to control the behavior of the rising middle class, Hamilton Basso remarks:

It is the same American theme that runs through many of the novels of Edith Wharton, a writer with whom she has much in common, and also through the writings of Henry Adams and Henry James.²⁶

Clifton Fadiman mentions, very briefly, the similarity between Miss Glasgow and Miss Cather.²⁷ George Snell's The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947 (1947) discusses Ellen Glasgow with Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, largely, however, on the basis that they were contemporaries.²⁸ In an article intended to explain the last fifty years of American literature to British readers, Henry Steele Commager considers Henry James, Edith Wharton, George Santayana, O. E. Rølvaag, and Ellen Glasgow as "traditionalists." They are all, he writes, "more concerned about the spiritual well-being of the individual than about the material well-being of society."²⁹ Finally in the Literary History of the United States Mr. Canby, like other writers of the last twenty-

²⁵ Monroe, The Novel and Society, pp. 111, 163.

²⁶ Hamilton Basso, "Ellen Glasgow's Literary Credo," The New York Times Book Review, (October 17, 1943), p. 5.

²⁷ Clifton Fadiman, "The American Novel of the Truce," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII (August 5, 1944), p. 20.

²⁸ George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction, 1798-1947 (New York, 1947), p. 140.

²⁹ Henry Steele Commager, "Traditionalism in American Literature," The Nineteenth Century and After, CXLVI (November, 1949), p. 313.

five years, draws attention to the similarity of Ellen Glasgow's work with that of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather.

This study will show that Miss Glasgow is not simply a novelist of manners of the school of James and a rebel against the Southern literary tradition. She as well as her critics have misunderstood the nature of her reaction against Virginian fiction. Her role in American literature is more complex than scholars have realized. Many writers have spoken disparagingly of her art and her ideas. At the center of her thought lies the concept of the civilized man, yet no one has bothered to discover what qualities such a man possesses. No scholar has troubled to study her handling of the artistry of the novel with enough care to realize the full extent of her achievement, especially as represented in Vein of Iron. Miss Glasgow is a neglected, hence undervalued novelist; she is a figure of more stature than her critics have admitted. The purpose of this study is to place Ellen Glasgow in American literature, to show the progress, the successes, and the limitations of her art, and to reveal the development of her thought.

Chapter II

The Literary Heritage

Like the earliest literature of New England, that of Virginia begins in the days of Queen Elizabeth with English authors who wrote accounts of explorations and settlement in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Those ventures to the new world were financed by the crown and by wealthy gentlemen. A few of the gentlemen came to this continent either as explorers or as settlers. Here begins a tradition which was to become increasingly significant in Southern literature. The emphasis upon an aristocratic society in Virginia appeared first in the more-or-less factual accounts of exploration and settlement, but soon made its way into fiction. Whether or not there ever existed in Virginia a large number of families related to the English aristocracy is a question of no concern here.¹ The tradition of an aristocratic heritage proved desirable for literary purposes and represented what Southern readers were willing, indeed eager, to believe.

The first reference to an aristocracy in Virginia is found in the reports of explorers. Thomas Hariot published in the year of the defeat of the Spanish Armada his Brief and True Report of the New Found

¹The presence of branches of aristocratic English houses in Virginia is denied by Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, The Old South: The Founding of American Civilization (New York, 1942), pp. 19-21. Although Professor Wertenbaker denies, perhaps rather arbitrarily, that prominent families settled in Virginia, he does not consider the effect of the aristocratic tradition on the lives of the people who believed in it.

Land of Virginia (1588). In this account of Sir Walter Raleigh's attempt to found a colony on Roanoke Island there is a suggestion that aristocratic gentlemen or at least men who had enjoyed very comfortable lives were among the settlers.

Some of them had been nicely brought up, living in cities or towns, and had never seen the world before. Because they could not find in Virginia any English cities, or fine houses, or their accustomed dainty food, or any soft beds of down or feathers the country was to them miserable, and they reported accordingly.

Better known is John Smith's Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles (1624). Smith lists the colonists by their trades or occupations, and those catalogues show that a high percentage of the settlers were considered gentlemen.³ That Smith had little use for them is well known, and it is interesting to note his opinion of their usefulness.

For all the rest were poore Gentlemen, Tradesmen, Serving-men, libertines, and such like, ten times more fit to spoyle a Common-wealth, then either begin one, or but helpe to maintaine one....Ten good workemen would have done more substantiall worke in a day, then ten of them in a weeke.⁴

Robert Beverley's History and Present State of Virginia (1705) introduces a new element into the aristocratic tradition, an element which was destined to become increasingly prominent during the nineteenth century.

² Thomas Hariot, A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (London, 1588), reprinted in The New World, ed. Stefant Lorant (New York, 1946), p. 232. Mr. Lorant has, of course, modernized Hariot's orthography.

³ John Smith, The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles in Travels and Works of John Smith, ed. Edward Arber (Edinburgh, 1910), II, pp. 389-390, 411-412.

⁴ Ibid., II, p. 487.

He advances the idea that after the Puritan triumph in the middle of the seventeenth century refugee Cavaliers came to Virginia in numbers sufficient to influence significantly the social structure and habits of the people. He also indicates the devoted loyalty of Virginia to the lost cause of the Stuarts.

At last the King was traiterously beheaded in England, and Oliver install'd Protector. However, his Authority was not acknowledged in Virginia for several Years after, till they were forced to it by the last Necessity.⁵

...People of better Condition retir'd thither with their Families, either to increase the Estates they had before, or else to avoid being persecuted for their Principles of Religion, or Government. Thus in the time of the Rebellion in England, several good Cavalier Families went thither with their Effects to escape the Tyranny of the Usurper.⁶

After Beverley the South failed to produce any distinguished historian, with the exception perhaps of his contemporary William Byrd, but the tradition of a connection with the English aristocracy was maintained and developed in the lives of the ruling class of Virginia. Professor Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker discusses in some detail the surprisingly rich and varied cultural life of the eighteenth-century planters.⁷ That way of life, at least the externals of it, is best seen today in the restoration of colonial Williamsburg and is also to be found in more modest restorations like that of William Byrd's home,

⁵ Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia (London, 1705), ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1947), p. 63.

⁶ Ibid., p. 287.

⁷ Wertebaker, The Old South, pp. 19-70.

Westover. The aristocratic tradition was a vital one and widely accepted. A Northerner, Frederick Law Olmsted, in his Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (1856) gives a lengthy account of Virginia, and, using the histories of Smith and Beverley, he devotes considerable attention to the ruling class and its connection with the English aristocracy.

The proprietary planters, who always were the commanding body in the province, received their character from certain emigrating offshoots of aristocratic English families. They endeavored to sustain, so far as it was possible in the wilderness, the manners, morals, politics, forms of religion, and other habits and fashions of the gentry and court of Charles the First. On this account, and because of their brave adherence to the king's party against the people's parliament, they are called Cavaliers.⁸

It was but inevitable that a tradition thus strongly supported by historians should sooner or later appear in imaginative literature relating to Virginia. One of the very earliest depictions of the aristocratic code is found in John P. Kennedy's Swallow Barn (1832). As Kennedy was careful to explain, his work is not a novel. It comes close to being a kind of sketch-book in narrative form describing the life and manners of the Virginian planters during the first third of the nineteenth century, a life rather like that of the eighteenth-century English squires with much the same duties and powers and responsibilities. Small details from Kennedy's narrative reveal the standards of the gentry; for example, he notes that the owner of the plantation where he is visiting prides himself on dressing well⁹ and that the children's elderly governess

⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy (New York and London, 1856), pp. 234-235.

⁹ John P. Kennedy, Swallow Barn: or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion (New York, 1872), p. 31. (Originally published in 1832). Many books dealing with Virginia have been republished a number of times. The footnotes will give both the original date of publication and, when necessary, the date of the later reprinting.

is "aristocratical."¹⁰ Kennedy also looks back on the history of the state, mentions that fine families settled there, and adds with a touch of satisfaction:

Her early population, therefore, consisted of gentlemen of good name and condition, who brought within her confines a solid fund of respectability and wealth.¹¹

Only two years after Kennedy wrote, the aristocratic tradition appeared, fully grown, in fiction. In 1834 and 1835 William A. Caruthers published The Cavaliers of Virginia, based upon Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion in 1676. This was the first novel to identify the ruling class of Virginia with descendants of the seventeenth-century English Cavaliers. The author of this two-volume romance constantly refers to the powerful and wealthy people of Virginia as "Cavaliers." The story begins with a brief account of English aristocrats coming to Virginia, and the author writes proudly:

First came the Cavaliers who fled hither after the decapitation of their royal master and the dispersion of his army, many of whom became permanent settlers in the town [Jamestown] or colony, and ever afterwards influenced the character of the state. These were the first founders of the aristocracy which prevails in Virginia to this day; these were the immediate ancestors of that generous, fox-hunting, wine-drinking, duelling and reckless race of men, which gives so distinctive a character to Virginians wherever they may be found.¹²

Caruthers delights in showing the social life of this class. He describes

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹² William Alexander Caruthers, The Cavaliers of Virginia: or, The Recluse of Jamestown, An Historical Romance of the Old Dominion (New York, 1834), I, pp. 3-4.

a fox-hunt and the dinner which follows when a "tempting display of cold viands, wines and strong waters" is spread for the sportsmen.¹³

In more detail he tells of a reception given by the colonial governor and his wife.

A slight degree of pomp and formality characterized the profound inclination of the knight's magisterial person, as some guest of distinction was from time to time announced, while his lady performed her part of the ceremony in exact accordance with the stately habits of her lord, but softened by a native blandness of manner and sweetness of disposition. She was a lady in the most refined and polished acceptance of the term.¹⁴

Not only the governor's wife but all the ladies and gentlemen of the upper class are aristocratic. Mrs. Fairfax possesses "the peculiar tact of the cultivated female,"¹⁵ and Nathaniel Bacon is "noble and gifted with every manly and generous attribute."¹⁶ Brave men and gracious ladies, Caruthers' characters are the ancestors of scores of fictional Virginians.

In The Partisan (1835), a Cooperesque story of Americans, British, and Indians during the American Revolution, William G. Simms, a South Carolinian, touched on the aristocratic tradition. His partisan, Major Singleton, is a gentleman of superior birth, education, wealth, and character who leads the patriots in their revolt against the harsh, cruel, and arbitrary tyranny of England. Singleton's friend Colonel Walton is

¹³ Ibid., I, p. 156.

¹⁴ Ibid., I, p. 95.

¹⁵ Ibid., I, p. 74.

¹⁶ Ibid., I, p. 45.

also an aristocratic gentleman; with him "politeness was habitual."¹⁷

The Colonel lives in rustic splendor on his plantation.

...From a blockhouse station at first, it had grown to be an elegant mansion, improved in the European style, remarkable for the length and deep shade of its avenues of solemn oak, its general grace of arrangement, and the lofty and considerate hospitality of its proprietors.¹⁸

One of the most interesting Virginian novels from an historical point of view is Beverley Tucker's The Partisan Leader. Published first in 1836, it describes the beginning of a sectional war brought on by the greed for power and money of Martin Van Buren, who has just been re-elected for his third term as President of the United States. The War between the States revived interest in The Partisan Leader; during the 1860's it was reprinted in both the South and the North. The leaders of Tucker's revolt are "descendants of the men who had defied Cromwell."¹⁹ With these polished and cultivated Virginians, the author contrasts the supporters of Van Buren, who are a "compound of meanness, malignity, treachery."²⁰ The author points out, as Oliver Wendell Holmes was to do later in the opening chapter of Elsie Venner, that there are physical differences between the members of the aristocratic and the lower classes. The hero, Douglas Trevor, "would have been recognized as a gentleman" no matter what

¹⁷ William Gilmore Simms, The Partisan: A Romance of the Revolution (Chicago, 1888), p. 121. (Originally published in 1835).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁹ Beverley Tucker, The Partisan Leader: A Novel, and An Apocalypse of the Origin and Struggles of the Southern Confederacy, ed., Thomas A. Ware (Richmond, Virginia, 1862), p. 23. (Originally published in 1836).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

his dress or his company.²¹

After the sectional war which Beverley Tucker vividly foresaw, John Esten Cooke published a fictionalized account of his own adventures in the Confederate Army entitled Surry of Eagle's-Nest (1866).²² Cooke begins his story by telling of his own ancestor's devotion to the Stuarts, then proceeds to identify the two lost causes: that of the royal family and that of the Confederacy. Although much of the book is taken up with accounts of military campaigns, a melodramatic love story affords the author an opportunity to describe the homes, the habits, and the ideals of the Southern aristocracy. Cooke dwells especially on the gentleman's ideal of honor. Because his daughter has promised to marry a man whom she detests, Mr. Beverley insists that she carry out her agreement. Fate, of course, intervenes and saves the young lady, but the code of honor must be upheld at any cost.

Cooke devotes most of his attention to military activity. As the War between the States receded in time, novelists began to concern themselves less with martial events and to concentrate on the civilian life of the aristocratic class before, during, or after the conflict. Their portrayals quickly became glamorized and sentimentalized. Romantic escapism dominated Virginian literature. In "Marse Chan," one of Thomas Nelson Page's most famous short stories, an ante-bellum girl rejects a wealthy suitor because, in the words of a colored servant, "he warn'

²¹ Ibid., p. 190.

²² John Esten Cooke, Surry of Eagle's-Nest (Chicago, 1894). (Originally published in 1866).

muttin' but a half-strainer.'"²³ He comes of good family only on one side. Her refusal is not mere social snobbery; she is acting on the idea that wealth cannot compensate for a fine background. Page later wrote what is perhaps the most nostalgic of all Southern novels, Red Rock (1898), in which he looks longingly back to the pre-war era when "even the moonlight was richer and mellow...than it is now."²⁴ In this story proud, cultivated aristocrats like Dr. Cary still use china-ware presented to their loyal ancestors by Charles II. Although their wealth is gone, the aristocrats maintain their standards of gallantry and charm, for those qualities depend not on money but on a cultured background. Several generations are required to produce a gentleman fitted to this society, for being one is, as a Uriah Heep-like villain says, something which must be "bred in the bone."²⁵ The standards of the old aristocracy, which emphasize decorum and family background, are constantly contrasted with those of the scalawag, which stress only money.

Even more sentimental than Red Rock is F. Hopkinson Smith's Colonel Carter of Cartersville (1891). Scarcely a novel in any very strict sense of the word, this is a glamorization of the South and a highly unrealistic character sketch of Colonel Carter. The hero, who is supposed

²³ Thomas Nelson Page, In Ole Virginia (New York, 1896), p. 36. (Originally published in 1887).

²⁴ Thomas Nelson Page, Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction (New York, 1926), p. viii. (Originally published in 1898).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

to be poor, until toward the end of the book when an English syndicate pays him an immense fortune for coal rights on his land, seems to have an inexhaustible supply of madeira wine and terrapin for his frequent guests. Smith describes Colonel Carter in words which might be applied to many other fictional Southern characters.

A Virginian of good birth, fair education, and limited knowledge of the world and of men, proud of his ancestry, proud of his State, and proud of himself; believing in states' rights, slavery, and the Confederacy; and away down in the bottom of his soul still clinging to the belief that the poor white trash of the earth includes about everybody outside of Fairfax County.²⁶

It is scarcely necessary for Smith to add that the gentleman is the descendant of an English Cavalier general who settled in Virginia in the seventeenth century.²⁷ Gregory Paine says of this book, one of the most popular of all nineteenth-century Southern novels:

Readers South and North accepted his portrait of the ante-bellum Virginia Cavalier, proud of his section, his state, and his family, dispensing from the head of his table rich food and rare wines to his many guests, hopelessly careless about paying his debts, hotly challenging each fancied insult, courtly in his mannered treatment of women, and exemplifying 'the beau ideal of a charming and quixotic civilization.'²⁸

Although the story is set late in the nineteenth century, Colonel Carter's loyal servant, who has remained with his master after emancipation and who is a figure as necessary to sentimental Southern

²⁶ F. Hopkinson Smith, Colonel Carter of Cartersville (New York, 1891), p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁸ Paine, Southern Prose Writers, p. xcii.

literature as the proud plantation owners, beautiful belles, gallant young gentlemen, and mint juleps, often refers to the social life of the ante-bellum gentry.

'Dem was high times. We ain't neber seed no time like dat since de war. Git up in de mawmin' an' look out ober de lawn, an' yer come fo'teen or fifteen couples ob de fustest quality folks, all on horseback ridin' in de gate. Den such a scufflin' round! Old marsa an' missis out on de po'ch, an' de little pickaninnies runnin' from de quarters, an' all hands helpin' 'em off de horses, an' dey all smokin' hot wid de gallop up de lane. An' den sich a breakfast an' sich dancin' an' co'tin'; ladies all out on de lawn in der white dresses, an' de gemmen in fairtop boots, an' Mammy Jane runnin' round same as a chicken wid its head off, --an' der heads was off befo' de knowed it, an' dey a-brilin' on de gridiron.²⁹

A contemporary of F. Hopkinson Smith, James Lane Allen, in The Reign of Law (1900), the heroine of which is a girl from the former slave-holding aristocracy, also indulged in romantic pictures of the days before the War. Indeed Allen presented a more glamorized version of ante-bellum society than even Thomas Nelson Page or F. Hopkinson Smith had done.

And now what happy times there werei! The silks, and satins, and laces! The plate, the gold, the cut glass! The dinners, the music, the laughter, the wines!³⁰

...The big iron entrance-gate, the parklike lawn; the brilliant supper in the great house, the noiseless movements, the perfect manners of the many servants; later in the evening the music, the dancing, the wild joy--fairyland once more.³¹

²⁹ Smith, Colonel Carter, pp. 61-62.

³⁰ James Lane Allen, The Reign of Law: A Tale of the Kentucky Hemp Fields (New York and London, 1900), p. 254.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 370-371.

By the opening of the twentieth century the theme of the aristocratic heritage had definitely spent its force. If Southern authors wanted to break away from the then-current vapid type of fiction, they had to treat the aristocratic character and society in a more realistic manner. The breath of realism, however, would shrivel and destroy the romanticized tradition as it had developed in seventy years from Kennedy and Caruthers to Smith and Allen.

Ellen Glasgow reacted against the romanticizing of the aristocratic theme in Virginian literature which had led to utterly lifeless writing of the type produced by Smith and Allen. The supreme aim of fiction, she declared, is to increase one's understanding of life.³² Her major criticism of Southern literature of the previous century was that its compound of moonlight and magnolias and mint juleps and gentle ladies and dashing gentlemen and loyal servants did not begin to create life. Early in her career, paraphrasing the statement of Otto Bismarck, she asserted that Southern literature must have blood and irony.

Blood it needed because Southern culture had strained too far away from its roots in the earth; it had grown thin and pale; it was satisfied to exist on borrowed ideas, to copy instead of create. And irony is an indispensable ingredient of the critical vision; it is the safest antidote to sentimental decay.³³

She objected to Virginian literature written in the last century because it lacked realism. It was, she felt, nothing more than fiction of escape

³² Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction (New York, 1943), p. 30.

³³ Ibid., p. 28.

and portrayed a society and characters which had never existed. These romantic novels did not reveal the minds of the characters, and, as she explained in a book of critical essays about her own work, A Certain Measure (1943), the creation and revelation of character is the hall-mark of great literature.

Great novels, as I have come upon them, either in youth or in later years, have unerringly revealed the human mind and heart as these are affected or controlled by the deeper realities. Always there has been illumination, and always this illumination has fallen straight on the subject.³⁴

She pointed out that the writing of Southern novels had been reduced to a formula.

In Southern fiction there were many romances of the Confederacy; but so far as I am aware, they had, one and all, followed faithfully a well-worn and standardized pattern. A gallant Northern invader (though never of the rank and file) must rescue the person and protect the virtue of a spirited yet clinging Southern belle and beauty....I could not believe that war was like that. I had never been young enough to believe it. I could not believe that the late invasion had been a romantic conflict between handsome soldiers in blue uniforms and Southern ladies in crinolines. Although I was not born until the middle of the eighteen-seventies, I could well remember the hungry 'eighties; and I could remember, too, that when I wanted a doll with 'real hair,' I was told that I could not have it because we had 'lost everything in the war.' A war in which one had lost everything, even the right to own a doll with real hair, was not precisely my idea of a romance.³⁵

Being of an inquiring mind, Miss Glasgow posed to herself the question why Virginia and the South generally had failed to produce any important literature during the first part of the nineteenth

³⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

century. This query she answered in an article called "The Novel in the South."³⁶ She said that "the South has suffered less from a scarcity of literature than from a superabundance of living."³⁷ She then continued to explain her remark at some length.

What distinguished the Southerner, and particularly the Virginian, from his severer neighbors to the north was his ineradicable belief that pleasure is worth more than toil, that it is worth more even than profit....In this agreeable social order, so benevolent to the pleasure-seeker and so hostile alike to the inquirer and the artist, what encouragement, what opportunity, awaited the serious writer? What freedom was there for the literature either of protest or of escape? Here, as elsewhere, expression belonged to the articulate, and the articulate was supremely satisfied with his own fortunate lot, as well as with the less enviable lot of others....Pride, complacency more human than Southern, self-satisfaction, a blind contentment with things as they are, and a deaf aversion from things as they might be: all these universal swarms, which stifle both the truth of literature and the truth of life, had settled, like a cloud of honey-bees, over the creative faculties of the age....Moreover, the civilization of the old South was one in which every member, white or black, respected the unwritten obligation to be amusing when it was possible and agreeable in any circumstances. Generous manners imposed a severe, if mute, restraint upon morals; but generous manners exacted that the artist should be more gregarious than solitary.³⁸

³⁶ Harper's Magazine, CLVIII (December, 1928), pp. 93-100. That essay with minor changes and certain additions she reprinted in A Certain Measure.

³⁷ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 133.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 135-137.

Ellen Glasgow was concerned primarily with Southern literature written before 1860. After the War the problem of why the South failed to produce a fine literature would require a different answer. Certainly much of Southern energy was diverted into the pressing problems of reconstruction, and what literature was produced, like that of Thomas Nelson Page, was of a type which Miss Glasgow called "commemorative," that is, it glamorized Southern life and the aristocracy. There was no sharp break in the

This pleasant society did produce some literature, as has been noted, but Ellen Glasgow, though always interested in the novel as a reflection of the age and society which produced it, failed to see anything except escapism in nineteenth-century Southern fiction.

Why old Virginia, with a mode of living as gay, as gallant, as picturesque, and as uncomfortable as the life of England in the eighteenth century, should have created, not a minor Tom Jones, the crown of English fiction, but merely Cavaliers of Virginia and Knights of the Horseshoe--this is a question which no Southern gentleman, however Georgian his morals or Victorian his manners, would have dignified with an answer. A minor Fielding may have been too much to expect. But it would seem to the cold modern mind that almost any readers who devoured them so voraciously might have produced a native variety of Mrs. Radcliffe, of Miss Jane Porter, or even of Mrs. Charlotte Smith. All these authors were with

³⁸(cont'd) direction or tone of Virginian novels after 1865, but post-War writers tended to idealize the past rather than the present.

In passing it might be interesting to note what two other writers, one a critic, the other an historian, have had to say about the reason for the failure of the ante-bellum South to develop a great literature. Donald Davidson remarks: "One must allow that the South of the past, for all its ways of life, did not produce much 'great' art. An obvious retort to such a criticism would be, 'Neither did the rest of America.' Also I might say, as it is frequently said, that the long quarrel between Southern agrarianism and Northern industrialism drove the genius of the South largely into the political rather than the artistic field. A good case might be made out, indeed, for political writing itself as a kind of art in which the South excelled, as in forensic art." (I'll Take my Stand, pp. 54-55). Professor Thomas J. Wertenbaker's explanation is quite opposed to Miss Glasgow's. He writes: "The isolation of life upon the plantation retarded education, made it difficult for men of intellectual interests to come in contact with each other, made the attendance upon concerts or the theatre or even the ablest sermons a matter of some difficulty, a treat rarely to be indulged in. The wealthy planter might turn over the larger part of the responsibility for running his plantation to his overseer and retire to his library to delve in the classics or history or philosophy, but he seldom had the opportunity of discussing them with men of like interests. Unless he lived in the vicinity of Williamsburg or Annapolis he must miss the stimulus of the literary society or the musical club. It was this, perhaps, which made the culture of the region receptive rather than creative. The plantation was not the place to create a Shakespeare, or a Newton, or a Beethoven." (The Old South, pp. 69-70).

us in their solid bodies of masculine calf or modest feminine cloth. If our jovial grandfathers chuckled for a generation over The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle, our sentimental grandmothers shivered over The Mysteries of Udolpho and wept or trembled over the misfortunes of Thaddeus of Warsaw. Yet, while sentiment effervesced as easily as soda water, the stream of creative energy flowed, as thin and blue as skimmed milk, into the novel that was 'notable for its respect for good morals and good manners.'³⁹

Miss Glasgow thought of the writings of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe and Tobias Smollett and William Caruthers simply as literature of escape. It did not occur to her to look for deeper significance in the romances of the early Virginian novelist. Ellen Glasgow, like all the critics who have discussed her relation to Southern fiction, saw in the romantic novels of the nineteenth century nothing more profound than a desire to escape from reality. Yet if the wish to escape exists, there must be a definite reason for it. The effort to get away from reality indicates dissatisfaction with actual conditions. Escapism implies a protest against unpleasant or immoral conditions in life.

Now in connection with this element of escapism in Southern literature, it is important to note that the aristocratic theme grew steadily more pointed from the end of the War between the States up to 1900. Virginian writers became ever more interested in stressing the difference between the cultural standards of their own upper class and the materialistic aims of Northerners. That literature is significant, therefore, because it reveals, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, dissatisfaction with the increasingly materialistic standards of American life.

³⁹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 131-132.

This protest against the emphasis on pecuniary values is found in the first Virginian novel, Kennedy's Swallow Barn. Speaking of a wealthy plantation-owner, the author remarks: "He thinks lightly of the mercantile interest, and, in fact, undervalues the manners of the large cities generally."⁴⁰ In Simms' The Partisan Colonel Walton and a subordinate officer exchange remarks which show that the former is above materialistic considerations. Walton's friend says to him:

'You are no niggard--you live profusely--care not for money: wherefore this reference to wealth in comparison with honour and honourable duty?'

'The wealth is nothing, Robert; but I have a strange love for these old groves--this family mansion, descended to me like a sacred trust through so many hands and ancestors. I would not that they should be lost.'⁴¹

And in Tucker's The Partisan Leader the supporters of Martin Van Buren, virtually a totalitarian ruler of the United States, are represented as greedy men trying to destroy the honorable, cultured, aristocratic gentlemen of the South. With considerable bitterness the author laments the decline of the cultivated upper class and the rise of the uncouth lower classes.

The revolution in public sentiment which commenced sixty years ago [1776], had abolished all the privileges of rank and age, trained up the young to mock at the infirmities of their fathers, and encouraged the unwashed artificer to elbow the duke from his place of precedence; this revolution had now completed its cycle. While the sovereignty of numbers was acknowledged,⁴² the convenience of the multitude had set the fashions.

⁴⁰Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 35.

⁴¹Simms, The Partisan, p. 163.

⁴²Tucker, The Partisan Leader, p. 75.

This protest against the vulgarity and the materialism of the new ruling classes became stronger after 1865. The decorous Southern aristocrats of Page's Red Rock are contrasted with the scalawag and the carpetbagger, both of whom are selfish, dishonest men desiring nothing but money. Hiram Still, a scalawag, though he is one of the richest men in the state, finds the homes of the best people closed to him because of the unscrupulous way in which he has acquired his fortune. He can purchase the plantations of the old families, but he cannot acquire their respect or recognition. Ultimately the code of personal morality and of culture of the fallen aristocrats proves stronger than Still's interest in money; the impoverished gentlemen preserve their dignity and their happiness while the scalawag declines to an unrespected and discontented vulgarian. Smith's Colonel Carter of Cartersville carries on the protest against America's emphasis on wealth. When the Colonel is offered money, he refuses it and says:

'Take money, suh, for helpin' a friend out of a hole? My dear suh, I see you do not intend to be disco'teous; but look at me, suh! There's my hand; never refer to it again.'⁴³

Not all the protest against materialism is found in Southern romantic literature. In the post-war period Northern realists frequently put anti-materialistic sentiments into the mouths of Virginian characters. John William DeForest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867), a novel praised by William Dean Howells for its realism, centers about another Colonel Carter, who had a "cavalier dash," for "no family in Virginia boasted a purer strain of old colonial blue blood than the

⁴³Smith, Colonel Carter, p. 102.

Carters."⁴⁴ But the Southerner along with Colburne, who represents the New England aristocracy of family and intellect, and Van Zandt, who represents the old New York aristocracy of land-owners, are all less successful in their military careers than Gazaway, a cowardly man of low social class who uses his political influence to win advancement in rank and economic gain. The old standards of culture and gallantry are ignored by unscrupulous men desiring nothing but money. Miss Ravenel, the wife of Colonel Carter, admits that Southern gentlemen may have some short-comings, as certainly her own husband does, but she defends them by adding:

'But I do say that the better classes of Louisiana and Mississippi and Georgia and South Carolina and Virginia, yes, and of Tennessee and Kentucky, are right nice. If they don't know all about chemistry and mineralogy, they can talk delightfully to ladies. They are perfectly charming at receptions and dinner parties. They are so hospitable, too, and generous and courteous! Now I call that civilization. I say that such people are civilized.'⁴⁵

DeForest contrasts with these Southerners young Colburne, himself an aristocrat, but certainly not "civilized" as Miss Ravenel uses the word.

No; Colburne did not speak French, nor any other modern language; he did not draw, nor sing, nor play, and was in short as destitute of accomplishments as are most Americans.⁴⁶

DeForest shows that the Northern aristocracy is scarcely a cultured one and that throughout America the entire upper class is doomed by the

⁴⁴John William DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New York and London, 1939), p. 21. (Originally published in 1867).

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 156.

rise of the materialistic middle class.

The same view is expressed in the work of that famous Yankee critic Henry Adams. In The Education of Henry Adams (1918) the author tells of the generations-old conflict between his family and State Street, the Wall Street of Boston. But years before he wrote his autobiography, Adams voiced his criticism of American society in a novel, Democracy (1880). The main character, a woman with interests and abilities much like those of the author himself, is a Southerner, Mrs. Lightfoot Lee. In her search for "the gold of life"⁴⁷ she goes to Washington, where she meets Senator Silas P. Ratcliffe, who "showed invariable ignorance of common literature, art, and history."⁴⁸ Through Mrs. Lee's eyes the reader sees the vulgarity and the greed and the corruption of American life with its stress on material, economic or political, gain.

It is significant that these two writers, DeForest and Adams, should use Southern characters to express criticism of America's emphasis on wealth and that in novels written by Virginians the protest against materialism should increase sharply after 1865. In historic reality the Southern aristocracy was the only group in American history which offered a serious challenge to industrialism. The triumph of the North in 1865 was more than a victory for that section or for the anti-slavery elements; it brought about the complete rise to power of business and industrial interests, which had developed tremendously during the War.

⁴⁷ Henry Adams, Democracy: An American Novel (New York, 1880), p. 6. This book was published anonymously.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

The plantation owners, who believed in "the virtues of gallantry toward women, courtesy to inferiors, a mettlesome sense of honor, and a lavish hospitality,"⁴⁹ were ruined. As a prominent historian has written:

The Civil War dealt a body blow to the most exclusive aristocracy our country has ever known. The former master class issued from the conflict with the stigma of unsuccessful revolutionists; they had lost the flower of their manhood and most of their wealth; they had lost their slaves and, for a space of time, their political equality in the Union. The slaves emerged from the conflict at first as freedmen possessing undefined rights, then as citizens with all the legal rights of whites, and quickly thereafter the male negroes were endowed with the right of suffrage. But the aristocracy of the Old South, which had played so large a part in the history of the nation and had produced many of its greatest men, was annihilated, to live no more except as a splendid and romantic memory of the days 'before the war.'⁵⁰

The prime significance of the aristocratic tradition, whether expressed in romantic Southern literature or in realistic Northern novels, lies in its criticism of the materialistic standards of American life. Ellen Glasgow, however, failed to see the protest against vulgarity and noted only the escapism in Southern writing. Yet that criticism is a constant element. It is heard as early as Swallow Barn, written when the South was still prosperous, and continues down into the twentieth century, when the rise of the New South, the South of business and industry, marked the final triumph of the North, that is, the triumph of the materialistic standards of commerce and industry.

⁴⁹ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History (New York, 1922), p. 91.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

Chapter III

Ellen Glasgow: Virginian

Ellen Glasgow grew up as the devastated South began to evolve from an agrarian to a semi-industrialized region. Her family background allied her with the past and, less closely, with the new South. Hers was an aristocratic heritage. Her mother, Anne Jane Gholson, whose ancestors came to the Tidewater region in 1619 and again in 1634, was "one of a tribal multitude who looked back to that too virile progenitor, Colonel William Randolph, of Turkey Island."¹ On the maternal side the author was related to some of the other first families of Virginia: the Harrisons and the Yateses.² One of her forebears during the colonial period had been president of William and Mary College.³ Her father's people, pioneers in the upper valley of the James River and in the "fertile wilderness" between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies, were among the Presbyterians who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries migrated from Scotland to Ireland and finally to Virginia in search of religious freedom and prosperity. They settled in Rockbridge County, where there is to this day a town by the name of Glasgow. The Glasgows called their homestead "Green Forest," for the family name in Gaelic means "greenwood."⁴ Ellen's father, Francis T. Glasgow, represented the new

¹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 165.

²Douglas Southall Freeman, "Ellen Glasgow: Idealist," The Saturday Review of Literature, XII (August 31, 1935), p. 11.

³Anonymous, "New Writer: Ellen Glasgow," The Bookman (London), XVIII (September, 1900), p. 167.

⁴Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 165-166.

South since he managed the Tredegar Iron Works, a concern owned largely by his uncle General Joseph R. Anderson.⁵ Francis Glasgow purchased the colonial house in Richmond where his daughter grew up, lived, and died. This substantial, dignified, gray stone mansion still keeps its privacy behind a wrought iron fence and a hedge of boxwood and magnolia trees. A short flight of steps leads up to the square porch, which is supported by two tapered columns. Inside, a wide hall runs the length of the house, and four high-ceilinged rooms on each floor provide living space; every chamber boasts a fire-place and fine pieces of Sheraton and Chippendale furniture. Behind the house lies a formal garden. The building reflects the serenity and the taste of the aristocratic people for whom it was constructed.

Miss Glasgow received most of her education in her own home, for social conventions of the nineteenth century and her own delicate health forbade her much formal training. A voracious reader, she claimed that before her first book was published she had perused "every celebrated novel written in English."⁶ Critics report that she read widely in the novels of Henry James, Guy De Maupassant, Honoré De Balzac, Leo Tolstoy, and Fedor Dostoevski.⁷ Thus she knew the great realists of the nineteenth century and must have been influenced by them in her reaction against

⁵ Grant Overton, "Ellen Glasgow's Arrow," The Bookman, LXI (May, 1925), pp. 292, 294; Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," The Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), p. 134.

⁶ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 16.

⁷ Robert Van Gelder, "An Interview with Miss Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (October 18, 1942), p. 32; Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," The Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), pp. 136-137.

Southern romantic literature. Miss Glasgow herself, however, is nowhere very explicit about her early reading. She also studied philosophy and science. Her interest in the latter found expression in a rather amateurish concern with heredity, but she later regretted the amount of time given to science, for, she remarked: "I am convinced that a close and prolonged reading of science is an almost fatal exercise for an author who is trying to write better."⁸

Miss Glasgow's entire life was quiet and uneventful. Born on the 22nd of April, 1874, in Richmond, she made her debut at the St. Cecelia ball in Charleston, South Carolina, and was later presented formally to society in her own city. As a young girl she spent her summers at fashionable White Sulphur Springs. One of the few exciting events of her youth occurred when a friend smuggled Miss Glasgow and one of her sisters into a political convention so that she could get a first hand impression of such a gathering for use in her novel The Voice of the People (1900).⁹ After a first visit to New York City at the age of eighteen, she returned occasionally and then resided there from 1911 to 1916 while she was writing Life and Gabriella (1916).¹⁰ In her mature years she played an active part in the woman-suffrage movement, and she founded the Richmond Chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Delicate health prevented any fuller participation in public affairs. Her travels took

⁸ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 58.

⁹ Isaac F. Marcossan, "The Personal Ellen Glasgow," The Bookman, XXIX (August, 1909), pp. 619-620.

¹⁰ H. Blair Rouse, "Ellen Glasgow in Retrospect," The Emory University Quarterly, VI (March, 1950), p. 31.

her to Europe and to New England, where toward the close of her life she spent her summers. After a long illness Miss Glasgow died in her native city on the 21st of November, 1945, leaving an estate of approximately \$159,000, the bulk of it as a trust to go eventually to the Richmond Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.¹¹

An attractive woman, Miss Glasgow possessed delicate features, lively brown eyes, and a mass of bronze hair. Although somewhat deaf, a handicap which increased as she grew older, she remained an excellent conversationalist. A kind, thoughtful, charming person and a perfect hostess, she was "as quick witted a lady as we have ever encountered."¹²

During her life-time she received relatively few awards for her novels. This lack of recognition seems not to have bothered her very much.

Although I have had my loyal friends and critics, few persistent novelists, I suppose, have ever received in one lifetime so generous a measure of benevolent neglect. For all such double-edged blessings, I am able to say, since I have attained understanding, that I am not deficient in gratitude. To be choked with cream is, perhaps, the saddest fate that can overtake any promising writer. Not only was I spared this ultimate honour, but the lack of it has provided me with adequate space in which to take root and grow, without artificial grafting into a more popular stock. If I have missed many of the external rewards of success, I have never lost the outward peace and the inward compensation that come from doing the work one wishes to do in the solitary way in which one wishes to do it. It is true that I have seldom received prizes, but it is true also that I have seldom been obliged to return thanks.¹³

¹¹Anonymous, "Ellen Glasgow's Will Aids SPCA," The New York Times, December 4, 1945.

¹²Anonymous, "The Gossip Shop," The Bookman, LVIII (February, 1924), p. 697.

¹³Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 177-178.

There were, of course, some prizes, for which Ellen Glasgow presumably did return thanks. The Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at William and Mary College elected her an honorary member. In 1938 she was admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and, two years later, received from that body the Howells Medal for Fiction, a prize given every five years to a woman novelist; previous winners included Mary Wilkins Freeman, Willa Cather, and Pearl Buck. In 1941 The Saturday Review of Literature presented her with a special award for "distinguished service to American literature;" the editor of the periodical said that she "belongs unquestionably to that small group of writers of fiction who, in the twentieth century in America, have brought that art to one of its peaks in English."¹⁴ Mr. Canby seemed as interested in criticising the Pulitzer Prize Committee for neglecting Miss Glasgow as in honoring the writer, since he reviewed their awards for the past decade and a half and pointed out that many books inferior to those written by Ellen Glasgow had been chosen while hers were overlooked. Finally in 1942 the Pulitzer Committee gave her belated recognition for In This Our Life. The same novel won a \$100 award from the Woman's National Democratic Committee for the best book of the year on Southern life by a Southern author.

Since most of her novels take place in Virginia and even those which center in New York concern Southerners, it is natural that Miss Glasgow's most impressive recognition has come from her own section of the country.

¹⁴ Henry S. Canby, "SRL Award to Ellen Glasgow," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXIII (April 5, 1941), p. 10.

In 1938, when the twelve-volume Virginia Edition¹⁵ of her novels appeared, she received high academic honors. The University of Richmond made her a Doctor of Laws, and Duke University conferred the degree of Doctor of Literature.

Miss Glasgow passed judgment on certain of her own novels by omitting them from the Virginia Edition: namely, The Descendant (1897), Phases of an Inferior Planet (1898), The Wheel of Life (1906), The Ancient Law (1908), The Builders (1919), and One Man in His Time (1922). Nor did she include her book of verse, The Freeman and Other Poems (1902), or her collection of short stories, The Shadow Third and Other Stories (1923).

The novels included in the Virginia Edition fall into two groups: the early and the mature. Among the early books are The Voice of the People (1900), The Battle-ground (1902), The Deliverance (1904), The Romance of a Plain Man (1909), and The Miller of Old Church (1911). Looking back over her career, Miss Glasgow felt that this last novel marked the end of a period, for it was "the last of my books to be written in a fashion which I am obliged, however reluctantly, to call my earlier manner."¹⁶ She does not say on what basis she separates the work of the earlier period from that of the mature, but the novels which followed The Miller of Old Church were, on the whole, much better constructed and had far more unity. An important change in the author's attitude

¹⁵This was not the first collected edition of Miss Glasgow's novels; between 1929 and 1933 the eight-volume Old Dominion Edition had been issued.

¹⁶Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 129.

toward the aristocracy had already begun to appear in The Romance of a Plain Man.

The novels of the mature period include Virginia (1913), Life and Gabriella (1916), Barren Ground (1925), The Romantic Comedians (1926), They Stooped to Folly (1929), The Sheltered Life (1932), Vein of Iron (1935), and In This Our Life (1941). Important critical attention came to Miss Glasgow only with these books, more particularly with Barren Ground. James Branch Cabell called it "the best of many excellent books by Ellen Glasgow,"¹⁷ and at the time of its publication a reviewer in The New York Times wrote: "Southern romance is dead. Ellen Glasgow has murdered it."¹⁸ Critical recognition lagged behind popular acclaim since The Deliverance, The Wheel of Life, and Life and Gabriella had already been best sellers. Later The Sheltered Life and Vein of Iron were to appear on the annual lists of the most popular new novels.¹⁹

For the Virginia Edition Miss Glasgow herself divided the books into

¹⁷James Branch Cabell, "Review of Barren Ground," reprinted in Ellen Glasgow, ed. Dorothea Lawrence Mann (New York, 1927), p. 57.

¹⁸H. I. Brock, "Southern Romance is Dead," The New York Times Book Review, (April 12, 1925), p. 2.

¹⁹Alice Payne Hackett, Fifty Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1945 (New York, 1945), pp. 20, 22, 33, 65, 71.

They Stooped to Folly was translated into German by Susanne Schalit as Rette mir nicht and published in Berlin in 1930. In This Our Life was translated into Spanish by Alfredo Ferreira as Naseida para o mal and published in Rio de Janeiro in 1942.

In addition to her published work, Ellen Glasgow left one manuscript, her autobiography. Her literary executors, Irita Van Doren and Frank Morley, plan to publish it at some future date. (Letter from Irita Van Doren, dated New York, New York, September 27, 1951, to Thomas McR. Kreider).

three groups and indicated the period which each novel covered. The first and largest division was Novels of the Commonwealth: The Battle-Ground (1850-1865), The Deliverance (1878-1890), The Voice of the People (1870-1898), The Romance of a Plain Man (1875-1910), Virginia (1884-1912), and Life and Gabriella (1894-1912). The Novels of the Country included The Miller of Old Church (1898-1902), Barren Ground (1894-1924), and Vein of Iron (1901-1933). The last category, The Novels of the City, comprised The Sheltered Life (1910-1917), The Romantic Comedians (1923), They Stooped to Folly (1924), and In This Our Life (1938-1939).

In A Certain Measure, the collected prefaces²⁰ which she wrote for the Virginia Edition, Ellen Glasgow explained this division of the novels and her intention: she wanted to record the social history of Virginia. That idea occurred to her after she had published her first two books:

While American fiction entertained itself with an historical pageant, I began a history of manners that would embrace those aspects of Southern life with which I was acquainted. I intended to treat the static customs of the country, as well as the changing provincial fashions of the small towns and cities. Moreover, I planned to portray the different social orders, and especially, for this would constitute the major theme of my chronicle, the rise of the middle class as the dominant force in Southern democracy. From the year 1899 until the beginning of the First World War, I was at work on this series. By the time the war had ended, however, I felt that I had finished with history, and that I was now able to break fresh ground, and at least to lay the foundations of a more permanent structure. In my own critical opinion, my best books have been written since 1922; yet all

²⁰The history of the prefaces is interesting. Written first in very brief form for the Old Dominion Edition, they were greatly expanded in the Virginia Edition. When reissued as a separate book, Miss Glasgow revised them again but this time only slightly. In general, the tone of the introductions as found in the Virginia Edition is more personal than in A Certain Measure. For that book she also wrote a preface to In This Our Life.

these later novels, from Barren Ground to In This Our Life, were so arranged as to fall within the new broadened scope of my original plan.²¹

The social history was Miss Glasgow's answer to the romantic school of Southern fiction. She felt, as previously noted, that the nineteenth-century novels dealing with Virginia had been merely literature of escape. She planned a realistic picture of life and people in her own state. She considered herself a rebel against the Virginian tradition as represented by Caruthers, Cooke, Page, and Smith; all of her critics have supported that contention.

Note that Ellen Glasgow said that she intended to deal with "those aspects of Southern life with which I was acquainted." This remark explains, if it does not justify, certain omissions in her social history. Though she dealt with various classes of society, the aristocracy received much fuller treatment than any other group. The planter-class, such as the Blakes in The Deliverance, is described in the early novels, and in later stories the aristocratic characters, like the Archbalds of The Sheltered Life, generally trace their ancestry back to the old landed-families. The upper class was the one which Miss Glasgow knew best, for she herself came from a patrician family. The middle-class figures less prominently in her novels. In Vein of Iron the Fincastles, though they may belong to an aristocracy of intellect, are middle-class people because of their economic status. More definitely rural middle-class are the Oakleys in Barren Ground. Urban middle-class families include the Littlepages of They Stooped to Folly and the Timberlakes of In This Our

²¹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 4-5.

Life. Actually many of the middle-class families in Ellen Glasgow's novels are so closely connected with the aristocracy that is difficult to assign them to a particular group, nor is there much need to do so. The people of the laboring classes figure only to a slight degree. Tenant farmers and share-croppers are largely neglected; the family of Nicholas Burr in The Voice of the People provides the only significant picture of the "poor whites." And the Starrs in The Romance of a Plain Man are the only people who belong to the city proletariat. Negroes appear frequently in the early novels; it is interesting to note, however, that they do not play important roles in the narrative. In her nineteen novels only one character of Negroid blood, the light mulatto Parry of In This Our Life, is important in the working out of the plot. If Ellen Glasgow merely wanted to write literature, the omission of the lower classes and Negroes and the relatively small amount of attention devoted to the middle-class would be of little importance. An author is free to choose his subject matter as he will. Since, however, Ellen Glasgow set out to write a history of Virginia, the neglect of these groups is a serious fault, for they are important parts of the social structure. Failure to deal with certain social classes also meant that Miss Glasgow's much-publicized revolt against the romantic tradition in Southern literature was less thorough-going than she and all of her critics have assumed. Like the nineteenth-century authors whom she criticised, Ellen Glasgow concentrated her attention on the aristocracy, tended to slight the middle and lower classes, and portrayed Negroes as amusing but unimportant folk.

Quite possibly she did not feel competent to deal with people about whom she knew little at first hand. If that fact is true, it explains why

she did not write about certain elements of society, but it also indicates a deficiency both in her historic sense and in her creative ability. It may be, as Willa Cather once remarked, that

To note an artist's limitations is but to define his genius. A reporter can write equally well about everything that is presented to his view, but a creative writer can do his best only with what lies within the range and character of his talent.²²

Yet this statement does imply an imperfection of the formative power. An author can go beyond the immediate range of his physical experience, Henry James believed, provided he has imagination.

I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she had learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. Those opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a pasteur, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it--this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education.²³

²²Willa Cather, On Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art (New York, 1949), p. 54.

²³Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," reprinted in Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, ed. Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, Gordon McKenzie (New York, 1948), pp. 48-49.

In Miss Cather's sense the failure of Ellen Glasgow to deal with the lower classes and with Negroes may define the limits of her talent, but those very limits reveal, as is apparent from James' remarks, that Miss Glasgow lacked great imaginative power.

Though Ellen Glasgow tended to slight certain groups, she did devote considerable attention to one element of society--women. Perhaps because she was herself interested in their rights, her novels reflect the changing role of ladies in Southern life from 1850 to 1940. Her female characters fall into three categories: the mistress on the plantation, the Victorian woman, and the modern. The first type appears principally in The Battle-Ground. Miss Glasgow shows the many and varied duties which fell on the lady of a plantation: managing the home, caring for and teaching the slaves, being hostess at large and elaborate entertainments. "Of all the souls on the great plantation," commented the author, "the mistress alone never rested from her labours."²⁴

The fullest study of the Victorian woman is found in Virginia. Ellen Glasgow contended that her upbringing which reflected the "evasive idealism" of the era, that is, the stubborn refusal to face facts, unfitted a girl for life. Speaking of Virginia, she wrote:

Her education was founded upon the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would be to contend with it.²⁵

²⁴Ellen Glasgow, The Battle-Ground (New York, 1938), p. 21. (Originally published in 1902).

²⁵Ellen Glasgow, Virginia (New York, 1938), p. 17. (Originally published in 1913).

The chief object of her upbringing, which differed in no essential particular from that of every other well-born and well-bred Southern woman of her day, was to paralyze her reasoning faculties so completely that all danger of mental 'unsettling' or even movement was eliminated from her future.²⁶

The Victorian woman was expected to exist only as a wife and mother, but nevertheless was forbidden to work toward those goals.

Though love was the single window through which a woman might look upon a larger world, she was fatuously supposed neither to think of it nor to desire it until it had offered itself unsolicited. Every girl born into the world was destined for a heritage of love or of barrenness; yet she was forbidden to exert herself either to invite the one or to avoid the other. For, in spite of the fiery splendour of Southern womanhood in the war years, to be feminine, in the eyes of the period, was to be morally passive.²⁷

Bound by narrow convention, she was not allowed to develop any interest outside her family. Inevitably this woman found herself at last a useless bore to her husband and to her children. It was Virginia's fate never to realize that "a love which could survive the shocks of tragedy might at last fade away from a gradual decline of interest."²⁸

After Virginia Miss Glasgow wrote a companion piece, Life and Gabriella, wherein the modern woman throws off the restrictions placed on the Victorian lady. Virginia and others of her generation had passively accepted whatever life brought them. Gabriella did not.

She despised people who submitted to circumstances, who resigned themselves to necessity, as if resignation were a virtue instead of a vice.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 341.

²⁹ Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (New York, 1938), p. 144. (Originally published in 1916).

Gabriella dramatizes her revolt against Victorian conventions by entering business and becoming financially successful. She makes the final break with the proprieties of the nineteenth century when she pursues Mr. O'Hara to the railroad station to tell him that she has changed her mind and will marry him. With this act, wrote Miss Glasgow, "she abandoned forever the authority and guide of tradition."³⁰ The Victorian ideal of womanhood has died; in one of her last novels the author said:

Never again, except in the delusive pages of fiction, would the great Victorian ideal inflame the emotions and the imaginations of men.³¹

As the Victorian woman evolved into the modern, there arose the demand for the right to vote. Ellen Glasgow was herself one of the Virginian leaders in the suffrage movement. Advocates of women's rights turn up in several novels. It is to the author's credit that she always looked upon these crusaders with an air of detached amusement. Aunt Matoaca, strong-minded suffragist of The Romance of a Plain Man, is gently satirized. She presents a problem, a troublesome and at times annoying problem, to her friends because she "wasn't content to be what the Lord and the men intended" her to be.³²

The First World War opened many new fields of activities for women. Ellen Glasgow spoke, not always kindly, of those who went to Europe to do

³⁰ Ibid., p. 418.

³¹ Ellen Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly (New York, 1938), p. 261. (Originally published in 1929).

³² Ellen Glasgow, The Romance of a Plain Man (New York, 1938), p. 171. (Originally published in 1909).

nursing or to restore devastated lands. Such ladies as young Mary Victoria Littlepage, who was busy "inspiring the American Army in France,"³³ or Mrs. Dalrymple, who partially restored her battered reputation by war-work in Europe, grimly amused her. After 1918 women achieved so many positions in the business and professional world that when she came to write her last novel, In This Our Life, Miss Glasgow made Roy an interior decorator and did not feel it necessary to comment on her profession.

Naturally critics have been interested in Ellen Glasgow's portrayal of women. Some years ago Dorothea L. Mann wrote:

The rapier of Ellen Glasgow's satire has pricked with neatness and dispatch every part of the old romantic, sentimental, gallant-gentleman-and-lovely-lady tradition of the south.³⁴

James Branch Cabell said that Miss Glasgow's novels show how ladies act when they are placed, unwillingly, on the "impossible pedestal" of Southern ideals of womanly behavior.³⁵ A few critics have overstressed the attention which Miss Glasgow gives to the position of women and sometimes arrive at wild conclusions. Thus Josephine Lurie Jessup made the amazing discovery that the ultimate faith of Ellen Glasgow was "faith in her own sex."³⁶ It would be enlightening to hear Mrs. Jessup defend her conclusion when forced

³³Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 29.

³⁴Dorothea Lawrence Mann, "Ellen Glasgow: Citizen of the World," The Bookman, LXIV (November, 1926), p. 265.

³⁵James Branch Cabell, "Two Sides of the Shielded," New York Herald Tribune Books, VI (April 20, 1930), p. 6.

³⁶Josephine Lurie Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather (New York, 1950), p. 112.

to consider diabolical feminine characters like Mrs. Gay or Mrs. Blackburn or Mary Victoria Littlepage or Stanley Timberlake or to consider noble men like Uncle Tucker or Mr. O'Hara or General Archbald or John Fincastle or Asa Timberlake.

Critics when they mention Ellen Glasgow's social history often refer specifically to her picture of the changing position of women. Her fiction, though it stresses the increased participation of women in business and public life, cannot be accepted as a very complete history because it fails to show in sufficient detail the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the two groups which have been most significant during the last hundred years.

The social history of Virginia represented a self-conscious reaction on Miss Glasgow's part against romantic Southern fiction. Through history she intended to inject realism into Virginian literature. As she and her critics never tired of saying, she wanted to break away from the sentimental tradition of the nineteenth century. She aimed to write not fiction of escape but novels based solidly on facts. Yet those of her books in which historical details bulk largest fail as works of art. Unassimilated characters and scraps of information about Southern life in the late nineteenth century clutter The Voice of the People; The Builders often reads like a political tract for the times; and the figures in They Stooped to Folly are manikins dressed in period-costumes. Only when the characters and the story rise above a detailed presentation of the problems of Virginia do Miss Glasgow's stories hold the reader's interest. The backgrounds of Virginia and Barren Ground and Vein of Iron are apparently historically accurate, but the primary interest lies in the actors and the plot. Each of these books rises above its immediate setting, perhaps not to universality

but at least to a large area of reference.

Miss Glasgow's idea of writing social history was an unfortunate mistake. The framework of the history of Virginia over the past century gives some unity to her series of novels, but only when she escaped from the self-imposed limitations of history, did she approach greatness. Only when she forgot that she was a conscious rebel against the sentimental and romantic tradition of Virginian literature, did she write memorable novels.

Chapter IV

"The Truth of Art"

At the end of her career, when Ellen Glasgow reviewed her own achievement in A Certain Measure, her interest no longer lay primarily in the social history of Virginia, though she did stress the factual accuracy of her early work. The art of the novel was her principal consideration, and about the technique of her own books she wrote perceptively indeed. Her attention had shifted from concern with historic verisimilitude to an interest in form.

Looking back at her early books after forty-odd years, Miss Glasgow recalled her care for historic accuracy. She mentioned that while writing The Battle-Ground, a story about the War between the States, she had in her possession complete files, from 1860 to 1865, of The Richmond Enquirer, The Richmond Examiner, and The New York Herald; that she traveled over the scene of military action; that she read innumerable diaries and letters; and that she consulted actual participants in order to be positive that her picture was correct in all details.¹ About another early novel she wrote:

Every house that I mentioned was then standing, every tree, every stone, every brick. Even the pictures in Nicholas Burr's library were actually hanging on the walls of the 'Governor's mansion' in the Capitol Square.²

What she said about historical realism in The Voice of the People applies

¹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 63.

to most of her early stories about Virginia: "...I soon found that my historical conscience was involved even more deeply than my developing literary instinct."³ Miss Glasgow's devotion to literal truth, the "truth of life" as she calls it, in some of her early work almost led her to produce a guide to the city, a Baedeker, instead of a novel. Yet if a book is to live as a work of art, as distinguished from one possessing historic interest, it cannot, Willa Cather pointed out, concern itself primarily with the external details of life.

...Balzac tried out the value of literalness in the novel, tried it out to the uttermost, as Wagner did the value of scenic literalness in the music drama. He tried it, too, with the passion of discovery, with the inflamed zest of an unexampled curiosity. If the heat of that furnace could not give hardness and sharpness to material accessories, no other brain will ever do it. To reproduce on paper the actual city of Paris; the houses, the upholstery, the food, the wines, the game of pleasure, the game of business, the game of finance: a stupendous ambition--but, after all, unworthy of an artist. In exactly so far as he succeeded in pouring out on his pages that mass of brick and mortar and furniture and proceedings in bankruptcy, in exactly so far he defeated his end. The things by which he still lives, the types of greed and avarice and ambition and vanity and lost innocence of heart which he created--are as vital today as they were then. But their material surroundings, upon which he expended such labour and pains...the eyes glide over them. We have had too much of the interior decorator and the 'romance of business' since his day. The city he built on paper is already crumbling. Stevenson said he wanted to blue-pencil a great deal of Balzac's 'presentation' --and he loved him beyond all modern novelists. But where is the man who could cut one sentence from the stories of Mérimée? And who wants any more detail as to how Carmencita and her fellow factory-girls made cigars? Another sort of novel? Truly. Isn't it a better sort?

In her novels of the mature period, that is, those after The Miller of

³ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴ Cather, On Writing, pp. 38-39.

Old Church, Miss Glasgow reacted against excessive factual accuracy. She expressed her considered attitude in the preface to one of her late books.

When I was writing The Romance of a Plain Man, I verified, with exhausting, and I now think unnecessary, fidelity every detail of my setting; and my realistic conscience sternly forbade me to turn a maple into a mulberry tree. But in The Romantic Comedians, I have not failed, whenever I have needed shade, to make two trees grow in my Queenborough where only one was planted before me in Richmond. For I had come at last to perceive, after my long apprenticeship to veracity, that the truth of art and the truth of life are two different truths. In any case, I had wearied of external verisimilitude when it conflicted with the more valid evidence of the imagination. Sound psychology, I found, was more important,⁵ and incidentally more interesting, than accurate geography.

Although Ellen Glasgow escaped from the tyranny of literal reality, she continued to do considerable research before writing. She tells that she spent a year or more reading about the early settlers in the mountains of Virginia. The knowledge thus gained was not used to create in Vein of Iron a picture of life in the mountain-country which would be commended by antiquarians for its accuracy. Rather Miss Glasgow won for herself a "general sense of security, the feeling that I could move about freely and safely in the scene and atmosphere of the novel."⁶ With this understanding of an era and a locality, she no longer had to be overly concerned about the correct descriptions of houses or of furnishings, though, as a conscientious writer, she took care to avoid anachronisms. She learned to disregard the truth of life, the pedantic concern for the faithful

⁵ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 212-213.

⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

reproduction of historic detail, and to portray the truth of art, which must be in harmony with but is not the same as history.

The accuracy of Miss Glasgow's early novels probably was a reflection of her interest in local color. In the latter part of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries the local color school of fiction flourished in America. That type of writing is concerned primarily with commonplace scenes and surface characteristics of a region. It shows the customs and the habits which differentiate one section of the country from all others. Local color art is also characterized by the presentation of sectional interests or problems and of codes of behavior; it frequently employs the dialect peculiar to the region.

After the War between the States a group of Southern writers turned to local color fiction. Most famous was Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote the "Uncle Remus" tales about life on the plantations. The Creole culture of New Orleans was described by George Washington Cable, while Kate Chopin dealt with the state of Louisiana. Constance Fenimore Woolson portrayed life in the more rural areas of the Carolinas and Florida. Writing under the name of Charles Egbert Craddock, Mary Noailles Murfree dealt with the people of the Cumberland mountain region. Thomas Nelson Page's short stories are laid in Virginia. The inhabitants of West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky provided the material for the works of James Lane Allen and John Fox, Jr.

Ellen Glasgow viewed this local color literature of the South with a good deal of favor.

...Nothing better or truer than Uncle Remus has appeared in the whole field of American prose fiction. It is not without significance, perhaps, that whenever the Southern writer

escaped from beneath the paw of the stuffed lion into the consciousness of some race or class different from his own, he lost his cloying sentiment and his pose of moral superiority. Some literary magic worked as soon as the Southern novelist forgot that he had been born, by the grace of God, a Southern gentleman. The early dialect stories of Thomas Nelson Page are firm and round and as fragrant as dried rose-leaves; the humorous mountain folk of Charles Egbert Craddock are perennially fresh and delightful; the simpler persons, portrayed without august idealism, of James Lane Allen are vital and interesting. Though the chivalrous romances of William Gilmore Simms have lost, if they ever wore, the colours of life, the Creole novels of George W. Cable are still suffused with their own magic.⁷

In spite of her commendation of local color Miss Glasgow repeatedly asserted that she herself was not interested in doing that kind of writing. She objected to an unnamed critic who "politely assigned [her] first books to 'the Southern school of local colour'," and claimed that such a classification was "both casual and inaccurate."⁸ Twenty-five years after her early novels, when Barren Ground appeared, several reviewers assigned that book to the school of regionalism, a movement related to the previous interest in local color. Mr. H. I. Brock declared:

In short, the background of Miss Glasgow's novel is a contribution of real value to the literary exhibition of American social conditions.

Louise Collier Willcox in a reply to Brock's review disagreed violently with most of his judgments, but concurred in the idea that the book belonged to the regional school of fiction. Speaking of the author, Miss Willcox

⁷ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁹ H. I. Brock, "Southern Romance is Dead," The New York Times Book Review, (April 12, 1925), p. 2.

remarked: "She has taken a locality and made it live and act upon its inhabitants, as did Egdon Heath upon its natives."¹⁰ In her introduction to Barren Ground for the Virginia Edition Miss Glasgow replied to the criticism which made her out to be a regionalist.

I had resolved to portray not Southern 'types' alone, but whole human beings, and to touch, or at least feel for, the universal chords beneath regional variations of character....While I have faithfully painted the colours of the Southern landscape, I have always known that this external vraisemblance was not essential to my interpretation of life.¹¹

Elsewhere she again discussed the problem of regionalism versus universality.

There comes a point in every novel when, if it is to survive, it must overflow regional boundaries and achieve universal validity.¹²

Whether Miss Glasgow's own novels achieve universality or fail to "overflow regional boundaries" is a question frequently discussed by her critics. Stuart P. Sherman, Henry S. Canby, and Hamilton Basso all deny that she should be classified as a regionalist. With his customary vigor the first of these gentlemen wrote:

It is absurd to think of her as essentially a writer for the South, wholesomely irritant as she doubtless is to Southern slackness and ancestor-worship. It is high time that novel readers from Maine to California should become aware that she treats provincial life from a national point of view; that is, without sentimentality, without sectional prejudice or softness, with sympathy, understanding, passion and poetic

¹⁰ Louise Collier Willcox, "Miss Glasgow's Novel," The New York Times Book Review, (April 26, 1925), p. 25.

¹¹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 152-153.

¹² Ellen Glasgow, "A Memorable Novel of the Old Deep South," New York Herald Tribune Books, X (July 22, 1934), p. 1.

insight, yet critically and¹³ with a surgical use of satire—
in the spirit of the hour.

Other critics believe that Miss Glasgow should be classified as a regionalist. Carl Van Doren stated that "she long stood with the local colorists."¹⁴ Only in Barren Ground, remarked J. Donald Adams, did Miss Glasgow go beyond the bounds of regionalism,¹⁵ and in her article "Regional Literature" Marjorie K. Rawlings commented:

To my mind, Ellen Glasgow stands alone in our generation as the creator of the only unmistakable regional literature of the South. Pulitzer prizes for 'distinguished' novels are amazing anomalies when they ignore work of her literary distinction. Her literature, like Hardy's, is inherently regional, for while she would have written with great art of whatever people came into the ken of her interest, she is so steeped in the Virginia which she knows that it is an inextricable part of her work, like the colors of a painting or the dye of the wool of a tapestry. But she is first an artist and then a Virginian.¹⁶

Mrs. Rawlings makes an important qualification in her last sentence when she says that Miss Glasgow was primarily an artist, a Virginian secondarily. Not more than three of Ellen Glasgow's novels, The Miller of Old Church, Barren Ground, and Vein of Iron, deal with the countryside. Nor do any

¹³ Stuart P. Sherman, Critical Woodcuts (New York and London, 1926), p. 75. Mr. Canby's remarks may be found in "SRL Award to Ellen Glasgow," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXIII (April 5, 1941), p. 10. Mr. Basso's opinion is stated in "Ellen Glasgow's Literary Credo," The New York Times Book Review, (October 17, 1943), p. 5.

¹⁴ Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920 (New York, 1922), p. 132.

¹⁵ J. Donald Adams, "Ellen Glasgow's Finest Novel," The New York Times Book Review, (August 28, 1932), p. 1.

¹⁶ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, "Regional Literature of the South," College English, I (February, 1940), p. 386.

of these books, as does Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native, stress local customs like the Christmas pageant or characters peculiar to the region like the reddleman.

There are evidences of local color in Ellen Glasgow's work, but Mrs. Rawlings was not looking in the right place. The scrupulous concern for historical accuracy in the early novels is an indication of interest in regionalism. There is also some use of dialect. Negroes are present in The Battle-Ground only for whatever Southern flavor they may add.

The old woman wavered. 'Well, de devil, he ain' never let on his age,' she said at last; 'but w'en I fust lay eyes on 'im, he warn' no mo'n a brat.'¹⁷

'I'se done stuff dat ar pig so full er chestnuts dat he's fitten ter bus,' she exclaimed proudly. 'Lawd, Lawd, hit's a pity he ain' 'live agin des ter tase hese'f!'¹⁸

In the mature novels, when Miss Glasgow had escaped from taking too seriously her ambition to compose a social history of her state, local color disappears. The Virginian locale is not used to provide picturesqueness but to give a local habitation and a name to people who might live anywhere in twentieth-century America. Miss Glasgow was concerned with problems of value in life, not with preserving the quaint oddities of her region. She deliberately ignored poor whites and Negroes, the two classes which might easily have furnished her with material for local color, and her picture of the aristocratic classes represents them as well born and well educated people who might be found in any section of this country.

¹⁷ Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

They have little in common with the sentimental and romantic Southern aristocrats who parade through the novels of Thomas Nelson Page or F. Hopkinson Smith.

Miss Glasgow's characters were rarely patterned upon direct observation as figures possessing local color generally are. The writer explained in her critical essays that with one exception, They Stooped to Folly, each of her novels began when an imaginary personage rose up in her mind and insisted on staying there until she wrote about him. This process of creating a figure and following his activities began when she was about three years old. "A character named Little Willie wandered into the country of my mind just as every other major character in my novels has strolled across my mental vision when I was not expecting him...."¹⁹ For several years her colored mammy listened patiently to the childish story-teller recount the adventures of her first hero. Looking back years later, Miss Glasgow realized that she had learned much from telling her mammy about Little Willie.

In those earliest formative years Little Willie outlined, however vaguely, a general pattern of work. He showed me that a novelist must write, not by taking thought alone, but with every cell of his being, that nothing can occur to him that may not sooner or later find its way into his craft.²⁰

Having a character appear in one's mind and eventually writing about him is not, of course, an unusual experience for authors. Henry James remarked that the hero of The American, Christopher Newman, "rose before

¹⁹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 192.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 193.

me, on a perfect day of the divine Paris spring, in the great gilded Salon Carré of the Louvre."²¹ And Edith Wharton said:

In this world [of the writer's imagination] are begotten and born the creatures of his imagination, more living to him than his own flesh-and-blood, but whom he never thinks of as living, in the reader's simplified sense....The creatures of that fourth-dimensional world are born as helpless as the human animal....The author's characters are first born, and then mysteriously proceed to work out their own destinies.²²

Like Mrs. Wharton, Ellen Glasgow found that the characters who appeared in her mind "became more real to me, more moving and living, than persons and objects in the world I inhabited."²³

Once the major figures of In This Our Life came alive, the minor ones and the setting of the novel arose in her imagination.

Around Asa and Roy, standing together, the other figures assembled by their own act and volition. Here, dying of cancer in his plethoric eighties, is old William Fitzroy, the last great Southern captain of industry...and... Charlotte, his wife, as well as Asa's wife, the more formidable Lavinia.²⁴

The creative writer soon learns that when the central character has come to life, when the blood quickens in his veins, the pulses beat, and he breathes and moves, his immediate surroundings will awaken and respond to this sudden glow of animation.²⁵

²¹ Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, ed., Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), pp. 23-24.

²² Edith Wharton, The Writing of Fiction (New York, 1925), pp. 120, 121, 125.

²³ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 162.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

Sometimes, apparently, the "immediate surroundings" remained rather vague in Miss Glasgow's mind, for she had to hunt for houses in which to lodge her creatures of the imagination. Strenuous efforts were necessary to find the right homes for characters who were to appear in Virginia. The action of the story takes place in the town of Dinwiddie, which has been identified as Petersburg, probably because that old village is the principal one in Dinwiddie County, Virginia.

It was not sufficient to know the town. I must know also where and when my various persons had lived in this town. It took me days, for example, to find the proper dwellings for the Treadwells. After all these years, I can still savour the taste and smell of old Dinwiddie, while I roamed the streets in my urgent house hunting. For a whole afternoon I had searched, when, just at sunset, we turned the corner into Bolingbroke Street, and I stumbled upon the exact house that I wanted. The instant my eyes fell on the narrow brown front, I expected the door to open and Cyrus Treadwell to come out on the shallow 'stoop' and descend the steps to the pavement, where, much to his annoyance, children were playing hop-scotch. Tired but happy, I sank on the bottom step of the adjoining house and surveyed the end of my search.²⁶

When his New York Edition was being prepared, Henry James had a somewhat similar experience. He and Mr. A. L. Coburn searched London for a shop which the latter could photograph for a frontispiece to The Golden Bowl. The shop, though it was "but a shop of the mind, of the author's projected world,...prescribed a concrete, independent, vivid instance, the instance that should oblige us by the marvel of an accidental rightness....It would have to let us truthfully read into it the Prince's and Charlotte's and the Princess's visits."²⁷ Although the shop long

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

²⁷ James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 334-335.

evaded the hunters, it was finally discovered—where, James declined to say.

There is an important difference between Ellen Glasgow's experience and that of Henry James. The latter created his shop from his imagination, then looked for its actual counterpart. Miss Glasgow did her hunting while she was still engaged in writing Virginia; she was, therefore, relying to some extent on physical reality rather than entirely on her imagination. At this stage of her career, she lacked the creative power which could distill from all the old houses which she knew the one ideal house needed. She was also, perhaps, taking her idea of writing a social history too seriously and still confusing the historical truth of life with the imaginative truth of art.

In her last novels Miss Glasgow freed herself from reliance on physical surroundings and created them, as James had done, from her imagination. The home of the Fincastles in Vein of Iron was not patterned after an actual structure nor was it a typical mountain-dwelling.

I had seen every Fincastle, from Grandmother to little Ada and Horace, the hound, go up the rounded stone steps to the square porch, and pass through the front door into the hall, and then through the hall and the dining-room and the kitchen, out on the back porch and down into the yard. I had seen the pioneer oak and the rockery and the garden fence of white palings and the willow beside the little path that led down to the springhouse. But the house I saw so plainly was not the typical mountain house. It had its own peculiar plan, and its own sloping roof that drooped over the windows in the upper storey. Nevertheless, it was the old manse, and the Fincastles had built it. They had always lived under that roof, within those walls of weathered brick; and they refused obstinately to change their home, or even to go about their daily tasks, as long as they were threatened with eviction. Just as John Fincastle collapsed on my hands whenever I tried to change his name, so the whole family dropped dead at my feet as soon as I started to pull down the manse. So at last, in desperation, I told myself that an earlier grandfather, probably John Fincastle the third, had altered the original roof when he enlarged the house for his bride.²⁸

²⁸ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 172-173.

Just as Ellen Glasgow in her early novels sometimes based the physical environment on reality, occasionally her characters had some basis--always slight--in actual people. The picture of Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance was founded on the writer's knowledge of a living woman, though Miss Glasgow altered the story of her life "almost beyond recognition."²⁹ She patterned young Virginia Pendleton in Virginia on her own mother when she was in her youth.³⁰ Reliance on real people as models for her fictional characters was not, however, usual with Ellen Glasgow, and she never tried to portray in close and accurate detail a person whom she had known, for such exact copies, she found, invariably faded and became lifeless.

But it is worth noting, as we pass, that only a character we have treated objectively will submit to the firm handling of portraiture. External shapes, mannerisms, grotesqueries, all these may be touched off by a clever device or clean brushwork; but it is safe to assert that the genuinely created character must develop from its own embryo and pass through all the rudimentary stages of growth.³¹

Other authors have at times gotten their idea for a character from a living person. Henry James' The Spoils of Poynton grew out of some remarks which he overheard about the members of a family arguing over the division of an estate,³² and Owen Wingrave began at least partly as a result of the author³⁵ seeing a young man sitting on one of the benches

²⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 161-162.

³² James, The Art of the Novel, p. 119.

in Kensington Gardens.³³ Willa Cather, too, patterned characters after real people. Her most famous instance of doing so is found in Death Comes for the Archbishop. She became interested in the historic figure of Archbishop John Baptist Lamy, first bishop of New Mexico, and later found a biography of Father Joseph Machebeuf which threw much light on the personality of Bishop Lamy.³⁴ Some years afterwards, the historic Bishop Lamy evolved into the imagined Bishop Latour and Father Machebeuf into Father Vaillant.

Whether they were purely imaginary or based slightly on real people, Ellen Glasgow brooded over the characters which entered her mind. To give but one example, Dorinda of Barren Ground was with the writer for ten years before being put into a novel. This long period of brooding or incubation was necessary, Miss Glasgow thought, because:

Although a work of fiction may be written without a formula or method, I doubt if the true novel has ever been created without the long brooding season.³⁵

Her contemporary Edith Wharton believed that a character who remained in the author's mind for a long time was enriched.

...Every subject, to yield and to retain its full flavour, should be long carried in the mind, brooded upon, and fed with all the impressions and emotions which nourish its creator.³⁶

This period of brooding, claimed Miss Cather, resulted in better art.

³³ Ibid., p. 259.

³⁴ Cather, On Writing, pp. 7-8.

³⁵ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 191.

³⁶ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, p. 18.

The shapes and scenes that have 'teased' the mind for years, when they do at last get themselves rightly put down, make a very much higher order of writing, and a much more costly, than the most vivid and vigorous transfer of immediate impressions.³⁷

Ellen Glasgow discovered that after she had thought about characters for a time they insisted upon appearing in a novel. She could not, like Lucina, sit cross-legged and forbid their entry into the world.

Vein of Iron was finished in April 1935. The book was published in August; and throughout the spring and summer my mind, or that branch of mind which is imagination, remained dark, and, to every appearance, empty. Then, suddenly, in autumn--always my fruitful season--vague, undeveloped shapes began to stir and move, and to thrust upward out of obscurity. Slowly, by their own instinct, against my expressed wish to write no more novels, these dim embryos assumed human form, and pushed on and outward, in obedience to some relentless blind motive. A new novel was forcing its way into the lighted spaces within. I might resent the intrusion; but I knew there would be no inward peace until I had ceased to resist, and allowed the unwelcome offspring to enter and take possession.³⁸

Though shadowy figures wandered into the country of her mind and remained there while she brooded over them until they became clear-cut personalities, Miss Glasgow never wrote a novel according to a pattern or formula. She was much interested in the art of fiction, but did not believe that a good book could be written merely by following a prescribed recipe.

I have read, I believe, with as much interest as if it were a novel itself, every treatise on the art of fiction that appeared to me to be promising. That variable branch of letters shares with philosophy the favourite shelf in my library. I know all that such sources of learning as

³⁷ Cather, On Writing, p. 48.

³⁸ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 246-247.

Sir Leslie Stephen, Sir Walter Raleigh, Mr. Percy Lubbock, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Mr. E. M. Forster, and others less eminent, but often more earnest, were able to teach me, or I was able to acquire. Indeed, I know more than they could teach me, for I know also how very little their knowledge can help one in the actual writing of novels. If I were giving advice to a beginner (but there are no beginners nowadays, there is only the inspired amateur or the infant pathologist), I should say, probably something like this: 'Learn the technique of writing, and having learned it thoroughly, try to forget it. Study the principles of construction, the value of continuity, the arrangement of masses, the consistent point of view, the revealing episode, the careful handling of detail, and the fatal pitfalls of dialogue. Then, having mastered, if possible, every rule of thumb, dismiss it into the labyrinth of the memory. Leave it there to make its own signals and flash its own warnings. The sensitive feeling, 'this is not right,' or 'something ought to be different' will prove that these signals are working. Or, perhaps, this inner voice may be only the sounder instinct of the born novelist. ['] 39

Ellen Glasgow followed her own advice: she studied the technique of the novel, but "whenever I sit down at my desk and take up my pen, I detach my mind from the working of every literary formula. Life and life alone is the power that controls the slowly evolving situation."⁴⁰ In a similar vein Willa Cather advised against too much reliance on theory.

The novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it; just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns when utterly to disregard his accomplishment, when to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect. In this direction only, it seems to me, can the novel develop into anything more varied and perfect than all the many novels that have gone before.⁴¹

Much as Ellen Glasgow distrusted the value of theories of fiction, she

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 191-192.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

⁴¹ Cather, On Writing, pp. 40-41.

did not refrain from giving three rules which had helped her to write.

But the novel (which must be conceived with a subdued rapture, or with none at all, or even with the unpoetic virtues of industry and patience) requires more substantial ingredients than a little ignorance of life and a great yearning to tell everything one has never known. When I remember Defoe, the father of us all, I am persuaded that the novelist who has harvested well the years, and laid by a rich store of experience, will find his latter period the ripening time of his career.

Transposed into an impersonal method, the three rules of which I have spoken may be so arranged:

1. Always wait between books for the springs to fill up and flow over.

2. Always preserve, within a wild sanctuary, an inaccessible valley of reveries.

3. Always, and as far as it is possible, endeavour to touch life on every side; but keep the central vision of the mind, the inmost light, untouched and untouchable.⁴²

That she followed these rules is indicated by Miss Glasgow's own writings. In the early period of her career, that is, through the publication of The Miller of Old Church, about two years generally elapsed between the publication of each book while in the mature period there is an interval of approximately three years. The novels of the early period, on the whole inferior to those of her maturity, were perhaps written before the springs of imagination had time to fill and flow over. The characters who wandered into Miss Glasgow's mind were kept in an inaccessible valley of reveries; she refused to talk about novels on which she was working, for such a discussion would admit other people to the precinct.⁴³ Her third rule, which concerned the importance of keeping "the central vision of the mind...untouched and untouchable," was related to her criticism of nineteenth-century romantic Southern literature. She felt that novelists

⁴² Ibid., pp. 209-210.

⁴³ Anonymous, "The Gossip Shop," The Bookman, LVIII (February, 1924), p. 697.

had written of that region as lovers, not as artists, that they had lost perspective and indulged in commemorative gestures, that they did not give a true picture of life.⁴⁴ These authors had not been realistic, and Ellen Glasgow considered herself a realist, or, as she preferred to say, a verist.

I believe strongly in the realistic novel...but realism isn't a photographic reproduction of life. It is rather the truth of life portrayed; and, in the novel portrayed with an interpretation, for one must put one's self into the writing.⁴⁵

Virginian authors had failed to create life, and "the power to create life is the staple of fiction."

When the novelist possesses this one thing needful, all else, or very nearly all else, may be acquired. But if he lacks this first principle, this primal element, he would be wiser to abandon literature and take up archaeology. For wherever there is life, there are infinite possibilities. But when either a book or a human being flattens out and turns to dust in our grasp, we have reached the dead end of both intuition and effort. The world of fantasy, like the world of matter, is for the living alone.⁴⁶

The importance of a sense of vitality had been stressed earlier by Henry James.

What it all came back to was, no doubt, something like this wisdom--that if you have n't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, have n't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but that if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal.

⁴⁴Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 150.

⁴⁵Quoted by anonymous writer in news-story, "Ellen Glasgow Dies," The New York Times, (November 22, 1945), p. 35.

⁴⁶Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 164-164.

⁴⁷James, The Art of the Novel, p. 78.

One of his most devoted admirers, Edith Wharton, concluded:

Out of all the flux of judgments and theories which have darkened counsel in respect of novel-writing, one stable fact seems always to emerge; the quality the greatest novelists have always had in common is that of making their people live.⁴⁸

Miss Glasgow was critical of much modern literature because it did not even attempt to create life. Contemporary novelists, wandering "in an endless maze of futility,"⁴⁹ pour out words without any deep knowledge of life and scorn the idea that one ought to know anything in order to write. Addressing a meeting of the Modern Language Association, she stated that the present notion appears to be that "the less we know, the better novelists we shall make."⁵⁰ Many writers consider it unfashionable, even a "little absurd, to regard a work of fiction as a form of art."⁵¹

Among the strange superstitions of the age of science reveals the cheerful belief that immaturity alone is enough. Pompous illiteracy, escaped from some Freudian cage, is in the saddle, and the voice of the amateur is the voice of authority. When we turn to the field of prose fiction, we find that it is filled with literary sky-rockets sputtering out in the fog. But the trouble with sky-rockets has always been that they do not stay up in the air.⁵²

Her concern with the lack of artistry in contemporary literature was

⁴⁸ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, pp. 156-157.

⁴⁹ Ellen Glasgow, "George Santayana Writes a 'Novel'," New York Herald Tribune Books, XII (February 2, 1936), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ellen Glasgow, "Elder and Younger Brother," The Saturday Review of Literature, XV (January 23, 1937), p. 4.

⁵¹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 185.

⁵² Ibid., p. 209.

shared by Mrs. Wharton, who feared that:

The distrust of technique and the fear of being unoriginal --both symptoms of a certain lack of creative abundance-- are in truth leading to pure anarchy in fiction, and one is almost tempted to say that in certain schools formlessness is now regarded as the first condition of form.⁵³

In spite of the similarity between her judgment of modern fiction, as well as of many other matters, and that of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather, Miss Glasgow consistently denied that any novelist had influenced her work. She remarked to an interviewer: "When I finally achieved a technique, it came wholly through my own hard work, I was not helped to it. I am very sure of that."⁵⁴ Elsewhere she said of her novels:

Whatever their failings may be, they cannot, with truth, be called either derivative or imitative. Even my method was one that I worked out for my own needs. If we except the first invigorating inspiration of the great realists, which passed quickly, my work has owed little or nothing to any literary influence. I was content to write of life as I had lived or observed or imagined life to be.⁵⁵

This violent disavowal does not, however, alter the fact that Miss Glasgow's views on fictional creation closely resembled those held by three of her contemporaries, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather.⁵⁶

⁵³ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Robert Van Gelder, "An Interview with Miss Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (October 18, 1942), p. 32.

⁵⁵ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 67.

⁵⁶ A generation older than the others, Henry James lived from 1843 to 1916, Edith Wharton from 1862 to 1937, Ellen Glasgow from 1874 to 1945, and Willa Cather from 1876 to 1947.

All four wrote novels of manners. Conservative in technique, they believed in the importance of plot, of structure, and of a carefully polished and exact style. Each began his novels by brooding over a character, either purely imaginary or based on an actual person; each was interested in, wrote about, and yet distrusted theories of fiction; each believed that the power to create life was the first essential to being a good novelist; each was disturbed by the chaotic form of much modern fiction. In short, they all thought of the novel as a work of art, not as propaganda for social reforms, and concerned themselves with the life of the individual rather than with the evils of a society in which none saw much possibility of real improvement.

How much influence this quartet of novelists exercised on each other is a difficult matter to determine and a question which perhaps cannot be answered. One critic relates that Miss Glasgow read all of James' novels.⁵⁷ She herself mentions that she enjoyed his books, but does not expand on the remark.⁵⁸ Only once or twice does she refer to either Mrs. Wharton or Miss Cather. It is, however, important to recognize that they all belonged to one of the oldest traditions of the novel, the humanistic tradition dealing with the individual's relation to society, that their theories of technique were similar, and that they all believed that the

⁵⁷ Robert Van Gelder, "An Interview with Miss Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (October 18, 1942), p. 32.

⁵⁸ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 18.

"nameless felicity" of the "life of art"⁵⁹ "will reveal its own special delights, and may even, as the years pass, yield its own sufficient, if imponderable, rewards."⁶⁰

⁵⁹James, The Art of the Novel, p. 29.

⁶⁰Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 208.

Chapter V

"A World in Time and Space"

In A Certain Measure Ellen Glasgow shows that her main interest lay in the creation of character. Yet no critic has ever given serious thought to the technical aspects of her portrayal and handling of character. One of the first defects which a careful reader notices in the early novels is the author's inability to deal with more than a few major figures. The Descendant is concerned mainly with two people, Michael Akershem and Rachel Gavin. Although both are stiff, flat, and in general rather unbelievable, they are the only people who stand out from the gray and somewhat sordid background. Other characters, however, are important in the plot. There is, for one, Anna Allard, whom Akershem comes to love in a rather vague way. "He thought of her calmly, with not one quiver of his pulse. . He desired her mentally," explains Miss Glasgow. "She personified the proprieties of life--nothing more."¹ Nevertheless, Akershem's love for Anna is intense enough so that when she tells him that his revolutionary theory of the conduct of life is "an ideal theory, Mr. Akershem, intended for an ideal humanity"² he is completely upset and discontinues his illicit relations with Rachel. Although the break with Rachel is the turning point of the book, Anna, who precipitates that action, is a shadowy figure whose influence on Akershem is out of all

¹ Ellen Glasgow, The Descendant (New York and London, 1897), p. 204. (This novel was published anonymously).

² Ibid., p. 177.

proportion to what the reader knows of her. Almost as dim is John Driscoll. He saves Akershem from starvation or suicide, and a quarrel which the two men have so disturbs Akershem that in his distraught condition he kills a third man. Driscoll, moreover, is Miss Glasgow's own spokesman in the novel. These two characters then, Anna Alld and John Driscoll, important as they are in the story, remain vague and indistinct. Ellen Glasgow was unable to handle more than two major characters in her first novel.

This defect, however, was one which she eventually overcame, though never completely in her early period. In The Miller of Old Church there are a number of major figures, most of them well handled. That story centers about Jonathan Gay, his illegitimate cousin Molly Merryweather, the miller Abel Revercomb, and his sister Blossom. Their relations become somewhat complicated. Jonathan and Abel both love Molly, who after a long period of hesitation falls in love with Abel. He, believing that Molly will never marry him, has already married Judy Hatch. Jonathan secretly marries Blossom Revercomb. The author shows the minds of Jonathan, Abel, Molly, and, to a lesser extent, of Judy. Yet Blossom is in the most pathetic and, in some ways, the most interesting situation, because she is married for several years to a man who will not announce their marriage. Miss Glasgow ignores Blossom almost completely and lets her sit quietly by the fireside while she shows the activities and interests of the other important characters. Little in the way of external events does happen to Blossom, but her position is important, for the fact of her marriage blocks Jonathan's desire for union with Molly and at the end of the book brings about Jonathan's murder by one of Molly's relatives who has learned of the secret marriage. Blossom could have and should have been more fully treated

by the author.

This inability to deal adequately with all of the major figures was overcome in the novels of Miss Glasgow's mature period, such as Life and Gabriella. There are grouped about the central figure of Gabriella her mother Mrs. Carr, her sister Jane, her fiancé Arthur Peyton, her husband George Fowler and his parents, and the man who is to become her second husband, Mr. O'Hara. Each of these characters is exceedingly well handled. The reader sees them only as they relate to Gabriella. Their activities are developed only in so far as they concern Gabriella and are not developed unless they do concern her. None of them is shadowy like Anna Allard of The Descendant or neglected like Blossom of The Miller of Old Church.

Hence Miss Glasgow gradually learned to deal with more than one or two main characters and learned to develop other figures who acted on the hero as much as was necessary for her story. After her early novels there is little of importance to criticise in the handling of important persons and their relation to the plot.

Since Miss Glasgow had to learn to portray her principal figures in sufficient detail, it is paradoxical that in her early books she often made the error of overdeveloping her minor characters; she found it difficult to subordinate them to their proper place in the narrative. In The Voice of the People, a story about the rise of a poor white farmer to the governorship of Virginia, Ellen Glasgow draws the less important people with such care that the reader expects them to become more important in the story than they ever do. She presents a gallery of portraits of people living in Kingsborough, which is Williamsburg, in the late nineteenth

century. Of the ex-Confederate officer General Thomas Battle, she says:

He had enlisted as a private, had risen within a couple of years to a colonelcy, and had been raised to the rank of general by the unanimous voice of his neighbours upon his return home.³

In more detail she describes an aging couple:

There he saw Mr. Burwell—a pink-cheeked, little man who wore an expansive air of innocence and a white piqué waistcoat—and Mrs. Burwell, a pretty, grey-haired woman, who ruled her husband with the velvet-pawed despotism which was the heritage of the women of her race and day. She had never bought a bonnet without openly consulting his judgment; he had never taken a step in life without unconsciously following hers.⁴

About Mrs. Jane Dudley Webb, who has been reduced to taking in boarders,

Ellen Glasgow writes:

When she passed a cup of coffee she seemed to confer an honour; when she returned a receipted bill it was as if she repulsed an insult.⁵

Mrs. Webb remains a very minor character and does not appear at all in the second half of the book. Yet she is more fully portrayed, more memorable, than her son Dudley, who is very important in the story since he marries Eugenia Battle, with whom Governor Nicholas Burr was once in love, and becomes Burr's political opponent.

When Miss Glasgow wrote The Voice of the People, she was just beginning her social history of Virginia. Minor figures in that novel and other early books do contribute to the social history by filling in

³Ellen Glasgow, The Voice of the People (New York, 1938), p. 39. (Originally published in 1900).

⁴Ibid., pp. 64-65.

⁵Ibid., p. 81.

the picture of "complex and chaotic social conditions"⁶ in the South during the latter years of the nineteenth century, but, interesting as these characters may be, they blemish the artistry of the novels because they are too fully developed for the roles which they play.

A more important consideration is whether or not Miss Glasgow's characters achieve probability. In this phase of her technique she shows a definite and, on the whole, a steady advance. Many of the early characters are not convincing. There is, for example, Christopher Blake of The Deliverance. He plots revenge against Fletcher, the man who stole his ancestral estate, by corrupting Fletcher's only grandson. When that boy murders Fletcher, Blake suddenly feels morally responsible for the crime, aids the murderer to escape, and goes to jail in his place. Blake's unusual personality is reflected in his equally strange appearance.

Taken from the mouth up, the face might have passed as a rough, fleshly copy of the antique ideal; seen downward, it became almost repelling in its massive power.⁷

This hero is typical of Ellen Glasgow's earliest novels. Glamorous, handsome, bold, moody, polite, generous, yet cruel, Christopher Blake resembles some of the Byronic characters of nineteenth-century Southern romance. In spite of the author's much publicized revolt from the Virginian literary tradition, her hero Christopher suggests such a character as Mordaunt in John Esten Cooke's Surry of Eagle's-Nest.

⁶Harriet Waters Preston, "A Few Spring Novels," Atlantic Monthly, XCIII (June, 1904), p. 852.

⁷Ellen Glasgow, The Deliverance (New York, 1938), p. 10. (Originally published in 1904).

He was tall, powerful, and with a face resembling bronze. His eyes, as black as night, sparkled under raven eyebrows, and his heavy mustache and beard were of the same color. But his expression was more striking than all else. Never have I seen a fiercer satisfaction in the human face.⁸

When critics of Miss Glasgow's work, including the author herself, speak with confidence about her reaction against the romantic tradition, they overlook such melodramatic figures as Christopher Blake.

Even more unbelievable than Christopher is Maria Fletcher, granddaughter of old Fletcher. She falls in love with Christopher Blake. When he confesses his part in the increasing degeneracy of her brother, whom she likes and pities, Maria snatches at the opportunity to share her lover's guilt.

'Mine, too, Christopher--mine, too,' she repeated, 'for I take the blame of it, and I will share in the atonement. My dear, my dear, is love so slight a thing that it would share the joy and leave the sorrow--that it would take the good and reject the evil? Why, it is all mine! All! All!'⁹

The only critic in recent years to discuss Maria is her creator, who mildly remarked: "But her nobility, I may confess, has never entirely convinced me."¹⁰

Equally improbable is Roger Adams of The Wheel of Life. In him, Miss Glasgow attempted to portray a saintly person. Adams, however, is so saintly that he is scarcely human. His wife, Connie, has an affair with another man. One night on the way to his house from the office,

⁸ Cooke, Surry of Eagle's-Nest, p. 21.

⁹ Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 340.

¹⁰ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 44.

Adams sees printed in a newspaper one of his wife's "wild letters to Brady,"¹¹ her lover. The injured husband walks around the block a few times and before arriving home has achieved a serenity which might ordinarily take months to acquire.

'Yesterday I sacrificed for her both my rest and my work, but was she worthier of pity at that hour than she is at this? She has not changed since, nor has the thing which I have just discovered; it is only I who am different because it is I alone who have come into knowledge of the evil.'¹²

After his wife has left him and she in turn been deserted by Brady, Adams receives her back and takes her to a hospital. While waiting for Connie to be brought back from the operating room, he has a vision.

The window was still open, and going over to it he leaned out and stood for several minutes, too tired to make the necessary effort to collect his thoughts, while he looked across the sleeping city to the pale amber dawn which was beginning to streak the sky with colour. The silence was very great; in the faint light the ordinary objects upon which he gazed--the familiar look of the houses and the streets--appeared to him less the forms of a material substance than the result of some shadowy projection of mind. All the earth and sky showed suddenly as belonging to this same transient manifestation of thought; and gradually, as he stood there, his perceptions were reinforced by a sense which is not that of the eye nor of the ear. He neither saw nor heard, yet he felt that the spirit had moved toward him on the face of the dawn; and the 'I' was not more evident to his illumined consciousness than was the 'Thou.' He beheld God, with the vision which is beyond vision; the light of his eyes, the breath of his body were less plain to him than was the mystery of his soul. And the universal life, he saw--spirit and matter, fibre and impulse, vibration of atom and quiver of aspiration--was but the agonised working out into this consciousness of God. With the revelation his

¹¹Ellen Glasgow, The Wheel of Life (New York, 1906), p. 248.

¹²Ibid., pp. 249-250.

own life was changed as by a miracle of nature; right became no longer difficult, but easy; and not the day only, but his whole existence and the end to which it moved were made as clear to him as the light before his eyes.¹³

In spite of the closing sentences, the revelation really has little effect on Adams. Right has always been easy, not difficult, for him, nor is there any change in his life after this experience. Perhaps few men who have "beheld God" ever did so in quite such an unecstatic way as does Adams. The passage lacks emotional power. The mysticism is, as N. Elizabeth Monroe observed, "superficial and ill-directed."¹⁴ Adams is more likely to embarrass the reader than to inspire him.

Roger Adams is not convincing because he finds it too easy to be good. He forgives his wife and others who injure him so readily that the reader can only suspect that he is not so much forgiving as unhurt. His liking for his wife, Connie, and for another woman after the former's death has in it more of the grandfather's affection than of the husband's love.

In another novel of the early period, The Romance of a Plain Man, Miss Glasgow comes closer to drawing a convincing personality, but does not meet with complete success. She follows the life of Ben Starr from early childhood in the slums of Richmond to maturity, financial success, and marriage into the old aristocracy. In his desire to make money, Ben neglects his wife, has a collapse, and is nursed back to health by her. Yet he still has not learned that what she wants is his love, not

¹³ Ibid., pp. 344-345.

¹⁴ Monroe, The Novel and Society, p. 182.

his money. After his recovery from illness, he begins to build up a second fortune. Only when his wife begins to show attention to another man, does Ben devote more of his time to her than to railroad companies and the stock market. In the latter part of the book, when Ben is industriously creating his second fortune, he loses reality and becomes a type, the money-mad man. As an English reviewer remarked, the closing pages "may strengthen the authoress's indictment of the mania for money-making, but they certainly weaken the artistic value of the book."¹⁵

Ellen Glasgow herself felt that she carried the book on too far and that Ben becomes dimmer and dimmer.

...As he grows up, he becomes more shadowy, until at last he exists less as a personality than as a continuous stream of memories and reflections.¹⁶

The same criticism, that the central character grows shadowy, has been made of one of Miss Glasgow's best books, Barren Ground. Sara Haardt observed that Dorinda Oakley, like others of the author's worldly successful characters, grows indistinct.¹⁷ Dorinda does become pale. Once she has made a success of her life and has restored the family-farm, her story has really been told. Yet Ellen Glasgow goes on to describe how her heroine marries, how she loses her husband, and finally how she cares for her former lover, Jason Greylock, in the last weeks of his life.

¹⁵ Anonymous, "Review of The Romance of a Plain Man," The Bookman (London), XXXVI (August, 1909), p. 234.

¹⁶ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 72.

¹⁷ Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," The Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), p. 135.

All these incidents add little to the development of Dorinda's character, and the reader's interest slides away from the heroine to the bare details of the narrative. Speaking of Dorinda in a recent collection of critical essays by Catholic writers, N. Elizabeth Monroe refers to her as "great."¹⁸ Yet her judgment is not so opposed to Miss Haardt's as might seem at first glance, for the latter was judging Dorinda from a technical and artistic point of view, Miss Monroe from a moral.

One of her best portrayed figures, and one of Miss Glasgow's own favorites, is Virginia Pendleton in Virginia. "Virginia was more to me," wrote the author, "than a character in a book, though even as a character in a book, I find her wholly animated and consistent from the first page to the last."¹⁹ Virginia is a well conceived, fully rounded person. She never becomes shadowy like Ben Starr, is never subordinated to narrative like Dorinda, is never unbelievable like Roger Adams or Christopher Blake. Virginia can act only within those areas of life for which her narrow education has prepared her. She can save one of her children from deadly disease, she can nurse her husband back to health because both of those occupations call for devotion and self-sacrifice. She cannot, however, cope with a situation which involves people who do not live according to her own code of self-abnegation. Her visit to her husband's mistress, one of the finest scenes in the book, teaches her that Miss Oldcastle is the

¹⁸N. Elizabeth Monroe, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironist of Manners," in Fifty Years of the American Novel: A Christian Appraisal, ed., Harold C. Gardiner, S.J. (New York and London, 1951), p. 60.

¹⁹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 94.

type of woman whom she herself can never be. At the end of the book after traveling from Dinwiddie to New York to make one last attempt to save her marriage, Virginia cannot face her husband and returns without seeing him. At home,

...She saw the figure of her maid, in trim cap and apron, waiting to welcome her. Not a petal had fallen from the bed of crimson dahlias beside the steps; not a leaf had changed on the young maple tree, which rose in a spire of flame toward the stars. Inside, she knew, there would be the bright fire, the cheerful supper table, the soft bed turned down--and the future.²⁰

In addition to Virginia, Ellen Glasgow found most characters in her mature novels convincing.

Any novelist of experience knows the difference between the artfully invented puppet, which smells a little of clean sawdust, and the subconsciously created human being, who speaks and acts in response to the springs of character, and is controlled by some arbitrary power we call destiny. And all these imaginary persons contained, strangely enough, an almost equal endowment of reality. Judge Honeywell was scarcely more convincing to me than was Altrusa, who existed in only a few paragraphs of the story. Yet I do not mean to imply, in this candid confession, that only The Romantic Comedians among my novels has seemed to me to create a world of its own that expanded in time and space. This is equally true of Barren Ground, of The Sheltered Life, of They Stooped to Tolly, of Vein of Iron, of In This Our Life, and of Virginia.²¹

Two of the very few critics to discuss the life-like quality of Miss Glasgow's characters, Percy Hutchinson and Kenneth B. Murdock, both believe

²⁰ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 406.

²¹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 220.

that the fallen women of They Stooped to Folly fail to come alive.²² Those three ladies are sociological types, reflections of the ruined woman in various ages of history, the 1870's, the 1890's, and the 1920's. They represent or embody the attitudes of three generations; they are not individuals. On the other hand, major and minor figures such as Judge Honeywell and Annabel of The Romantic Comedians, General Archbald and Jenny Blair and George Birdsong of The Sheltered Life, John Fincastle, his mother, and Ada of Vein of Iron, and Asa and Roy Timberlake and Uncle William of In This Our Life are living men and women.

How an author succeeds in creating a human being is extremely difficult to say. Miss Glasgow's remarks on that subject are really not at all helpful. As noted earlier, she speaks of characters developing in the author's imagination much as an embryo develops in the body. Similar figures of speech were employed by Mrs. Wharton. Neither woman, however, wrote anything that tells much about the art of presenting a fictional character in such a way that the reader thinks of him as a living person. Indeed Howard Mumford Jones felt disappointed that in A Certain Measure Miss Glasgow sidestepped a discussion of the problem;²³ yet neither Professor Jones nor any other critic has attempted to say in detail how Ellen Glasgow made her characters live.

²² Percy Hutchinson, "Wit and Wisdom in a New Novel by Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (August 4, 1929), p. 2; Kenneth B. Murdock, "Folly and the Ironist," The Virginia Quarterly Review, V (October, 1929), pp. 596-600.

²³ Howard Mumford Jones, "The Regional Eminence of Ellen Glasgow," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (October 16, 1943), p. 20.

Undoubtedly Grandmother Fincastle in Vein of Iron is one of her most effectively presented figures. About this lady and her son the author remarked: "I think the main strength of the book lies in the figures of the old Presbyterian grandmother and the old pagan philosopher."²⁴ The reader hears of Grandmother Fincastle when the minister mentions her journeys to isolated cabins in the mountains to help the sick. Immediately she begins to emerge as a strong woman. The clergyman then recalls that she always carried a winding sheet with her. Grandmother Fincastle is realistic. She first appears on the scene quietly knitting, but then "the aroma of coffee was wafted in, and Grandmother tossed her head with a spirited gesture, in the way an old mare will do when she feels the spring in her bones."²⁵ Miss Glasgow contrasts the old woman's "hearty relish for food" with her daughter-in-law's "pernickety taste."²⁶ Continuing to build up the idea of her strong love of life, Grandmother Fincastle thinks to herself that "she had enjoyed everything, even childbirth. There had been pangs, of course (though never the long spasms of agony that had tortured Mary Evelyn's frail body), but the pains were so soon forgotten in the joy of bringing a child into the world."²⁷ With this enjoyment of life the elderly lady combines an equally deep reverence for God. Her great cross in life has been the

²⁴ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 174.

²⁵ Ellen Glasgow, Vein of Iron (New York, 1938), p. 29. (Originally published in 1935).

²⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

expulsion of her son from the Presbyterian ministry.

'It is a trial of faith to believe that a good man can be an unbeliever. All the Fincastles were men of spirit, but not one was ever before an open doubter. They never questioned God's will, not even when it went against them, and they kept their word to Christian and heathen alike.'²⁸

This deep sense of religion and the almost pagan love of life are the basic ingredients of Grandmother Fincastle's character. All that she says or does can be traced back to those elements in her nature. Drama comes when the two forces conflict. Her granddaughter, Ada, conceives an illegitimate child. Sternly righteous, the older woman avoids the sinner. Yet when the baby is born, the love of life triumphs in Grandmother and she comes to Ada's assistance. Soon afterwards, however, feeling disgraced by and disappointed in Ada, she dies. Grandmother Fincastle is, as E. M. Forster says well rounded characters should be, "capable of surprising in a convincing way."²⁹ There is about the old woman a statuesque, indeed an heroic quality. The finer details are not sketched in, but the outlines are drawn with a sure hand. She is as substantial as the mountain-country in which she lives.

Ellen Glasgow's people lack the subtlety of Jamesian characters. There is in the work of the Virginian author no one to compare in complexity with Lambert Strether. Nevertheless the simple woman of the mountains is as convincing as the acute observer in Paris. There is, of course, a difference in the type of art represented. James

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

²⁹ E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), p. 118.

portrayed Strether in elaborate detail; he worked as carefully as the painter of a miniature does. Miss Glasgow's sketch of Grandmother Fincastle is done with a bolder stroke. The details are overlooked in favor of an impressive outline. Each artist chose well. James' subtle and detailed study of Strether is appropriate since he was dealing with a highly complex culture in Paris. But in the less sophisticated atmosphere of western Virginia a simpler method of character-portrayal is called for. Like Grandmother Fincastle, none of Ellen Glasgow's characters in the mature novels finds himself involved in a really complex situation; none is a complex person. Without being flat, each is a plain person. Finally, each is convincing because the author establishes the core of personality and lets the action of each person grow from his character. Yet never quite predictable, the figures in the mature novels will surprise without confusing the reader.

Miss Glasgow rarely, and never to a significant degree, attempted to increase the verisimilitude of her novels by discussing the professional or business careers of her characters. This aspect of her artistry has been quite overlooked by her critics. In Phases of an Inferior Planet little is seen of Father Algarcife performing his clerical duties; indeed the author conspicuously avoids opportunities for showing them. Ben Starr of The Romance of a Plain Man makes fortunes in tobacco, copper, oil, and railroads, but the reader knows little about the details. The same generalization may be made about the novels of Miss Glasgow's mature period. General Archbald of The Sheltered Life has retired from the practice of law before the novel opens. The reader does not see John Fincastle, the philosopher of Vein of Iron, writing his monumental work.

Asa Timberlake of In This Our Life is, during the course of the novel, never inside the tobacco factory where he works. Ellen Glasgow pays slightly more attention to the professional careers of women. She tells something, not really very much, about the duties of the mistress of a plantation in The Battle-Ground. In Life and Gabriella the heroine busies herself occasionally in the dress shop where she is employed, and Dorinda of Barren Ground appears once in a while at work on her farm. In The Builders, however, the nurse Caroline Meade rarely is seen performing her duties, and Roy's career as an interior decorator is not once mentioned in In This Our Life.

Readers of the novels of Henry James will recall that he also largely ignored the business and professional careers of his characters. In The Portrait of a Lady Daniel Touchett has already retired from his bank, and most of the other persons with the exception of Miss Stackpole have independent incomes. In The Ambassadors Lambert Strether is the editor of a journal, but the reader never sees him in that capacity, and even the business of the Newsome family remains a carefully kept secret. Both Henry James and Ellen Glasgow were concerned with their characters as human beings, as individuals, not as representatives of a profession or a business. For Miss Glasgow's purposes an elaborate account of Ben Starr's financial activities or of General Archbald's practice of law would have added nothing to the reader's understanding of the men.

Certain authors have developed aspects of commerce in which Ellen Glasgow was not interested. Such novelists as Frank Norris in The Pit (1903) or Upton Sinclair in The Jungle (1906), or Theodore Dreiser in The Titan (1914) had all given carefully accurate accounts of the Chicago

grain exchange or meat-packing business. Realistic literature emphasizing mechanical operations or economic functions are discussed in Willa Cather's essay "The Novel D meubl ."'

There is a popular superstition that 'realism' asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations. But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candour with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme? Is the story of a banker who is unfaithful to his wife and who ruins himself by speculation in trying to gratify the caprices of his mistresses, at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange? Of course, if the story is thin, these things do reinforce it in a sense,--any amount of red meat thrown into the scale to make the beam dip. But are the banking system and the Stock Exchange worth being written about at all? Have such things any proper place in imaginative art?³⁰

Though Ellen Glasgow did not show businessmen acting as businessmen or others exercising their professional duties, she did occasionally portray a figure who embodied the typical ideas and attitudes of a certain social class. Such a character becomes a representative, almost a personification or a symbol, of that group. This type of symbolism is seen best in The Deliverance and in Virginia, and it is attempted again in the last novel, In This Our Life. Christopher's mother, Mrs. Blake, in the first of these books is blind and does not realize that the South has been defeated in the War between the States. Nor does she know that her family has lost its plantation and now lives in the house once used by the overseer, who has defrauded the family of their estate. She continues

³⁰ Cather, On Writing, pp. 37-38.

in this illusion for twenty years. Mrs. Blake is unbelievable, for the reader refuses to suspend belief and accept the idea that a woman as alert and intelligent as Mrs. Blake could be deluded for such a long period of time. Instead of a living person she is, as Frederic Taber Cooper wrote with more enthusiasm than discrimination, a "tragic and impressive" symbol.³¹ Miss Glasgow remarked of her creation:

I saw in her, not one old woman groping, blind and nourished by illusions, through a memorable epoch in history, but Virginia and the entire South, unaware of the changes about them, clinging, with passionate fidelity, to the ceremonial forms of tradition.³²

Virginia Pendleton, central figure of the novel bearing her name, is also a symbolic figure. Throughout the book the author stresses that her upbringing, education, and life are typical of those of girls in her class. Yet unlike Mrs. Blake, Virginia becomes a woman of flesh and blood, one of Miss Glasgow's fully realized characters. Her creator explains that

...Virginia was more than a woman; she was the embodiment of a forsaken ideal. Already, when I wrote of her, she was beginning to pass into legend; and even man, who had created her out of his own desire, had grown a trifle weary of the dream-images he had made.³³

Recognizing Virginia to be both an individual and a symbol, a reviewer of the novel wrote, perhaps rather unfeelingly: "Does Virginia's

³¹ Frederic Taber Cooper, "Representative American Story Tellers," The Bookman, XXIX (August, 1909), p. 615.

³² Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 27.

³³ Ibid., p. 82.

suffering wring your heart? It is the pain of extinction in a vanishing type."³⁴ Asa and indeed the entire Timberlake family in In This Our Life are intended to be symbolic of a modern American community. Ellen Glasgow explains this sweeping claim.

But the central figure in this novel is larger than any individual character, for it embraces the interior life of a community. If I seem to labour this point, it is because, to my astonishment, the meaning has eluded a number of casual readers. I had innocently imagined that the silhouette of roofs and spires on the dust-jacket would convey at least the bare idea that my outlook would be more diffused than individual; and there is always a shock in the discovery that, in print, one must be brutally obvious if one wishes not to be misconstrued.³⁵

Ellen Glasgow had, of course, no right to criticise her readers as "casual" if they misinterpreted her meaning and then to refer them to the dust-jacket for evidence of her intention. As Henry James remarked about illustrations in a novel: "Anything that relieves responsible prose of the duty of being ...good enough...does it the worst of services, and may well inspire in the lover of literature certain lively questions as to the future of that institution."³⁶ Whether Ellen Glasgow makes the reader feel that either Asa or Roy, the two central figures, is really "larger than any individual character" poses a very debatable question. It is noteworthy that no reviewer of the book considered the characters symbolic. There is as much reason for saying that the Timberlakes are symbolic of a community

³⁴ Anonymous, "Review of Virginia," Current Opinion, LV (July, 1913), p. 51.

³⁵ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 249.

³⁶ James, The Art of the Novel, p. 332.

as for saying that Judge Honeywell of The Romantic Comedians represents "the pattern of declining gentility,"³⁷ which Miss Glasgow emphatically declares he does not. There can be little argument that Mrs. Blake and Virginia are symbolic, but to state that Judge Honeywell is not symbolic and that the Timberlakes are is a claim which apparently indicates the author's aim but scarcely her accomplishment.

Many of Miss Glasgow's books carry the characters forward over a long period of years. Biographical novels such as The Romance of a Plain Man, Virginia, Life and Gabriella, Barren Ground, and Vein of Iron cover about thirty years each. In these stories the author was faced with the difficult problem of insuring unity and with the more particular problem of convincing the reader of the passage of time.

At the beginning of her career Ellen Glasgow did not know how to handle the passage of time; indeed she seems almost to have been unaware that time presented any problem to the novelist. In Phases of an Inferior Planet there is an interval of eight years between the first and the second parts of the book. The first section closes with Anthony Alarcife nearly dead from starvation; the second opens with Father Alarcife an extraordinarily successful preacher. The reader is jerked violently over a period of years while dialogue between two minor characters fills in the gap by explaining what has happened to Alarcife, his former wife, and the other characters whose relations have altered greatly from what they were when the reader left them only a page or two before.

Such novels of the mature period as The Romantic Comedians and They

³⁷ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 223.

Stooped to Folly cover only a few months, and the passage of time does not really present a serious problem to the author. More interesting in technique is The Sheltered Life, in which the action extends over seven years. Miss Glasgow tries an experiment by introducing into the middle of the novel a section entitled "The Deep Past," which contains the reverie of General Archbald as he recalls his youth about the time of the War between the States. Action in the story stops for forty pages while the General reviews the early years of his life. In rather fanciful manner he feels that there is no relationship between the young man that he was and the old man that he has become.

Which was the real David Archbald, the lover in memory, or the old man warming his inelastic arteries in the April sunshine? Or were they both merely spirals of cosmic dust, used and discarded in some experimental design?...³⁸

For eighty-three years he had lived two lives, and between these two different lives, which corresponded only in time, he could trace no connection.³⁹

The reader feels inclined to add, rather maliciously, that there exists little enough connection between the elderly gentleman's reverie and the plot of the story. The figure of Archbald develops in this section, but he plays too negative a role in the rest of the book; he exists as an observer, not a participant. He is not "compelling," observes Miss Monroe.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ellen Glasgow, The Sheltered Life (New York, 1938), p. 115. (Originally published in 1932).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁰ Monroe, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironist of Manners" in Fifty Years of the American Novel, ed., Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., p. 53.

What happened to Archbald as a young man lacks any connection with what happens to his granddaughter. Miss Glasgow describes two eras, Archbald's youth and Jenny Blair's. Since the author does not bring the General's reverie down to a point where his granddaughter might logically enter into it, she does not establish a relationship in time between her two characters. Each figure remains suspended in his own epoch. "The Deep Past" is an interesting experiment and has, J. Donald Adams justly observed, "exquisite beauty" in isolated passages.⁴¹ Yet neither Mr. Adams nor anyone else has noted that the passage fails in its purpose of convincing the reader of the continuity or flow of time because it pictures two eras, not time sweeping steadily from one age to another.

In this novel Ellen Glasgow was attempting somewhat the same technique that Willa Cather employed in Death Comes for the Archbishop by recounting Indian legends and stories of the early Spanish missionaries. Miss Cather added ballast to her book by using these old tales. Hers is more a character study than a novel, where the narration of events must depend on casuality.⁴² There need be no direct connection between Bishop Latour and the Mexican peasant who experienced a vision at Guadalupe, but there must be a connection between David Archbald and his granddaughter if "The Deep Past" is to have significance.

In spite of some blunders Ellen Glasgow did improve in her attempts to show the passage of time. In A Certain Measure she frequently states

⁴¹ J. Donald Adams, "Ellen Glasgow's Finest Novel," The New York Times Book Review, (August 28, 1932), p. 1.

⁴² Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p. 130.

that she tried to present time as flow rather than as duration, but on the interesting technical question of how she went about giving that effect she has little to say and that little is not very helpful.

Time is presented always as flow, not as duration, and the stream of life should appear to move as the tide moves, ebbing and flowing, spreading out, or stealing in rivulets through separate minds, murmuring away and whispering back in subtle variations, like the sound of a recurring phrase in music, or the familiar repetition of winds and falling waves.⁴³

Nor are her other comments about passage of time any more helpful than this one to the critic who wants to understand, in more concrete and less rapturous manner, how she worked for her effect.

Mrs. Wharton in The Writing of Fiction suggests how an author gives a sense of the flow of time. She states that success in this matter is one of the mysteries of writing which can never be satisfactorily explained, but that one observation may be made.

One of the means by which the effect is produced is certainly that of not fearing to go slowly, to keep down the tone of the narrative, to be as colourless and as quiet as life often is in the intervals between its high moments.⁴⁴

Whether Ellen Glasgow was influenced by these remarks is here of no concern, but she did use a method similar to the one which Mrs. Wharton suggested without developing in detail. Since no critic has studied, indeed even noticed, Miss Glasgow's handling of the passage of time, it is rewarding to investigate her technique as revealed in Vein of Iron, a book which covers the period 1901 to 1933.

⁴³ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 250.

⁴⁴ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, p. 96.

The novel is built up out of a series of episodes. The first, really a prologue rather than an episode, tells of Ada Fincastle's childhood, introduces the other main characters, and shows their relationships to one another. There is then a jump of ten years. The first real episode of the book deals with Ada's loss of Ralph McBride to Janet Rowan; the next recounts the interlude on Thunder Mountain, where Ralph and Ada are together before their marriage; the final episode portrays the life of Ada and Ralph in Queenborough. The close of the book, the epilogue, tells of the return from Queenborough to the village of Ironside, where the story began.

As each episode draws to a close, new events begin another episode and another period of time. Thus the prologue about Ada's childhood introduces the main characters and, by indicating Ada's interest in Ralph and Janet's selfish jealousy, foreshadows the events which soon follow. In the first episode Ada's quarrel with Ralph prepares the way for his marriage to Janet, and, since it is only a lovers' quarrel, also leads up to the interlude on Thunder Mountain. As a result of being with Ralph on the mountain, Ada has a child and leaves Ironside. The episode set in Queenborough begins. The depression of the 1930's and the strong emotional bonds of the past pull the family back to Ironside. Thus there is an interlocking of events between each episode as the action of one period of time grows out of that which preceded it.

Each episode begins calmly and moves to a climax; then there is falling action as a new episode begins. The prologue comes to a climax with the failure of Ada to get a doll with real hair and the falling action comes with the reveries of the members of the Fincastle family.

The new section commences with Ada's assurance of Ralph's love, moves to the catastrophe of their quarrel and Ralph's forced marriage to Janet. These events are followed by a period of quiet despair and resignation, but the mood changes and rises steadily to the ecstasy of the episode on Thunder Mountain. The return to Ironside from Thunder Mountain brings the emotional pitch of the story down to a quieter level, and the gloom increases when Ada's illegitimate son is born and her grandmother dies. The episode in Queenborough starts calmly as the family adjusts to post-war conditions, rises in intensity as Ralph's automobile accident and the economic depression upset the family's security, and culminates when dying John Fincastle struggles back to Ironside. The epilogue, the return of the entire family to Ironside, restores on a deeper, more mature level the sense of security felt less confidently in the opening of the book. Thus Vein of Iron is composed of a series of waves of narrative, each rising to an emotional climax and then falling as a new wave of narration, brought on by the preceding events, approaches.

Besides this alternation of calmness and excitement in the book there is the theme of life, maturation, and death which adds to the sense of passing time. Ada's mother and her grandmother die; somewhat later her father gradually weakens and dies. Ralph's mother passes away. Ada's son is born and starts to school. Throughout the book Miss Glasgow speaks frequently of the past generations of Fincastles, who live in the memories and traditions of the family. The author creates a sense of many generations and a long duration of time.

Early in the book, as previously mentioned, there is an hiatus of ten years. The interval occurs after the prologue, which sets the tone

of the book, and before the first episode, the one which tells about Ralph's marriage to Janet. Miss Glasgow, however, succeeds in jumping over this period of a decade. She uses the mechanical device of beginning a new "book" and a new chapter in her novel. This proceeding is scarcely a literary technique in the strictest sense of the word, but the reader more willingly accepts a quick passage of time when he is made to begin a new division of the novel. The closing chapters of the prologue recount the reveries of the five Fincastles as they sit around their fireplace one night in autumn. The new chapter, which begins ten years later, tells of Ada's love for Ralph. The new subject is accompanied by a change in the rhythm of the prose. The last chapter of the prologue is the reverie of the childish Ada. The rhythm of her reverie is a girlish, rippling one while that of the new chapter is the strong, steady rhythm appropriate to a young but mature woman. The season of the year also changes. The prologue draws to a close on an autumn evening. The new section opens in the middle of June with sunlight flooding the countryside.

Finally, the author indicates more directly that ten years have passed. Ada thinks rapidly back over her twenty years of life and mentions the fact that Ralph has been in college one year. Her feeling for Ralph has matured from childish fancy to love, and Janet's selfish jealousy is beginning to assume more sinister aspects. Unlike Phases of an Inferior Planet, where an interval of almost the same time is skipped over, there is no elaborate readjustment of relationships which have to be explained to the reader.

In the course of her literary career Ellen Glasgow developed considerable

skill in showing passage of time. In her first novels she made no attempt to present time as continuous, but bluntly informed the reader that time had passed, explained the new situation, and went on with her story. In her mature period she experimented with handling time in The Sheltered Life, an experiment that failed because she did not make any connection between the two periods of time which she portrayed. Finally in Vein of Iron she succeeded in showing a long period of time as a steady flow.

Although Miss Glasgow learned to convince the reader of the passage of time, she never developed her art to a point where she was no longer dependent on coincidence. In The Battle-Ground Dan Montjoy meets his father just before the latter's death in a military hospital in Richmond. The old man deserted Dan and his mother years before, and nothing was heard of him until he turns up as a war-hero at the end of his life. Dan himself stumbles on the dying Colonel Ambler, father of Betty, his future wife. These coincidences are relatively unimportant, even though they strain the reader's credulity, because subsequent action does not develop from them. The meeting of Dan and Colonel Ambler does perform an architectonic function in the story. In the latter part of this novel Miss Glasgow deals alternately with Dan in the Confederate Army and then with Betty at home on the plantation. When Betty comes to see her dying father, she finds Dan; thus the two threads of narrative are brought together briefly. More serious as artistic faults are coincidences in The Wheel of Life, The Romance of a Plain Man, and Virginia. In each of these books the main character overhears in a public place some comment about the unfaithfulness of his wife or husband. The reader tires of finding casual informers planted behind potted palms in every hotel lobby.

Coincidence is important in these novels because in each case it opens or helps to open the eyes of the injured person to the activities of his partner. Reviewers and subsequent critics of all these novels concentrated on aspects which are of more general interest than the author's use of coincidence. Only Floyd Dell in the Chicago Evening Post and H. I. Brock in The New York Times criticized Miss Glasgow for reliance on chance.⁴⁵ Mr. Dell pointed out that The Miller of Old Church abounds with chance meetings. Jonathan and Abel happen to meet Blossom and Judy, respectively, and, because they encounter them at a particular instant, marry them. Miss Glasgow was keenly aware that she was depending on coincidence too much, for she has one of her characters, Molly, meditate on the importance of circumstance.

'All this happened because I went along the Haunt's Walk and not across the east meadow that April afternoon,' she thought, 'but for that, Jonathan would not have kissed me, and Abel and I should not have quarreled.' It was such a little thing—only the eighth of a mile which had decided her future.⁴⁶

A great deal of the action in Barren Ground depends on coincidence. Towards the end of the novel Dorinda, who has just lost her husband because he happened to take a train that was wrecked, reviews the fortuitous events which have influenced her life and, incidentally, the

⁴⁵Mr. Dell's opinions are cited by an anonymous writer in "Recent Fiction and the Critics," Current Literature, LI (September, 1911), p. 339. H. I. Brock expressed his opinions in "Southern Romance is Dead," The New York Times Book Review, (April 12, 1925), p. 2.

⁴⁶Ellen Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church (New York, 1938), p. 264. (Originally published in 1911).

plot of the novel.

Yet it seemed to her that it was always the little things, not the big ones, that influenced destiny; the fortuitous occurrence instead of the memorable occasion. The incident of his going was apparently as trivial as her meeting with Jason in the road, as the failure of her aim when the gun had gone off, as the particular place and moment when she had fallen down in Fifth Avenue. These accidents had changed utterly the course of her life. Yet none of them could she have foreseen and prevented; and only once, she felt, in that hospital in New York, had the accident or the device of fortune been in her favour.⁴⁷

Ellen Glasgow never developed her artistry to the point where progression of the novel depended on a natural sequence of events. Throughout her career she resorted to contrived coincidence in order to force the action to take the desired direction. Conscious of this weakness in her novels, she used a device which Thomas Hardy occasionally employed and had characters meditate on the importance of mere chance. Thus she tried to give philosophic dignity to her reliance on coincidence.

Another phase of fictional technique which, like her use of coincidence, Ellen Glasgow pointedly neglects to discuss in A Certain Measure and which she never learned to handle perfectly, is unity of the novel. Certainly some of the early books are poorly constructed. In The Descendant the center of interest almost shifts from one character to another. Akershem is the main figure in the beginning and middle of the novel, but as the story progresses Rachel Gavin becomes more and more important until she finally challenges Akershem for the central position. The unity of Phases of an Inferior Planet is shattered by the intrusion

⁴⁷ Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground (New York, 1938), pp. 354-355. (Originally published in 1925).

of the account of a political campaign which has no bearing whatsoever on the rest of the story except that one of the candidates happens to be acquainted with Algarcife. The main plot of The Voice of the People deals with the life and political career of Nicholas Burr, but in the last chapters the birth of Eugenia's and Dudley Webb's child, an event which has no bearing on the progress of the story, competes for the reader's attention. The first of Ellen Glasgow's long biographical novels, The Romance of a Plain Man, contains the account of rose-growing Dr. Theophilus, who, though he may be an interesting type, has very tangential relations with the central figure of the book, Ben Starr.

There are also violations of unity in the mature novels though critics have been oblivious of them. Barren Ground contains an account of a symphony concert which Dorinda attended while living in New York. The program, incidentally, must have been one of the longest ever performed by any orchestra to judge from the number of composers mentioned. Dorinda finds the experience very emotional: "I've got to stand it. No matter what it does to me, I've got to stand it."⁴⁸ Fortunately, she manages to survive. Though the account of the concert is relatively brief, the experience makes such an impression on Dorinda that the reader keeps expecting something to develop from it. After she has left the concert hall, however, music passes completely out of the life of the heroine. At the very end of They Stooped to Folly appears a curious scene which mars the unity of that book. Martin Welding has escaped from the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 204. The entire concert-hall scene is strongly suggestive of Willa Cather's story "A Wagner Matinée" in Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920).

suffocating love of his wife, Mary Victoria Littlepage. She and her father start out after Martin. Near a house where they have reason to believe that the errant husband may be hiding, Mr. Littlepage stops to chat with an organ-grinder. The purpose of the incident is to point out that, as the musician observes: "It is a hard world for artists...."⁴⁹ The pursuit of Martin is one of the few exciting passages in the book, and Miss Glasgow spoils her effect by intruding into it a consideration of the role of the artist in America. The reader is inclined to feel with Mary Victoria that Mr. Littlepage has more pressing obligations at the moment than to philosophize with organ-grinders. Vein of Iron, too, is marred by certain irrelevant incidents. In that novel Miss Glasgow became so interested in expressing certain of her own criticisms of America that she forced them into the story whether they belonged there or not. Genuinely concerned over contemporary lawlessness, the author presents several scenes which illustrate that aspect of modern life. John Fincastle is confronted one day by a child who orders him to put his hands in the air and informs the elderly philosopher that he is going to be a gangster when he grows up. Less related to the body of the story is the account of a Negro peddler struck down by a speeding car. Even more distracting are the conversations which the dying John Fincastle overhears on the bus as he makes his way back to Ironside. Comment about politics becomes so extensive that the reader's interest veers away from the old gentleman's journey home to Miss Glasgow's random and disjointed criticisms of contemporary America. Thus even in what is

⁴⁹ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 292.

perhaps her best novel, Miss Glasgow failed to achieve perfect unity.

One very important device for securing unity is the use of a consistent and restricted point of view. In handling this aspect of the novel Ellen Glasgow improved considerably though she made some bad blunders in the early novels. On point of view in The Battle-Ground she herself remarked:

The major obligation of adhering to a single, or at least a restricted, point of view came to me more gradually. In The Battle-Ground, the subject is surveyed, not only through the eyes of the two central figures, but, on several occasions, it is recorded in the minds of less prominent characters. Moreover, although not ever appearing in person, a narrator remains permanently in the background, even when unobserved, and directs the flow of pure narrative.⁵⁰

The author's failure to maintain a consistent approach in this novel is treated perhaps with more courtesy than it deserves. Indeed one of the worst violations of any restraint on point of view is to be found in The Battle-Ground; Miss Glasgow relates what a Union officer thought about Betty Ambler at the time of General Lee's surrender several years after the Northerner had casually met Betty. This novel, however, handles point of view more skillfully than does The Descendant, for there the narrator does not remain permanently in the background, but occasionally steps forward and addresses the reader directly.

Miss Glasgow's improvement was rapid. As an experiment she wrote one book, The Romance of a Plain Man, in the first person. She does adhere to a consistent approach, but that very fact leads her into several absurdities. The biographical novel traces Ben Starr's life from early childhood to maturity. The type of event noticed and the manner of

⁵⁰ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 18-19.

observation should change as Ben grows older, just as David Copperfield's reflections mature as he grows up. Ben, however, is just as alert and perceptive when childish and inexperienced as when a grown man. The nine-year old boy indulges in satiric comment about a woman who calls her daughter a "lamb" though she is really an impolite brat.⁵¹ At the ripe age of twelve Ben understands the great social changes occurring as the rising middle and lower classes take over from the old aristocracy business and political leadership. Thinking of his hero, patrician General Bolingbroke, Ben remarks perceptively:

...I felt instinctively that my future triumphs would be in a measure the overthrow of the things for which he and his generation had stood.⁵²

When she came to write an introduction to this novel, Miss Glasgow decided that the use of the first person had been a mistake.

This question of the proper use of the first person has been frequently discussed in criticism, and either approved or condemned according to the preferences of the critic. For my part, I have always thought that the method contained almost insurmountable disadvantages, even when it was employed by the great masters of prose fiction.⁵³

One of the critics who has condemned use of the first person, Henry James, remarked in connection with The Ambassadors:

Suffice it, to be brief, that the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness, and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little

⁵¹ Glasgow, The Romance of a Plain Man, p. 41.

⁵² Ibid., p. 87.

⁵³ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 70.

as on this particular occasion.⁵⁴

The difficulty arising when, as in The Romance of a Plain Man, the narrator is also the hero, has been discussed by another student of the novel, Mr. Percy Lubbock.

It seems, then, to be a principle of the story-teller's art that a personal narrator will do very well and may be extremely helpful, so long as the story is only the reflection of life beyond and outside him; but that as soon as the story begins to find its centre of gravity in his own life, as soon as the main weight of attention is claimed for the speaker rather than for the scene, then his report of himself becomes a matter which might be strengthened, and which should accordingly give way to the stronger method.⁵⁵

In Miss Glasgow's novel Ben Starr claims for himself "the main weight of attention." As he grows up, Ben becomes, even his creator admits, "shadowy." Why a narrator-hero often grows indistinct is explained by Mr. Lubbock.

In that story the man or woman who acts as the vessel of sensation is always in danger of seeming a light, uncertain weight compared with the other people in the book--simply because the other people are objective images, plainly outlined, while the seer in the midst is precluded from that advantage, and must see without being directly seen. He, who doubtless ought to bulk in the story more massively than any one, tends to remain the least recognizable of the company, and even to dissolve in a kind of impalpable blur. By this method (which I am supposing to have been adopted in full strictness) the author is of course forbidden to look his central figure in the face, to describe and discuss him; the light cannot be turned upon him immediately.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ James, The Art of the Novel, p. 320.

⁵⁵ Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, nd), pp. 144-145.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 259.

In the novels of Miss Glasgow's mature period there is a marked improvement in the treatment of point of view. Life and Gabriella is written "entirely through the eyes and the consciousness of Gabriella."⁵⁷ The successful handling of the angle of vision accounts for the fact, already mentioned, that all of the characters are shown only as they relate to the heroine. The first part of The Builders is told entirely from the point of view of Caroline Meade; in the second part of that novel an omniscient narrator suddenly takes over. It is impossible to determine just what Ellen Glasgow was attempting. Probably she originally intended to tell the story entirely through the eyes of Miss Meade, but, as she became involved in a rather complex plot, perhaps felt unable to present all her material as it might be seen by the one woman. Action in Barren Ground and The Romantic Comedians is viewed primarily by one person, Dorinda Oakley and Judge Honeywell respectively. In the earlier novel the author frequently anticipates future action; thus she violates the point of view in time. In The Romantic Comedians the reader occasionally enters into the mind of Mrs. Upchurch, the Judge's mother-in-law. Several of the novels present the action as it is seen by two people. In They Stooped to Folly Mr. Littlepage and his wife alternately tell the story, a device which adds nothing to the novel.

In The Sheltered Life, Vein of Iron, and In This Our Life, however, two points of view--in each case that of an elderly man and of a young woman--are used to good effect. Two people with different reactions view the events in those novels just as in Tobias Smollett's The Expedition of

⁵⁷Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 99.

Humphrey Clinker (1771) numerous persons with diverse interests and attitudes comment on the action. Speaking of her presentation in one of her books, Miss Glasgow wrote:

In The Sheltered Life, where I knew intuitively that the angle of vision must create the form, I employed two points of view alone, though they were separated by the whole range of experience. Age and youth look on the same scene, the same persons, the same events and occasions, the same tragedy in the end. Between these conflicting points of view the story flows on, as a stream flows in a narrow valley. Nothing happens that is not seen, on one side, through the steady gaze of the old man, seeing life as it is, and, on the other side, by the troubled eyes of the young girl, seeing life as she would wish it to be.⁵⁸

Use of the double point of view is effective because it creates both sympathy and irony. Through the eyes of Jenny Blair, who is in love with him, George Birdsong seems exciting and glamorous. But to the wiser General Archbald, George appears cruel and cheap. While Jenny Blair's angle of vision arouses some sympathy for her, the General's point of view creates the irony. It is the old man, not his granddaughter, who sees George as he really is. The two main characters also look at each other. To Jenny Blair, her grandfather seems to be a rather stuffy, old-fashioned man; to David Archbald, Jenny is a frivolous and somewhat mystifying adolescent. The double point of view avoids the difficulty, which troubled Miss Glasgow earlier in The Romance of a Plain Man, of the central character becoming vague. By employing two angles of vision the author sets up a series of reflecting mirrors so that minor figures like George Birdsong and the major characters, Jenny Blair and the General, are all seen from several approaches.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

The only critic to consider in any detail Ellen Glasgow's handling of the angle of vision made the bold claim that her "manipulation of point of view bears comparison with that of any other modern novelist."⁵⁹ When, some years later, the same critic discussed Miss Glasgow's art in Fifty Years of the American Novel, she considered the double point of view in The Sheltered Life only as a device to sustain a story "too slight to be told in straight narrative."⁶⁰ Miss Monroe failed to make clear that the angle of vision involves more than the arbitrary question of which characters tell the story; it involves the development and extension of the narrators' personalities.

Just as skillful use of the angle of vision contributes to the rounding out of characters, so does the use of retrospection. In some of the mature novels whole chapters, sometimes an entire section of the work, may be given over to tracing the thoughts of a single individual. General Archbald's reverie, "The Deep Past," has already been discussed in connection with the passage of time. Similar though less extensive are the reflections of Mrs. Burden in They Stooped to Folly and five chapters devoted to as many different members of the Fincastle family in Vein of Iron. The author was using in these passages retrospection similar to that employed sometimes by Henry James. The reveries of Miss Glasgow's characters suggest such chapters as the one in The Portrait of a Lady in which Isabel Archer, after seeing Gilbert Osmond and Madame

⁵⁹ Monroe, The Novel and Society, p. 174.

⁶⁰ Monroe, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironist of Manners" in Fifty Years of the American Novel, ed., Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., p. 53.

Merle in intimate conversation, reviews her own relationships with those two sinister figures. There is a great benefit to be gained from such thoughtful backward glances. Characters mature as past events take on more significance. Yet Miss Glasgow had to pay for this enriching and developing of her people. All action in the novels, which at their best are slow paced, ceases while characters recall interesting though not always relevant events of the past. Too often she fails to establish a significant relationship between the past history of her fictional people and their present situation. Nor are these lengthy passages always well placed in the novel. Mrs. Burden's train of memories begins when Mrs. Littlepage comes to visit her. After the long reverie the reader feels that the visitor, annoyed at being neglected, surely will have left by now. The next chapter, however, recounts the social call which Mrs. Littlepage makes.

That visit reveals another deficiency in Miss Glasgow's literary technique: her lack of ability to write dialogue. The conversation between these two women is stiff and unnatural.

'But what in the world would become of Milly if she didn't have me to look after her? Why, I often lie awake in the night worrying myself about who would take care of her if I were to die.'

Mrs. Littlepage sighed and thought of Mary Victoria. 'Such devotion is not usual in this modern age, Mrs. Burden.'

'Oh, I'm not pretending that she's grateful for it. But you can't neglect your duty just because you don't receive the proper return.'

'You are right, of course, and your attitude is commendable.' As she rose from her chair, Victoria thought vaguely, 'It is a weakness, no doubt, but I do find worldly people so much less depressing.' Almost deprecatingly, she added, 'Then, I fear, it is no use offering you a position as matron in our House of Hope? Or perhaps you would like me to consult your

daughter about it?'

Mrs. Burden shook her head. 'She doesn't realize how much she needs me. But I couldn't reconcile it with my conscience to let her go to New York alone.'

'So many girls do that now,' Mrs. Littlepage urged gently, and checked herself before she added, 'even good girls.'

'That's what she says. But I tell her she isn't like other girls. She has her mistakes to live down, and that makes her more defenseless.'

'I wonder,' Mrs. Littlepage sighed. 'I wonder,' and indeed she did.⁶¹

Ellen Glasgow was herself aware of the "pitfalls of dialogue" and like Mrs. Wharton⁶² considered conversation a wasteful method of writing since characters frequently have to tell each other what they already know for the benefit of the reader. Miss Glasgow used relatively little dialogue, and much of what she did write is not very convincing.

Often Ellen Glasgow's conversation, while it may lack the sound of the human voice speaking, is witty, ironic, and satiric. Too sparkling to be convincing as genuine speech, it serves as a vehicle for the author's keen sense of humor. Thus one night Major Lightfoot hears a knock at his door and knows that it must be a messenger from his neighbors, the Amblers, at Uplands. The officer exclaims: "'Something's gone wrong at Uplands.... There's an illness--or the brandy is out.'"⁶³ In The Romance of a Plain Man Ben Starr's father defends his second marriage: "'It stands to reason --don't it?--'he concluded, with a flash of direct inspiration, 'that

⁶¹ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 202.

⁶² Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, pp. 72-74.

⁶³ Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 27.

thar ain't any way to get a woman to wash free for you except to marry her."⁶⁴ Grandmother Fincastle, whose memories of the War between the States are still vivid, says as the First World War begins: "'Well, I'm thankful that General Hunter is safely buried and not on the side of the German."⁶⁵

Wit is so prevalent in her novels that critics have frequently mentioned it. Stuart P. Sherman, an early admirer of her work, noted it,⁶⁶ and Dorothea Mann called Miss Glasgow "the wittiest of all our novelists."⁶⁷ Commenting on The Sheltered Life, J. Donald Adams said that the book represented "a true marriage of wit and wisdom."⁶⁸ Mr. Adams touched here on an important aspect of Miss Glasgow's wit. It has a deeper purpose than merely to amuse the reader. She directs her wit against the pretensions of human beings; she delights in puncturing the sanctimonious or hypocritical. She pokes fun at the attitudes which people have toward reading and education, at their undue reverence for ancestors, and at their concern with charity for distant human beings. With more bitterness she criticises their religious attitudes and their

⁶⁴Glasgow, The Romance of a Plain Man, p. 63.

⁶⁵Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 156.

⁶⁶Sherman, Critical Woodcuts, p. 80.

⁶⁷Dorothea Lawrence Mann, "Ellen Glasgow: Citizen of the World," The Bookman, LXIV (November, 1926), p. 267.

⁶⁸J. Donald Adams, "Ellen Glasgow's Finest Novel," The New York Times Book Review, (August 28, 1932), p. 1.

sexual mores.

Miss Glasgow scoffs at the notion that education and reading are pursuits to be undertaken only by those who have nothing more important to engage in. Virginia Pendleton always feels that "time for reading was obliged to be time subtracted from more important duties."⁶⁹ Her teacher, Miss Priscilla Batte, turned to teaching school after the War between the States "as the only nice and respectable occupation which required neither preparation of mind nor considerable outlay of money."⁷⁰ Virginia's husband, Oliver, speaking of his moralistic plays, describes them caustically in language which William Dean Howells might have used as words of praise: "The kind of thing any father might take his daughter to see."⁷¹ In Vein of Iron one of Ada's distant relatives, hearing that John Fincastle writes books, exclaims: "Books? Well, I don't read. Nobody that I know ever opens a book."⁷² And in One Man in His Time Stephen Culpepper, thinking of his cousin, remarks to himself: "Of all the girls he knew she was the only one who ever opened a book except one that had been forbidden."⁷³

Ellen Glasgow humourously criticises the social as well as the

⁶⁹ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 344.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 326.

⁷² Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 343.

⁷³ Ellen Glasgow, One Man in His Time (Garden City, New York, 1922), p. 85.

educational attitudes of people. She directs her wit against excessive ancestor-worship. Miss Batte, the author writes, "still clung passionately to the habits of her ancestors under the impression that she was clinging to their ideals."⁷⁴ The reader, however, sees little of Miss Batte's confusion of habits and ideals. More skillfully handled is the elder Mr. Culpepper, who "still dined at two o'clock in the afternoon because his grandfather, who was dyspeptic by constitution, had been unable to digest a late dinner."⁷⁵ Miss Glasgow was also rather grimly amused by people's charity for those who were far away and their neglect of immediate neighbors. Speaking of a wealthy industrialist in The Descendant, she said: "His charity was universal. If it did not begin at home, at least it ended there, and his interest in his employes was only second to his interest in the natives of Damaraland."⁷⁶ Mrs. Blackburn of The Builders was so concerned with raising money for American soldiers in Europe that she neglected her own daughter. Like Mrs. Blackburn, Mrs. Culpepper worked hard for the relief of orphans in Vienna, yet objected to any proposals that her husband reduce the rent on the tenements from which his family drew its very comfortable income.

Ellen Glasgow directs a great deal of humor against religious convictions which have hardened into a creed. She satirizes both Puritanical and Episcopalian sects with equal vigor. In The Miller of Old Church

⁷⁴ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 10.

⁷⁵ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 33.

Abel Revercomb remarks about his Calvinistic mother: "All the world is divided for her between religion and damnation. I believe she thinks the very eggs in the hen-house are predestined to be saved or damned."⁷⁷ The author speaks in They Stooped to Folly of the "sad-coloured garments in which evangelical Christianity wraps original sin."⁷⁸ Victoria Littlepage is convinced that "the first and longest step in repentance is the one that leads to the wiping away of every trace of make-up."⁷⁹ The author's attitude toward Presbyterianism becomes very bitter when Ada realizes that "Ralph's will had been broken and his life ruined because his mother had discovered that salvation was better than happiness."⁸⁰ Certainly not all of Miss Glasgow's humor is directed against the Puritanical Christians; the Episcopalians come in for their full share. Old Adam, whose sole purpose in The Miller of Old Church is to plague the rector, asks that gentleman a question about resurrection and asks it when the clergyman is "'outside the pulpit an' bound to speak the truth like the rest of us."⁸¹ Undoubtedly speaking for the author, Old Adam observes:

"'Tis the fashion for parsons, an' for some people outside of the pulpit, to jump to conclusions, an' the one they've jumped the farthest to get at is that things are all as

⁷⁷ Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, p. 160.

⁷⁸ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 186.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 144-145.

⁸⁰ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 203.

⁸¹ Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, p. 7.

they ought to be.⁸²

In The Romantic Comedians and The Sheltered Life fun is poked both at individual members of the Episcopalian Church and at the institution itself. Edomna, Judge Honeywell's sister, comments:

'You Episcopalians may have made most of the history and all of the mint juleps in Virginia; but you have left your politics and your laws to the Methodists and Baptists, and pleasure-baiting has always been the favourite sport of those earnest Christians.'⁸³

About the Judge's former fiancée, Amanda, Miss Glasgow writes:

...She belonged to that fortunate generation of women who had no need to think, since everything was decided for them by the feelings of a lady and the Episcopal Church.⁸⁴

Isabella Archbald in The Sheltered Life marries into a family socially beneath her own. The Archbalds promptly begin trying to lift the new in-laws up in the social scale. The first move, of course, is membership in the correct church.

'Yes, the Crockers have always been quiet people. Baptists are so devout. Not that Joseph has ever had much religion--' Which was a step at least in the right direction of the Episcopal Church.⁸⁵

That Ellen Glasgow was deadly serious about her criticism of the Episcopalian Church is indicated by a cutting remark in A Certain

⁸² Ibid., p. 174.

⁸³ Ellen Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians (New York, 1938), pp. 158-159. (Originally published in 1926).

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁵ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 77.

Measure:

...The Protestant Episcopal Church was charitable toward almost every weakness except the dangerous practice of thinking.⁸⁶

Both Episcopalians and Puritans obstinately decline to view the relations between the sexes as they actually exist. That refusal provides Miss Glasgow with opportunity for satiric criticism. The Calvinistic community as represented by the Littlepages finds sexual irregularity so repugnant that it cheerfully confuses hypocrisy with reform.

In the motive of desertion, as Victoria had so often assured him, there was all the difference between reform and dishonour. Any woman, she had explained with a firm and noble accent, could perceive the fine distinction between abandoning a woman without reason and forsaking a vice because you wished to profit by an example of purity.⁸⁷

The Episcopalians also, influenced by their sterner neighbors, distrust the natural instincts of man. Entering a room just after his young wife has left it, Judge Honeywell enjoys but censures his reaction to the aroma of perfume.

The only reminder of her presence was a lingering scent, which he found agreeable though he instinctively disapproved of the pleasure it gave. Cordelia and her friends had never used any perfume more encouraging to the lower nature of man than bay rum; but, of course, as he reminded himself, Cordelia's friends had all been paragons of virtue, whose appearance and manner invited reform rather than seduction.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 136.

⁸⁷ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 234.

⁸⁸ Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 168.

Even this brief selection of passages reveals that Miss Glasgow's wit is essentially serious. Unfortunately for her literary fame, her critics have found the humor so delightful that they have generally failed to appreciate the thought behind it. Through humor she expresses her criticism of society. There is little that is actually funny in her work. The wit is so tightly united with character and with situation that when passages are wrenched out of context much of the humor is lost. Always it is high comedy; the author never depends on getting a character into a situation which is physically ridiculous. The humor arises from personality or from mockery at social convention. Sometimes the wit is bitter, especially that directed at any religion which has become an empty form.

Miss Glasgow occasionally employs similes or metaphors to express her humor. Ralph McBride remarks: "There's been no lack of women in this war. They've rushed for every horror as straight as ducks for a puddle."⁸⁹ In The Sheltered Life the author tells about Jenny Blair's aunt who had spent a night away from home with a young man.

Like the silver spoon Zoana, the cook, had left out all night in the grass, poor Aunt Isabella's shining lustre had been impaired by exposure.⁹⁰

Another humorous simile is found in the same novel.

On a clothes-line, stretched between the kitchen porch and the mulberry tree, empty garments were swinging back and forth, like human beings deflated of vanity.⁹¹

⁸⁹Glasgow, Vein of Iron, pp. 233-234.

⁹⁰Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 13.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 258.

This image about clothes recalls one used much earlier in Phases of an Inferior Planet: "Across the tenement roofs lines of drying garments fluttered like banners."⁹² Obviously this simile is dull and trite. Ellen Glasgow had to learn how to use images, that is, similes and metaphors. Many of her early attempts were flat and inappropriate.

...Outward events in life are of no greater significance than the falling of the rain on the growing corn.⁹³

This is a poor figure of speech because it states that rain has no importance for growing grain, a statement contrary to fact. Many of the early images are religious in nature and are frequently in bad taste.

...She had come at last to feel, almost without explaining it to herself, that the truth was in Laura as in some obscure, mystic sense the sacrament was in the bread and wine upon the altar.⁹⁴

Even when the matter of propriety is not involved, Miss Glasgow's ecclesiastical figures are not very good ones.

Cold, white, and spectral as one of the long slim candles on an altar, still beautiful with an indignant and wounded loveliness, she had become in the end at once the shame and the romance of her family.⁹⁵

Although the comparison of a woman to an altar-candle may be more or less appropriate, it is certainly dull, as are many other figures of speech in the early novels.

⁹² Ellen Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet (New York and London, 1898), p. 73.

⁹³ Glasgow, The Wheel of Life, p. 238.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 349.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

...The electric lights, coming slowly into being, must have seemed to a far-off observer a galaxy of wandering stars that had burst the woof of heaven and fallen from their allotted spheres to be caught like blossoms in the white obscurity of fog.⁹⁶

Across the green, the houses were set in surrounding gardens like cards in bouquets of mixed blossoms.⁹⁷

Even though suitable, these images from the early novels lack interest. There is nothing very original or very provocative about Miss Glasgow's comparing city lights to stars and then to flowers.

From these figures of speech it is apparent that the author depends on direct and stated comparisons. Hence, she makes nouns the important words in her images. There are exceptions to this generalization, of course. In the closing pages of Vein of Iron Ellen Glasgow writes that "pain leaped" at John Fincastle.⁹⁸ Pain here is by implication an animal, and the effectiveness of the figure depends on the verb. Yet such images depending on a verb are relatively rare when compared with those in which a noun is used.

In the novels of her mature period Miss Glasgow handles her imagery much better. She still made an occasional blunder as when she said in Barren Ground that Mrs. Oakley had "the eyes of a saint in a primitive Italian painting."⁹⁹ This figure violates the angle of vision from which

⁹⁶ Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Glasgow, The Voice of the People, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 391.

⁹⁹ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 33.

the story is told. The point of view is that of Dorinda, who certainly at this early stage of her life knew nothing about Italian art. Most figures of speech in the mature novels, however, are effective and appropriate. The improvement in the use of images appears in one of the first books of the mature period, Life and Gabriella.

As she supported him his teeth began to rattle, not as the teeth of the living chatter from fear, but as the teeth of a dead man might rattle when he is jolted in his coffin.¹⁰⁰

In slightly less macabre manner the author describes the tombstones in the Fincastle cemetery.

The row of sandstone slabs, as yellow as old teeth and stained with the droppings of birds, stood upright among the periwinkle and ivy.¹⁰¹

Miss Glasgow employed in her mature period a type of figure which reveals a high degree of artistry.

...I've come to believe that there's a certain kind of virtue that's no better than poison. It poisons everything it touches because all the humanity has passed out of it, just like one of those lovely poisonous flowers that spring up now and then in a swamp. Nothing that's made of flesh and blood could live by it, and yet it flourishes as if it were as harmless as a lily.¹⁰²

...He looked as hopelessly battered by reality as a political theory....¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 349.

¹⁰¹ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 148.

¹⁰² Ellen Glasgow, The Builders (Garden City, New York, 1919), p. 212.

¹⁰³ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 128.

...He had observed...that they treated her scarlet letter less as a badge of shame than as some foreign decoration for distinguished service.¹⁰⁴

Around them, the familiar estate of marriage was preserved in the unruffled calm of their bedroom as in an embalming fluid.¹⁰⁵

After all, class consciousness, like his arteries, was not all that it used to be.¹⁰⁶

These images express in figurative language the inner nature of a man or of a social class or of a state of existence. Outward appearances are of secondary importance. The poetic effectiveness of these figures of speech depends in each case on the comparison of a concrete reality with an abstract state—a certain type of virtue with a flower or the physical man with a political theory. Obviously Ellen Glasgow brought her use of figures of speech to a high finish. Yet even her friendliest and closest critics have not noticed this aspect of her art. She is a neglected and, hence, undervalued novelist.

More conspicuous than her figures of speech is the aphoristic quality of Miss Glasgow's style. This aspect of her writing is one which even her often-obtuse critics have not failed to observe. An enthusiastic, if not very sensitive, reviewer of her first novel said:

...It is a testimony to its engrossing human interest that the reader can absorb page after page of shrewd and epigrammatic observations and hardly be aware of it.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 60.

¹⁰⁵Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷Anonymous, "Review of The Descendant," The Critic, XXX (OS), XXVII (NS) (May 22, 1897), p. 353.

A few years ago Mr. J. Donald Adams referred to the "epigrammatic flashes of perception which she so perfectly phrases."¹⁰⁸ From The Descendant to In This Our Life terse, sharp epigrams are scattered throughout her work. One of the worldly-wise characters in her first novel remarks: "Pessimism is the affectation of youth, the reality of age."¹⁰⁹ Aristocratic Mrs. Blake voices the sophisticated attitude of the Virginian planters: "For a man to go twenty-six years without falling in love means that he's either a saint or an imbecile, my dear; and, for my part, I declare I don't know which character sits worse upon a gentleman."¹¹⁰ Advice on the importance of a woman's appearance is given by practical-minded Corinna Page:

'As long as you haven't much sense, it is necessary for you to make yourself as pretty as possible, for only intelligent women can afford to take liberties with their appearances.'¹¹¹

Love supplies the subject for still another apothegm as Mrs. Upchurch somewhat cynically observes: "Love fills the lives of most women, especially the lives of the women who have never had it."¹¹² Speaking of America's effort to bolster weak democracies after the First World War, one Virginian says: "Nothing, not even moonshine, goes to the head

¹⁰⁸ J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (March 30, 1941), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 162.

¹¹⁰ Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 76.

¹¹¹ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 315.

¹¹² Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 90.

quicker than saving democracy with other people's money."¹¹³ The conflict between two generations gives the author the opportunity of remarking: "Only one other motive appeared as inevitable as the desire of youth to live its own life, and this was the determined effort of age to nip that desire in the bud."¹¹⁴ Most of these sharp, epigrammatic statements are remarks made by characters in the novels. Miss Glasgow's dialogue, witty as it is at times, is far from convincing as real speech, for human beings seldom speak in epigrams and even more seldom coin them for the occasion. The aphorism is characteristic of the written, not of the spoken language, and of the polished and isolated mot, not of the usual, informal conversation. About Miss Glasgow's epigrammatic style a French critic, Léonie Villard, aptly remarks:

...Née deux siècles plus tôt, avant que Paméla, Tom Jones et La Nouvelle Héloïse eussent définitivement ouvert sa voie au roman, Ellen Glasgow aurait été tentée d'être un de ces auteurs de Pensées ou de Maximes qui condensaient leur connaissance de la vie et de l'âme humaine en quelques brèves phrases, emplies d'une sagesse ironique et désabusée, marquées du sceau de cette perennité que seule peut conférer une forme parfaite.¹¹⁵

M. Villard neglects to mention that the aphoristic style is not confined to the Gallic tradition; George Meredith and George Eliot also used it.

An aphoristic style is a sophisticated style. It is appropriate when writing about society in the city or about the plantation aristocracy,

¹¹³ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 133.

¹¹⁵ Léonie Villard, "L'Œuvre d'Ellen Glasgow," Revue Anglo-Américaine, XI (December, 1933), p. 111.

but scarcely suitable for literature dealing with farmers. Little of the epigrammatic quality appears in Ellen Glasgow's novels of the country, The Miller of Old Church, Barren Ground, and Vein of Iron. "Satire," the author remarks, "would have splintered back from the sober bulk of the Presbyterian mind and conscience."¹¹⁶

An epigrammatic style, moreover, tends to fall apart into a series of clever remarks held tenuously together by intervening passages. Realizing this fact, Ellen Glasgow frequently disguises the aphoristic quality of her style in the mature novels. In Life and Gabriella, one of the first books in which she tries to avoid the bareness of pure epigrams, she writes:

But the trouble with both men and money, when considered solely as rewards to enterprise, is that the quest of them is inexhaustible.¹¹⁷

The subordinate clause, "when considered solely as rewards to enterprise," by lengthening the sentence and by making it more involved structurally hides its aphoristic nature. A more complex example of this disguise of the real nature of the style is found in The Romantic Comedians.

For, notwithstanding his profound respect for Amanda, an object of respect, he was beginning to perceive, was far from being the partner with whom you would prefer to dance.¹¹⁸

As a simple epigram this would read: "An object of respect was far from being the partner with whom you would prefer to dance." The two subordinate

¹¹⁶ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 222.

¹¹⁸ Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, pp. 39-40.

clauses, as in the previous example, break up the sentence and make it longer and more involved grammatically. The names, "Amanda" and "he," change the statement from a general one applicable to all men, which an epigram must be, to a particular observation concerning two definite people. Thus by elaborating on her epigrams, Miss Glasgow was able to take off some of their cutting edge and to make them less conspicuous. In her comedies of manners, The Romantic Comedians, They Stooped to Folly, and The Sheltered Life, she was hunting for a style "delicate yet unbreakable,"¹¹⁹ and the use of disguised epigrams was one way in which she worked for such a style.

An aphoristic style makes for lucidity and terseness. Even when not coining epigrams, Miss Glasgow wrote clearly and concisely. In A Certain Measure she remarks that she constantly trimmed her work and states that "an unpruned style is a slovenly style."¹²⁰ Critics have, on the whole, applauded her style. One reviewer said of Virginia:

The English of this book is faithful to the coloring of the author's spirit. Unforced and unadorned except where the subject is itself poetic, it is throughout of classic purity. There is not a trace of the modern mixing up of the parts of speech, or of modish defacements of the language. As far as language goes it might have been written in the days of Addison himself.¹²¹

Frederic Taber Cooper spoke rather grandiloquently of her novels having "an epic sweep and comprehension, an epic sense of the surge of life and

¹¹⁹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 204.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

¹²¹ Anonymous, "Review of Virginia," The North American Review, CXCVII (June, 1913), p. 857.

the clash of multitudinous interest."¹²² In more precise language Emily Clark wrote:

With style as her central, unvarying aim, Miss Glasgow has evolved a prose close-woven, smooth, polished, brilliant and highly epigrammatic.¹²³

J. Donald Adams called it "one of the best prose styles of our time."¹²⁴

If, however, Miss Glasgow's mature writing had a classic purity, she had to work hard for that quality of ease and lucidness. Her earliest writing was frequently stiff and depended on self-conscious use of repetition and contrast, and, at the slightest excuse, waxed flamboyant over the beauties of nature. The turgid quality of her early prose makes itself felt in one of her philosophic passages.

As we all look upon life through the shadows which we ourselves cast upon it, so the facts of organic existence shape themselves in our horizon conformably with the circumstances which have shaped our individual natures. We see large or small, symmetrical or distorted forms, not according to external forces which have played upon external objects, but according to the adjustment of light and shade about our individual lenses.¹²⁵

Euphuistic sentences occur to a noticeable extent in some of the early novels.

¹²² Frederic Taber Cooper, "Representative American Story Tellers," The Bookman, XXIX (August, 1909), p. 614.

¹²³ Emily Clark, "Ellen Glasgow," The Virginia Quarterly Review, V (April, 1929), p. 189.

¹²⁴ J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," The New York Times Book Review, (December 2, 1945), p. 2.

¹²⁵ Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 18.

The spirit that walked within him was a dual one—a spirit of toil, a spirit of ease; a spirit of knowledge, a spirit of ignorance; a spirit of improvidence, a spirit of thrift; a spirit of submission, a spirit of revolt.¹²⁶

Sometimes combined with this balanced structure is repetition of sound:

"He taught her logic and a little law; she taught him poetry and passion."¹²⁷

Related to this awkwardness in style is a certain *gaucherie* in the manner of her early books. Miss Glasgow could rarely resist the temptation to bring in a description of nature. All too frequently these lyrical passages were set into the story at crucial points when the author should have been primarily concerned with advancing her plot. In The Deliverance the reader is being introduced to the situation when Ellen Glasgow stops discussing the Blakes and the Fletchers in order to talk about the sunset.

The sun had just gone down in a blaze of light, and the bare field was slowly darkening against the west. Nearer at hand, there were the long road, already in twilight, the rail fences, wrapped in creepers, and a solitary chestnut-tree in full bloom.¹²⁸

Later in the story Christopher Blake and Maria Fletcher are discussing her approaching marriage when that conversation is interrupted for a look around the countryside.

'Why do I marry him?' She hesitated slightly.
'Oh, for many reasons, and all good ones--but, most of all, because I love him.'
'You do not love him.'

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²⁷ Glasgow, The Voice of the People, p. 172.

¹²⁸ Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 9.

'I beg your pardon, but I do.'

For the first time in her life, as her eyes swept over the landscape, she was aware of a peculiar charm in the wildness of the country and the absence of all civilizing influences; in the open sky, the red roads, the luxuriant tobacco, the coarse sprays of yarrow blooming against the fence; in the homely tasks, drawing one close to the soil, the harvesting of the crops, the milking of the mild-eyed cows; and in the long still days, followed so tranquilly by the long still nights....

'Well, I hope you'll live to regret it,' he said suddenly, with bitter passion.¹²⁹

Such digressions were sure to provoke adverse criticism. Reviewers in both the Atlantic Monthly and The Nation suggested that the reader could do with less in the way of scenic background. The critic in the latter periodical complained:

The most thrilling moments of the story are hyphenated by purple patches of scenery. Every emotion has its landed estate, and it is the weary reader who pays the tax.¹³⁰

Much as Ellen Glasgow enjoyed writing descriptions of nature, she soon learned that such passages must not block the flow of narrative. After her first few novels she disciplined herself and used descriptive pieces only when their presence was justifiable.

Although Miss Glasgow's manner improved and her style bettered itself, even as late as The Miller of Old Church she was still turning out some awkward writing.

It is a mood that comes once to every man--to some men more frequently--a mood in which the prehistoric memory of the soul is stirred, and an intolerable longing arises for the ancient nomadic freedom of the race; when the

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

¹³⁰ Anonymous, "Review of The Voice of the People," The Nation, LXX (May 24, 1900), p. 402.

senses, surfeited by civilization, cry out for the strong meat of the jungle, for the scent of raw, dark earth and for the gleam of yellow moonlight on wet, rustling leaves.¹³¹

Only with Virginia did she achieve the clarity which, however much she might decorate and elaborate it with imagery or with epigrams, was the basis of her mature style.

And it seemed to her divinely right and beautiful that, while he should have a hundred other absorbing interests in his life her whole existence should perpetually circle round this single centre of thought. One by one, she lived in anticipation all the exquisite details of their life together, and in imagining them, she overlooked all possible changes that the years might bring, as entirely as she ignored the subtle variations of temperament which produce in each individual that fluid quantity we call character.¹³²

Clarity and ease and simplicity—all intellectual qualities—are excellent in themselves, but a concise style is not necessarily a beautiful or emotional style. The reader may be impressed by Miss Glasgow's firm, competent handling of a smooth and polished style, but he is not likely to be moved by its emotional power. The author herself spoke of beauty in her writing only in connection with the interlude on Thunder Mountain and John Fincastle's return to Ironside.¹³³ While her style in the passage describing Ralph and Ada together on the mountain is good, it does not merit being called "beautiful."

When the sun had risen over the mountains, she left Ralph still asleep and stole out of doors to bathe in the stream.

¹³¹ Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, p. 243.

¹³² Glasgow, Virginia, pp. 156-157.

¹³³ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 213.

Running with bare feet across the grass, she plunged into sparkling water, as cold as ice on her skin, and then, after rubbing her body into a glow, put on her clothes and combed her hair behind the screen of the sycamores. With a radiant face, she went back into the cabin, built a fire of lightwood in the stove, and ran down again to fill a pail with fresh water. On her way from the spring to the cabin, she set the pail down in the dew-drenched weeds and lifted her arms in a gesture of pure delight toward the risen sun. Far away the blue mountains were like clouds on the horizon, and high above the blue clouds were like mountains. Below, through webs of iridescent mist, she could see red or gray roofs and the ripe autumn fields in the smaller valleys.¹³⁴

Obviously the beauty of her prose, even when Miss Glasgow herself asserts it, does not overwhelm the reader. More lyrical is one of the descriptions of broomsedge in Barren Ground.

Bare, starved, desolate, the country closed in about her. The last train of the day had gone by without stopping, and the station of Pedlar's Mill was as lonely as the abandoned fields by the track. From the bleak horizon, where the flatness created an illusion of immensity, the broomsedge was spreading in a smothered fire over the melancholy brown of the landscape. Under the falling snow, which melted as soon as it touched the earth, the colour was veiled and dim; but when the sky changed the broomsedge changed with it. On clear mornings the waste places were cinnamon-red in the sunshine. Beneath scudding clouds the plumes of the bent grasses faded to ivory. During the long spring rains, a film of yellow-green stole over the burned ground. At autumn sunsets, when the red light searched the country, the broomsedge caught fire from the afterglow and blazed out in a splendour of colour. Then the meeting of earth and sky dissolved in the flaming mist of the horizon.¹³⁵

Ellen Glasgow became a competent, a highly competent stylist, but she never rose to ecstasy or sank to despair. Hers is a fine, straightforward, lucid style. It has the intellectual virtues of ease and

¹³⁴ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, pp. 178-179.

¹³⁵ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 3.

clarity, but it lacks emotional power.

Miss Glasgow was able to use the rhythm of her prose effectively. She first attempted to utilize cadence to reflect the action of the story, and these experiments were brief. In The Battle-Ground she gives a description of General Lee's army as the war draws to a close.

Lean, sun-scorched, half-clothed, dropping its stragglers like leaves by the roadside, marching in borrowed rags, and fighting with the weapons of its enemies, dirty, fevered, choking with the hot dust of the turnpike—it still pressed onward, bending like a blade beneath the hand of Lee.¹³⁶

The long, disjointed, meandering sentence, leading irregularly through a series of single adjectives and longer modifying phrases to its subject and verb and then trailing off again with a simile, suggests the disordered and straggling nature of the marching troops. A description of a dance in The Sheltered Life is equally brief.

Whirling, reversing, gliding, dipping, swinging, flowing, dissolving into the music, they waltzed from the end of the back parlour, past the open doors of the hall, where musicians were hidden in palms, to the front windows, which were festooned in roses and smilax.¹³⁷

The series of participles, each ending with an unaccented syllable, creates the smooth flow of the dance.

In more interesting and sustained manner the author expressed the emotions or the personality of her characters through the cadence of the language. In Barren Ground, for example, she employs a rough, broken, and irregular rhythm to express Dorinda's distraught state of mind as

¹³⁶ Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 291.

¹³⁷ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 82.

she recalls the appearance and behavior of her lover Jason, who has just deserted her.

Weak, whining, apologetic, blaming everything and everybody except himself. His hair plastered in damp streaks on his forehead. His eyes, red and blinking, as if he had wept. His hands that were never still; nervous hands, without a firm grip on anything.¹³⁸

The most elaborate, sustained, and interesting use of prose rhythm is found in Vein of Iron. Early in the book Ellen Glasgow tries a bold experiment. She tells the story from the point of view of Ada and of her father, John Fincastle, with the exception of five chapters which reveal the thoughts of the five members of the Fincastle family as they sit around the fireplace at night. Miss Glasgow was proud of her success with this experiment and wrote:

The truth is that it took me months to enter completely into the mental processes of these five different human beings, from the old grandmother down to the child of ten, and to immerse myself in their separate moods and visions. After I had written these chapters, I felt that there was little left for me to learn about the inner lives of my characters. For each point of view, it was necessary to discover or invent an appropriate rhythm.¹³⁹

The first and most effective chapter records the thoughts of Grandmother Fincastle.

Suddenly, without warning, descended upon her a sleep that was not sleep as yet. Her eyes saw; her ears heard; and in her stiff fingers the needles did not slacken. But she was immersed in profound stillness; she rested upon an immovable rock. And about her she could feel the pulse of the manse beating with that secret life which was as near to her as the life in her womb. All the generations

¹³⁸ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 148.

¹³⁹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 181-182.

which had been a part, and yet not a part, of that secret life. The solid roof overhead, the solid floor underfoot, the fears of the night without, the flames and the shadows of flames within, the murmurs that had no voices, the creepings that had no shape, were all mingled now. Weaving in and out of her body and soul, and knitting her into the past as she knitted life into stockings, moved the familiar rhythms and pauses--now--of the house; and moved as a casual wave, as barely a minute's ebbing and flow, in the timeless surge of predestination.¹⁴⁰

This passage has a quiet, a falling rhythm, indeed a nodding rhythm tending to drift away into sleep, into the past. Suddenly toward the end the mood is broken for a moment by the word "now," which is set off from the rest of the sentence and which gives the effect of someone jerking himself awake before sleep overcomes him.

If the rhythm of Grandmother Fincastle's musing becomes quieter and quieter as it becomes dreamily regular, certainly the same cannot be said about the cadence of the passage in which her son, John, the philosopher, thinks.

No man who has to provide for a family, John Fincastle thought, has a right to search after truth. Perhaps not anywhere in the world. Certainly not in America. But were the Renaissance and the nineteenth century in Europe the only ages when men believed that they could discover truth as they discovered a gold mine? When men believed that the search alone was worthy of sacrifice? Missionaries, Mary Evelyn declared, sacrificed their families all the time, but his mother insisted there was a difference when people were sacrificed to a truth that had been revealed.¹⁴¹

Here the rhythm is strong, clear, sharp, and definite. The clean, even movement of the prose reflects the precise logic of John's thought.

¹⁴⁰ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 39.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 40.

John's wife, Mary Evelyn, lets her mind wander in a manner far different from that of her husband.

'I've forgotten something,' Mary Evelyn said under her breath, 'but I can't think what it is.' If she didn't remind herself Saturday night, she would be sure to neglect it on Monday. There was the rent in John's greatcoat; there was the turpentine liniment for Aunt Abigail; there was Ada's best dress to be washed and prettiest hair ribbon to be pressed for the festival—Oh, the new doll's dress! That was what she was trying to think of! Sunday always made a breach in her work; but perhaps she might steal into the closet when they came back from church and look for the pink gingham she had put away, though, to save her life, she couldn't remember where she had put it. It was dreadful the way she forgot things. Her memory was growing worse all the time. Her bringing up was to blame, said Mother Fincastle, who was upwards of seventy and never forgot anything....¹⁴²

The rhythm here is a meandering, flowing one always tending to dissolve away in long sentences, but suddenly punctuated and brought back to a more regular and logical train of thought by Mary Evelyn's recalling that she wanted to make a new dress for Ada's doll.

Meggie Fincastle, John's unmarried sister, thinks over her life in a passage the cadence of which is as regular and steady and as uneventful as her own past has been.

For herself, she had never thought of love-making or marriage. It wasn't that she had been plain or unattractive. She was better-looking than most, especially when she had been plump and fresh, with a neat figure. But she couldn't run after men the way some girls did even in Ironside. In the old days there had not been women enough to go round, and all had been sought after. There were belles among simple people like themselves, as well as in the more distinguished circles of the upper Valley. Mother said it had been different ever since the war, with most of the young men going away to make a livelihood and marrying in

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 45.

strange places. Well, she hadn't worried about that. If the Lord had appointed her to marriage, He would have arranged it all in His own good time. As it was, she had put her hope in little things, and she had been happy. She was the only member of the family who was never low-spirited, not even in the long winters, when sometimes they were snowed in for a week.¹⁴³

The calm and controlled rhythm of this passage suggests Meggie's personality.

The cadence here is the closest to that usually found in Miss Glasgow's writing and reveals the sensible, plain type of character with whom she generally dealt.

Ada, a child of ten, lets her childish fancies find expression in the dancing rhythm of her thoughts.

The taste of sugar is like pinks, Ada thought. It's like verbena and sweet alyssum. If only a taste wouldn't melt and fade as soon as it had gone down! And when you hadn't had sweetness for a long time (Father had waited because he could get coffee and sugar cheaper from a wholesale house over in Doncaster) it tasted different and sharper. She wished pleasant things lasted longer, and other things, like evening prayers when you were sleepy, wouldn't drag on forever. Father wasn't going to read to-night. She wanted dreadfully to hear what happened next in Old Mortality, but Mother had whispered in the kitchen that she mustn't ask him to read. If she couldn't listen to that, she wished they would let her shut her eyes until morning.¹⁴⁴

Jumping lightly from one matter to another, the rhythm ripples, but begins to drag a little as the child becomes tired and drowsy.

Even though Miss Glasgow called attention to her use of prose rhythm in Vein of Iron, critics have not bothered to see what she succeeded in doing with cadence. None has attempted to describe the relationship

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

between the prose style and the personality concerned. Miss Monroe, for example, notes that Miss Glasgow "distinguished five different points of view through the prose cadences...and succeeds in the experiment."¹⁴⁵ The author herself discusses her accomplishment in more detail. Here again is an instance where critics have simply neglected to study Ellen Glasgow's art.

More interesting perhaps than the reveries of the Fincastles as showing the effectiveness of prose rhythm is the opening passage of Vein of Iron.

Children were chasing an idiot boy up the village street to the churchyard.
 'Run, run, oh, what fun!' sang little Ada Fincastle, as she raced with the pursuers. Flushed and breathless, panting with delight, she felt that the whole round world and the short December day were running too. The steep street and the shingled roofs of Ironside rocked upward. The wind whistled as it sped on. Dust whirled and scattered and whirled again. The sunshine was spinning. A bird and its shadow flashed over the winter fields. Clouds flew in the sky. The road beyond the church reared and plunged into the shaggy hills. The hills shook themselves like ponies and rushed headlong among the mountains. The Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies toppled over and tumbled far down into the Valley of Virginia. 'Run, run, oh, what fun to be flying!' Then suddenly the world balanced itself, revolved slowly, and settled to rest. She had stopped.¹⁴⁶

The hurried and breathless cadence gives the effect of running. At the end of the passage the beat slows down quickly as the children cease their chase. The final sentence of three stressed syllables

¹⁴⁵ Monroe, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironist of Manners" in Fifty Years of the American Novel, ed., Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., p. 62.

¹⁴⁶ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 3.

followed by one weak syllable brings the pursuit to a halt. Rime also figures here in the expression, twice used, "run, run, oh, what fun!" Alliteration is used even more prominently: "whole...world," "December day," "steep street," "wind whistled," "sunshine...spinning," "road...reared," and "toppled...tumbled."

Less subtle than Miss Glasgow's use of cadence is her employment of a unifying motif. Recurrent figures of speech or symbols based on a single underlying idea set the tone in several of her novels. In one of her first books, The Deliverance, she tried to use tobacco to give a background and a mood to her story in somewhat the same fashion that James Lane Allen used hemp in The Reign of Law. Both Miss Glasgow and Mr. Allen failed for the same reason: each failed to make sustained use of the crop or to relate it in significant fashion to the plot. Ellen Glasgow proudly quotes a critic who wrote that the book was "'drenched with the smell of tobacco,'"¹⁴⁷ but as the novel progresses the smell becomes the barest perceptible aroma and finally almost fades away. She tried again in One Man in His Time, where she endeavored to establish the similarity between the eighteenth-century English and the twentieth-century Virginian aristocracy by comparing the contemporary men and women to portraits of the earlier gentry. She writes that Corinna Page looked "as if she had stepped out of a portrait by Romney"¹⁴⁸ and that her father, Judge Page, was as "imposing and distinguished as a portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

Although there are a few other figures based on paintings, there are not enough of them to make the idea of the similarity between the eighteenth-century English and the modern Virginian aristocracy clear and sustained.

It is only in Barren Ground and Vein of Iron that Miss Glasgow succeeds in using imagery to create a unified impression or mood. Throughout the earlier novel people are compared to lower forms of life, either animal or vegetable. Thus, a man's skin is said to feel like a "withered leaf"¹⁵⁰ and a girl's face is "as glossy as a chestnut."¹⁵¹ Scattered here and there in the book are many comparable figures of speech.

A frost had blighted her impulse of opposition....¹⁵²

...Her eyes...hard and cold as a frozen lake....¹⁵³

Rugged, gnarled, earth-stained, these men were as impersonal as trees or as transcendental philosophers.¹⁵⁴

Drugged with fatigue, they nodded in a vegetable somnolence. Even in their hours of freedom they could not escape the relentless tyranny of the soil.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 226.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 314.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

His resignation was the earth's passive acceptance of sun or rain.¹⁵⁶

Life was treating her still as if she were a straw in the wind, a leaf on a stream.¹⁵⁷

...The negroes...rose to the funeral as fish to bait...¹⁵⁸

His humble, friendly eyes looked up timidly, like the eyes of a dog that is uncertain whether he is about to receive a pat or a blow.¹⁵⁹

As long as the spell lasted, it had seemed to the child that the farm-house crouched like a beaten hound, in the midst of the brown fields, beneath the menacing solitude.¹⁶⁰

...She was visited again by the image of the house as a frightened thing that waited, shrinking closer to the earth, for an inevitable disaster.¹⁶¹

While she stood there she was visited by a swift perception... that she and her parents were products of the soil as surely as were the scant crops and the exuberant broomsedge.¹⁶²

Miss Glasgow intended to create in the reader "a feeling of intimate kinship with the country."¹⁶³ Her images show man to be an integral part

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 215-216.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 380.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 63.

of nature and to be in harmony with it. As in other novels of the soil like Willa Cather's O Pioneers! (1913), Knut Hamsun's Growth of the Soil (1917), Ladislav Reymont's The Peasants (1924), O. E. Rølvaag's Giants in the Earth (1927), and Pearl Buck's The Good Earth (1931), Miss Glasgow's novel shows man's closeness to the earth and to creatures of the earth. Although the author uses figures of speech based on forms of life lower than the human, she does not degrade man by these comparisons but shows him to be a vital part of nature and of life.

In Barren Ground Ellen Glasgow also makes extensive use of broomsedge as a symbol. That plant represents decay and inertia, for it grows only over exhausted and sterile ground, over barren ground. It is also symbolic of the decay of the people among whom "fortitude had degenerated into a condition of moral inertia."¹⁶⁴ The novel begins with a lyrical description of broomsedge, and the first book is entitled "Broomsedge." That plant nearly engulfs Dorinda when she realizes that she is pregnant though unmarried.

She had risen to her feet, and was turning to look at the clouds in the west, when the broomsedge plunged forward, like a raging sea, and engulfed her. She felt the pain and dizziness of the blow; she heard the thunder of the waves as they crashed together; and she saw the billows, capped with spraylike plumes, submerging the cabin, the fields, the woods, and the silver crescent of the horizon.¹⁶⁵

The heroine has to conquer the broomsedge in order to reclaim her farm, and she has to overcome the human inertia symbolized by that plant in order to make a worthwhile life for herself. Her victory over broomsedge

¹⁶⁴ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 155.

¹⁶⁵ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 118.

is a triumph over life because, as one of her neighbors says: "'Broomsage ain't jest wild stuff. It's a kind of fate.'"¹⁶⁶

Miss Glasgow's symbolism, based on broomsedge, does not harmonize with her imagery, based on nature. The author does two opposing things at once: she uses broomsedge as a symbol of something that must be conquered, and at the same time she shows how close man is to nature. There is a lack of harmony between the ideas of man conquering the broomsedge, which is part of nature, and of man himself being part of nature. Ellen Glasgow says that man, though an integral part of nature, must overcome nature. Broomsedge, a part of nature, is a symbol of man's fate, yet man is also part of nature. Nor can the difficulty be resolved by a subtle distinction between parts of nature: the part that man is in harmony with and the part that man must overcome, for Miss Glasgow just does not make that distinction. Her imagery is excellent; her use of broomsedge as a symbol of fate is excellent; but the mixture of the two is not harmonious.

More artistic is her use of imagery and symbol in Vein of Iron, for there she fuses her ideas and her technique. The opening passage describing the chase of the idiot boy has already been quoted as an outstanding example of prose rhythm used for a particular end. That passage also sets the tone of the entire novel by introducing the idea of man's inhumanity to man. The pursuit motif which begins the story recurs in various forms throughout the entire book. Scarcely has the chase of the idiot, Toby, ended before the event begins to take on deeper significance for Ada.

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Ibid., p. 4.

In a flash of vision it seemed to her that she and Toby had changed places, that they were chasing her over the fields into that filthy hovel. But it wasn't the first time she had felt like this. Last summer she had seen a rabbit torn to pieces by hounds (their own young Horace, for all his noble bearing, was among them) and she had heard it cry out like a baby. She had watched its eyes throbbing with fear and pain, like small, terrified hearts.¹⁶⁷

The opening scene anticipates the action, much later in the book, when Ada, shortly after the birth of her illegitimate child, is pursued through the streets of Ironside by the children of the town.¹⁶⁸ Just as the book begins with the chase of an idiot, it draws to a close as the dying John Fincastle thinks that idiots are following him.

Two generations of blank, grinning faces and staring eyes and driveling mouths danced and shouted round him as they pressed closer and closer. A world of idiots, he thought in his dream. To escape from them, to run away, he must break through not only a throng, but a whole world of idiots....¹⁶⁹

Aware of the numerous pursuits of helpless people, the reader understands that "that chase began many millions of years ago, and it is still going on. It will stop only when the human race becomes civilized."¹⁷⁰

Not all the pursuits depicted in Vein of Iron are of people. Just after learning that the community of Ironside is forcing Ralph to marry another woman, Ada sees her own plight paralleled in the bird-kingdom.

¹⁶⁷ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 222-224.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 389.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

She stared through tears at a soaring hawk, which swooped suddenly, flashed downward like a curved blade in the air, and seized a small bird--or it may have been one of Aunt Meggie's chickens--in its claws before it swept upward and onward. And she felt that the same claws had seized her heart out of her breast, and had swept away with it over the sunny land, over the tranquil blue of the hills.¹⁷¹

The hawk seizing the chicken becomes what Mr. T. S. Eliot calls an objective correlative, "in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."¹⁷² The objective correlative, then, is a symbol, but not an arbitrary one. It must arouse in the reader the same emotion as that created by the act which it symbolizes. The objective correlative, the hawk seizing the chicken, arouses the same anger at cruel injustice that is evoked by the act of Janet's stealing Ralph away from Ada.

The symbol of the pursuit, whether on the human or the sub-human level, indicates the uncivilized, the predatory, and the cruel nature of man; it indicates his nearness to the life of the animals. Like the symbolism, the imagery of Vein of Iron conveys the idea of man's nearness to a lower form of life. In a passage already quoted Ada identifies herself with the pursued Toby and thinks also of a pack of dogs chasing a young rabbit. Several times later in the book she makes the same associations.

But her heart was shivering, she felt, like a frightened hare.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁷² T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays: 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), pp. 124-125.

¹⁷³ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 322.

Was she an idiot fleeing over a twisted path? Was she something soft, warm, furry, with eyes like small, terrified hearts?¹⁷⁴

Other characters are compared to animals. Mr. Black, the minister, has a "long bony nose curved in a beak," and his look is as "defiant as the eye of a caged hawk."¹⁷⁵ A pioneer-woman, who does not actually enter the story, is said, when she reached water after a harrowing flight from Indians, to have "knelt down and lapped it up like an animal."¹⁷⁶ And there are many other comparisons between human and sub-human forms of life.

...Her grandmother moaned like an animal in pain, sinking her proud old head on her chest.¹⁷⁷

Aunt Meggie hopped like a rabbit....¹⁷⁸

Yet he knew, as surely as an animal that slips away from the herd toward finality, that his strength would not fail while he needed it.¹⁷⁹

Maybe we are grasshoppers, she thought, and something bigger will tread us into the ground, and our time will be over.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 337-338.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 379.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

Not only people but inanimate objects and even ideas and feelings take on animal associations.

...A shadow, shaped like the head of a beast, which the screen threw on the wall.¹⁸¹

Round the electric light at the corner a million tiny globes of sleet circled, like frozen moths in an eddying swarm.¹⁸²

...A wild idea darted like a minnow below the surface of Ada's mind.¹⁸³

...Her mind was a cage in which anxiety darted round and round like a squirrel.¹⁸⁴

Suddenly a jagged pain clutched her feet and galloped as madly as a living thing up her legs to her waist.¹⁸⁵

Like the shadow of a crow, the image of Mrs. Waters flapped over Ada's mind and was gone.¹⁸⁶

And Ralph says of the adjustment from military to civilian life: "It was like shedding a dead skin and growing a new one."¹⁸⁷ The effect of these and many similar images is to reinforce the idea, already created by the symbolism of the chase, of man's cruelty, his wildness,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 334.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 287.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 345.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

his closeness to the animal level of life, and the danger of life itself. Human life, for all its thin crust of civilization, is close to the animal level.

In one section of Vein of Iron Miss Glasgow uses a noticeably different type of imagery. The metaphors and similes employed in the episode on Thunder Mountain, where Ralph and Ada steal away for two days of love before he goes to war, contrast with those found elsewhere in the novel. Ada, who is generally compared to a frightened rabbit, here becomes a bird: "Her body, winged and tremulous, seemed as light as a swallow's."¹⁸⁸ The mood of the imagery changes, though not completely. In place of the animal figures, images based on light and color now are dominant.

Within a screen of yellow sycamores, she saw the cabin beside a tiny stream, as bright as quicksilver, which darted over the bare rock.¹⁸⁹

Drawing him with her, she turned and ran into the forest, where the light was splintered by the coloured branches and scattered like jewels over the brown mould and green moss on the ground—square, round, triangular, diamond-shaped, crescent-shaped.¹⁹⁰

Gradually moonlight silvered the sky....¹⁹¹

In the stillness the music of the little stream tinkled like bells. Then, suddenly, it seemed to her that everywhere bells were ringing.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 176.

...His hair still glistening from pearly dew.¹⁹³

The autumn wind, like racing sunlight, had shaken down
a rain of leaves.¹⁹⁴

Yet even in the ecstasy of these two days an undercurrent of fear runs through the minds of the lovers. By living together they are violating the code of pre-marital chastity. Ralph fears the possible consequences to Ada, and she fears that Ralph may be killed in the war. This sense of dread is expressed through symbolism and imagery. The pursuit motif reappears, though in subdued fashion, when Ada says to Ralph: "Do you remember how we used to play we were escaping from Indiana?"¹⁹⁵ Animals come back into the story, but this time in reality, not as figures of speech.

...A fox barked far away....¹⁹⁶

The fox barked again from a nearer distance.¹⁹⁷

'I shan't wake up,' she said, while she unfolded the
covering, 'not if a bear looks in the window.'¹⁹⁸

As the episode on Thunder Mountain draws to a close, the wilder images and references increase in intensity.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

Only the small hidden lives, the creeping furry shapes, within and without the forest--only the scurrying of mice, the burrowing of moles, the shuffling of toads, the scampering of ground squirrels--had inherited the twilight.¹⁹⁹

As the light faded into dusk, the wilderness appeared to creep nearer, but the solitude could not protect them from the dread of separation and the threatened loneliness of to-morrow.²⁰⁰

Outside, she could hear the wind rising; the clouds were flying like witches, ragged and dark against a thin moon; the forest was shaken; leaves whirled past the cabin; the very mountains were loosened and flowed away with the universe.²⁰¹

With Ada's return to Ironside the tone of the book becomes sember once more as she sees "the same trodden dust, the same trash in the gutters" and the idiot carrying slops to the hogs.²⁰²

Thus in Vein of Iron Ellen Glasgow uses what Edwin H. Sauer, discussing the novels of the middle period of Henry James, calls a "pattern of metaphor."²⁰³ This pattern, this repeated use of the same type of imagery, along with the recurring symbol of the pursuit forms the "symbolic structure of the work."²⁰⁴ Miss Glasgow employs imagery

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 191.

²⁰³ Unpublished dissertation (University of Cincinnati, 1951) by Edwin H. Sauer, "Henry James: The Symbols of Morality in the Novels of the Middle Period, 1881-1900," p. 42.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

and symbolism not as decoration but as an integral part of the novel. The imagery consistently based on animal life and the repeated use of the symbol of the pursuit support her idea of the cruelty and the selfishness of human beings, qualities which the author shows more directly by introducing the First World War and by Janet's taking Ralph away from Ada.

Even the title of this book is symbolic. The "vein of iron" in the spirit of man is fortitude or the force of tradition which provides the means of victory over life. The phrase is a metaphor, perhaps the only one, which occurs again and again in Miss Glasgow's novels.²⁰⁵

It is unfortunate for Miss Glasgow's reputation that critics have completely failed to see the very high artistry which she achieved in Barren Ground and, especially, in Vein of Iron. She herself frequently remarked that her reviewers had been "casual." Certainly they have lacked sensitivity. Probably the difficulty is that no first-rate critic has as yet written extensively on Miss Glasgow. Even the most obtuse reviewer can generally find an epigram to quote when the book is full of them, and critics more interested in sociology than in art can always talk about the role of woman in Southern society. But when, at the height of her career, Miss Glasgow wrote a book which uses many of the devices of poetry—cadence, symbolism, imagery—her unimaginative critics were caught completely off guard. Even today, twelve years after the publication of Vein of Iron, they do not realize that she wrote at least one novel which the world

²⁰⁵ Miss Glasgow used the expression "vein of iron" in the following books: Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 141; Life and Gabriella, p. 24; The Builders, p. 169; Barren Ground, p. 89; The Romantic Comedians, p. 116; and They Stooped to Folly, p. 100.

should not willingly let die. In that book the structure, unified though it covers some thirty years; the competent handling of the passage of time by employing waves of narrative, each of which leads on to the next; the two sustained points of view; the excellent character presentation; the utilization of prose rhythm to set the tone of the book and to reveal character; the close-knit union of form and idea through the use of symbol and image; all these elements combine to make that book Miss Glasgow's greatest artistic achievement. Vein of Iron is a minor masterpiece.

Chapter VI

"Beyond Defeat"

Ellen Glasgow remarked that the measure of a great novel is whether or not it serves "to increase our understanding of life and heighten our consciousness."¹ Literary art, as implied in this statement, is therefore more than a matter of technique. If a piece of literature is to attain or even to approach greatness, it must combine form with a serious evaluation of life. Neither the technical accomplishment nor the criticism alone is enough. Sometimes, unfortunately, the two are not found together.

Professor Lionel Trilling remarks in a recent issue of Partisan Review:

The value of form must never be denigrated. But by a perversity of our minds, just as the commitment to a particular matter of literature is likely to be conceived in terms of hostility to form, so the devotion to the power of form is likely to be conceived in terms of hostility to matter, to matter in its sheer literalness, in its stubborn denotativeness.

Miss Glasgow's basic common sense kept her from devoting all of her attention to either form or matter. She handled the form of the novel with increasing skill, even perhaps with brilliancy, and she always had something to say.

A determinist in her thinking, she believed that the individual has little freedom in life. One of her characters, General Archbald, comments on the trivial occurrences which determine a man's fortunes:

¹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 30.

²Lionel Trilling, "W. D. Howells and the Roots of Modern Taste," Partisan Review, XVIII (September-October, 1951), p. 531.

Not an act of God, he told himself (unless a twinge of pain were an act of God), but a toothache had decided his destiny. Had the pain come a day later, just one sunrise and one sunset afterwards, he might have escaped. But falling as it did in that infinitesimal pin point of time, his fate had been imprisoned in a single luminous drop of experience.³

Although most of her characters, like David Archbald himself and Virginia Pendleton and John Fincastle and Asa Timberlake, are doomed to outward failure, Ellen Glasgow's determinism never led to pessimism or supine resignation, but it did lead to irony.

In a world where most people are fated to defeat, the greatest irony of life is that they strive for happiness. Real happiness is perhaps as rare as real unhappiness.⁴ The most consistent theme in Miss Glasgow's novels is this often-futile search for happiness. Although this topic has entered into every one of her books, no critic has seen that it is basic to her thought. The explanation for this oversight probably lies in the fact that few critics have read all of her novels. Most men and women in her books look for happiness in love; some seek it in art. Yet both love and art fail to gratify. The author advanced various suggestions as to how people might be happy. After considering and finally rejecting several notions, she settled on the idea that fortitude and a man's inner strength allow him to be content. A person with these qualities is a civilized person, a moral person, who realizes the importance of the past, of culture, and of conventional morality. In her last few novels she was

³ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 113.

⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

more and more concerned with the fact that modern Americans, both young and old, were seeking happiness outside the pale of convention. She made a number of observations about the culture of contemporary America and was deeply concerned about what she saw.

In their search for happiness most people turn first to love. Love figures in every one of Miss Glasgow's stories, as indeed it does in almost all novels. She shows several different types of love. There is, first of all, a generalized and diffused love of all mankind. Dan Montjoy, hero of The Battle-Ground, experiences this feeling just before a battle.

At that instant he knew that he loved every man in the regiment beside him; loved the affectionate Colonel, with the sleepy voice, loved Pinetop, loved the Lieutenant whose nose he had broken after drill.⁵

This concept of a love for all mankind is highly sentimentalized in The Ancient Law, where Daniel Smith becomes known as "Ten Commandment Smith" because of his evangelistic preaching and his aid given to all who request it. Love of mankind in that novel takes on a definitely religious character.

The faces of the men who had listened to him yesterday returned to his memory; and as he saw them again seated on the rude benches among the pines, his heart expanded in an emotion which was like the melting of his will into the Divine Will which contained and enveloped all.⁶

Smith's uncritical love of everybody eventually leads him to conceal the fact that his daughter has forged a check. For this action he is praised as a "good" and a "brave" man.⁷ In her last novel, In This Our Life, there

⁵Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 236.

⁶Ellen Glasgow, The Ancient Law (New York, 1908), p. 179.

⁷Ibid., pp. 452, 453.

is a situation quite analagous to the one which Smith faces in The Ancient Law. Asa Timberlake's daughter Stanley has killed a small child in an automobile accident. Unlike Smith, Timberlake does not hide his daughter's guilt, but makes her confess it to the authorities. In her later work Ellen Glasgow had no patience with the generalized love of mankind which makes no distinction between good and bad people.

Closely related to this sentimentalized love of mankind is the highly spiritualized love of one person for a member of the opposite sex. The love of Dan Montjoy and Betty Ambler becomes increasingly ethereal as war sweeps over them. When they meet for a few hours after a long separation, they experience only the most delicate emotions. The quality of their feeling is reflected in the tone of the descriptive passages.

Through the spreading beech above a clear gold light filtered down on her, and a single yellow leaf was caught in her loosened hair. He saw her face, impassioned, glorified, amid a flood of sunshine.⁸

Miss Glasgow said much about her revolt from the Southern sentimental tradition, yet this passage creates the same mood as one of Thomas Nelson Page's dialect stories about Virginia.

'An' jes' den de sun crawl roun' de winder shetter an' res' on her like it pourin' light all over her.'⁹

Although Mr. Henry Canby strongly emphasizes Ellen Glasgow's revolt against Southern romantic literature, he once remarked that the beautiful women in

⁸ Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, pp. 319-320.

⁹ T. N. Page, In Ole Virginia, p. 167.

early novels like The Battle-Ground have about them "an aura that suggests Thomas Nelson Page's heroines or the Gibson girls."¹⁰

Soon, however, Miss Glasgow took a different attitude toward love which was too spiritualized. Gabriella turns down an offer of marriage from aristocratic Arthur Peyton and weds George Fowler, who deserts her after they have had two children. For the next twenty years Gabriella thinks of her first lover and persuades herself that she is still in love with him, but in a very different way from that in which she loved George. Her affection for Arthur is "a love so pure, so disembodied, so ethereal that it was liberated from the dominion of flesh."¹¹

It was a higher love, she felt, so much higher, indeed, that it had been too spiritual, too ethereal, to take root in the earthly soil from which her passion for George had sprung.¹²

Thinking that she still cares for him, Gabriella revisits Arthur and finds him a bore. She forgets all about her spiritual love and runs after an Irishman "with a commanding personality."

Miss Glasgow found a vaporous attachment unsatisfactory because she believed that man is a creature of dual nature, of flesh and of mind or spirit. To ignore either side of one's temperament is stupid, perhaps fatal. As one character states the idea:

¹⁰ Henry Seidel Canby, "Ellen Glasgow: Ironic Tragedian," The Saturday Review of Literature, XVIII (September 10, 1938), p. 4.

¹¹ Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 197.

¹² Ibid., p. 254.

'I tell you, there is no bigger fool than the man who, because he possesses a few brains, forgets that he is an animal.'¹³

The two aspects of man's nature must be harmonized, but reason must dominate. In such a love as that which Gabriella felt for Arthur, genuine emotion had been suppressed and replaced by an unrealistic dream of love.

Another type of love which in excess can be unhealthy is mother-love. At first Miss Glasgow looked on this emotion with hearty approval. Daniel Smith sees his wife, Lydia, and their son, Dick, together in a tender scene.

As he passed up the staircase, he glanced into the room, and saw that Lydia and Dick were sitting together before the fire, the boy resting his head on her knees, while her fragile hand played caressingly with his hair. They did not look up at his footsteps, and his heart was so warm with happiness that even the picture of mother and son in the firelit room appeared dim beside it.¹⁴

It was not long, however, before Miss Glasgow decided that a mother's love for her child has less beneficent aspects than appeared at first glance. Mrs. Gay in The Miller of Old Church uses a suffocating type of mother-love to dominate her son, Jonathan. The young man is afraid to announce news of his wedding to Blossom Revercomb because he fears that knowledge of his marriage beneath the family's social position will kill his mother. That lady, protected by her deep selfishness, manages to survive word both of her son's marriage and of his murder. When Milly

¹³Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴Glasgow, The Ancient Law, p. 441.

Burden, rebel against Victorian conventions, informs her mother that she cannot stand any more of her affection, the affronted woman thinks in horror:

Bear mother-love! What an ideal! What an expression! Surely civilization was in imminent danger if the noblest sentiment of the race, and not only of the race but of all sacred and profane literature, had become a burden instead of a blessing to the young.¹⁵

Miss Glasgow was among the first American writers to question the healthiness of extreme forms of mother-love. The Miller of Old Church appeared in 1911. Not until 1927 was Sidney Howard's The Silver Cord produced. The next year saw Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude, in which Charles Marsden's Oedipus complex is an important factor in the plot.

More common than mother-love in Miss Glasgow's novels is that between two members of the opposite sex. This emotion appears in all of her books. Once or twice she advances the idea that common interests and background plus physical desire are necessary for a successful marriage.

Both had passed through the earlier fires of racial impulse; both had been scorched, not warmed by the flames; and both had learned that the only permanent love is the love that is rooted as deeply in thought as in desire.¹⁶

Of all her characters who fall in love, only Ralph and Ada have this attitude.

I hope she [Grandmother Fincastle] has taught me how to live, Ada mused, as if she were smoothing out some

¹⁵ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 209.

¹⁶ Glasgow, The Builders, p. 248.

tumult within, some exultation and overflow of the heart. I hope she has taught me how to make the right kind of wife. There was no fear of poverty in her mind. She was prepared to meet the future on its own terms, and to take what it gave. If only she had Ralph, she could find happiness, and no one could be easier to make happy than Ralph.¹⁷

Ada, however, is unusual. Generally the sole basis for love in Miss Glasgow's novels is physical desire. From The Descendant to In This Our Life her books are crowded with mismatched people whose affection is the result only of a biological instinct. Many of the marriages and love-affairs end in disaster. Akershem kills a man in his strange reaction from an illicit liaison. Mariana and Algarcife are divorced. Jonathan Gay and George Birdsong are murdered. Virginia and Gabriella and Dorinda and Molly and Roy all find themselves deserted. After one dull and another nerve-wracking marriage, Peter Kingsmill commits suicide. Ellen Glasgow often shows the excitement of early love, but behind the rapture stands the ironist saying that this is all folly and will not last. Yet, late in her life, she criticised James Branch Cabell for his concept of love.

It may be true that mortal life is so futile; but we are moved occasionally to question if love is really so frail. Is the power that has combatted death and robbed the grave of its victim nothing more than a physical hunger?¹⁸

This is an amazing comment to come from Miss Glasgow, for, like Cabell, she generally ignored the higher qualities of love and in practically

¹⁷ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 67.

¹⁸ Ellen Glasgow, "The Biography of Manuel," The Saturday Review of Literature, VI (June 7, 1930), p. 1109.

all her books treated it as a "physical hunger."

In spite of the great amount of sexual irregularity which appears in Ellen Glasgow's novels, physical relations never become the dominant interest in her stories and never take on a sensational character. Herschel Brickell once remarked that Miss Glasgow never discussed sex "in terms that could have offended the late Queen Victoria."¹⁹ Mr. Brickell perhaps overestimates the Queen's tolerance, but his comment does indicate the decency and restraint with which Ellen Glasgow always wrote of physical relations.

Since love, as portrayed in her books, is a violent passion which does not endure, it cannot bring happiness. "That love could not confer happiness," is, the novelist writes, "the ultimate tragedy of the human heart."²⁰ Ada in middle age says: "'It was different, but it was love. It was different, but it was happiness.'²¹ Ada, however, contrasts with all other of Miss Glasgow's men and women, of whom the majority by the end of their youth have finished with love. After an unfortunate romance and a dull though satisfactory marriage, Dorinda achieves serenity only when she has put aside all thoughts of another husband.

Dorinda smiled, and her smile was pensive, ironic, and infinitely wise. 'Oh, I've finished with all that,'

¹⁹Herschel Brickell, "Miss Glasgow and Mr. Marquand," The Virginia Quarterly Review, XVII (July, 1941), p. 409.

²⁰Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 172.

²¹Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 350.

she rejoined. 'I am thankful to have finished with all that.'²²

Edwin Mims said that Dorinda by the end of the book had achieved "blessedness."²³ Her attitude, however, suggests not a woman who controls her emotions so much as one who has killed them. Dorinda has turned her back on human relationships; she has tired of life.

Ellen Glasgow's strong emphasis on love as physical desire alone makes for a certain vapidness in many of her characters. They may have manners and morals and minds, but, once the adolescent passion is spent, they lack emotional depth. Too frequently her personages over twenty-five have only mild affections for each other; they all behave like very elderly people. Love fails to bring happiness because Miss Glasgow conceived of that emotion as a brief and burning desire which, once consumed, left no abiding and profound feeling.

In their search for happiness a few people turn to art and beauty. Mariana Musin, the first and most fully developed character of this type, has "an instinctive aversion to things common and of vulgar intent"²⁴ and feels that "an atmosphere of harmony was so necessary to her growth that she seemed to droop and pine in uncongenial environment."²⁵ Once she cries out hysterically to Algercife, her husband: "...I want music.

²² Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 451.

²³ Edwin Mims, "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow," Social Forces, IV (March, 1926), p. 503.

²⁴ Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 29.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

I want art. There is so much that is beautiful, and I want something."²⁶

Quite literally she attempts to make a religion out of her love of beauty.

At midnight she held devotional services all alone, sitting before the piano, bending to the uses of a litany the intellectual rhapsodies of Beethoven or the sensuous repinings of Chopin, while the little red flame sent up praise and incense from dried rose leaves and cinnamon to the memories of dead musicians.

Love of the beautiful, however, does not bring her happiness, and she readily drops her interest in art to marry Algarcife. Miss Glasgow never again drew a character like Mariana. An occasional artist appears in her novels, but is seen as a human being in conformity with the author's usual procedure of studying people as individuals, not as representatives of a profession.

In one of her mature books, The Romantic Comedians, Annabel, Judge Honeywell's young wife, pretends to some interest in art. "All I really care for," she exclaims, "is beauty--well, and perhaps joy, if you could ever find it."²⁸ Her longing is satisfied in the course of a series of visits to the more exclusive Parisian shops and nothing more is heard about beauty.

Ellen Glasgow's own attitude toward art, like her treatment of art and artists in fiction, underwent fundamental changes. At the beginning of her career as a writer she loved the beauty of the countryside and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁸ Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 49.

introduced some romantic and often irrelevant descriptions of nature. This interest in natural beauty is the only phase of her concern with art which critics have ever noted, and, as already pointed out, they resented the intrusion of lyrical descriptions into the narrative. At first Miss Glasgow was suspicious of art created by man as being immoral or an escape from the world of duties and responsibilities. This suspicion of art is a Puritanical one found in literature of the English language from the time of Edmund Spenser on. Puritans believe that art distracts man's attention away from concerns of the spirit to matters of the flesh. Art is just another device of the devil's, and persons interested in art are immoral.

More than a touch of this attitude appears in the thought of Miss Glasgow. Mariana's behavior is quite enough to shock any Puritan. Her interest in art is reprehensible, and her conduct, which wins her jewels if not happiness, becomes scandalous. One sober-minded character, John Driscoil, denounces a fashion sheet as "filth" and an "abomination."²⁹ In The Wheel of Life Laura is gifted with an intuitive understanding of the personalities of other people which is little short of miraculous. When she meets her former rival in love, an opera singer, Laura realizes that "the soul of the woman...had not perished, but was still tossed wildly in the fires of art, of greed, of sensuality."³⁰ No novelist but a Puritan would link together--almost equate--art, greed, and sensuality.

²⁹ Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 259.

³⁰ Glasgow, The Wheel of Life, p. 408.

A different type of criticism of interest in art appears in One Man in His Time, a book of the mature period. Corinna Page, after one of Miss Glasgow's usual unsuccessful marriages, tries her hand at slum clearance. This project ends in disillusion when she discovers that her tenants are subleasing at a five hundred per cent profit. Discouraged with love and reform, Corinna turns to art and starts a little print shop where her friends can drop in to chat and where she can talk to strangers without the necessity of being formally introduced. The charm and beauty of this retreat are developed at some length. The author relates how Stephen Culpepper feels on entering Corinna's establishment.

It was like stepping into another world, he thought, as he inhaled a full breath of the warmth and the fragrance of roses; it was as if a door into a dream had suddenly opened, and he had passed out of the night and the cold into a place where all was colour and fragrance and pleasant magic. The other was the real life--life for all but the happy few, he found himself thinking--this was merely the enchanted fairy-ring where children played at making believe.³¹

Here art is separated from life; it offers an escape from the worries and responsibilities which most people must confront.

That love of art could make one's life enjoyable in any way other than through an unlawful escape from unpleasant reality did not occur to Miss Glasgow until she wrote Vein of Iron. The author's most mature and significant attitude toward beauty is found there. Ada cherishes a blue bowl and a pair of tarnished silver-plated candlesticks.

She thought distantly of the table Mother adorned with flowers or winter berries in the blue bowl she loved, and would let no one else wash, because it was exactly the colour of God's Mountain. The blue bowl had been

³¹ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 40.

one of her wedding presents, but the four silver candlesticks, which she set out even when she had no candles to put in them, had belonged to Great-grandmother Fincastle, the one who had been a Graham. Good food, Grandmother said, needed no trimming. But Mother had a way of living that made everything pretty.³²

Ada's mother, Mary Evelyn, treasures her silver and her china because of what they represent to her.

'Love has been stronger than religion. But they would smile if they knew how much of my courage depends on little things. These little things mean more than themselves. They mean an attitude of soul, a ceremony of living. Your grandmother could never understand that my blue bowl has helped me more than morning prayers. For me, bare Presbyterian doctrine was not enough. I needed a ritual. That is why I have never, not even when we were poorest, let myself think poor. That is why I have never failed to put the crocheted mats on the table, and the candlesticks, with or without candles, and the flowers or berries in the blue bowl.'³³

Miss Glasgow's change from distrust of art to faith in it involves more than a complete reversal of opinion. In most of her novels concern with beauty indicates an immoral, at least a highly unconventional character, or it affords an escape from the mundane cares of daily life for the few who can afford rare and lovely objects. In Vein of Iron, however, the silver-plated candlesticks and the blue bowl are, to Mary Evelyn and her daughter, symbols of a beautiful and dignified way of living. Life is not decorated by these objects; it is ennobled. Beauty helps these women find the courage to face life, a courage which religion is unable to instill in either of them. This concept of the function of

³²Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 29.

³³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

art appears only in the one novel. Few characters in her mature books concern themselves with beauty, and only in Vein of Iron does Ellen Glasgow develop the idea that love of the beautiful is a source of strength.

A liking for art does not, however, really help anyone in her books to find happiness. Ada is happy and has some love of beauty, confined apparently to the bowl and the candlesticks, yet her happiness is not a result of her appreciation of art. Art, like love, does not bring happiness to people. Ellen Glasgow's distrust of love and her suspicion of art reflect the Puritanical strain in her work, a strain which, being less obvious than her satire of Puritanism, has been overlooked by students of her novels.

Despite the same element in her own thought, Miss Glasgow frequently criticises Calvinism as that kind of religion is seen in characters like Mrs. Spade and Mrs. Revercomb and Mrs. McBride. The righteous Mrs. Spade takes life much too seriously for her own comfort or for those about her.

'As I tell Tom--though he won't believe it--the only way to be sartain you're followin' yo' duty in this world is to find out the thing you hate most to do an' then do it with all yo' might.'³⁴

'Yes, ma'am; when I hear of a big misfortune happenin' to anybody that I know, the first question that pops into my head is: "I wonder if they've broke the sixth this time or jest the common seventh?" The best rule to follow, accordin' to my way of thinkin', is to make up yo' mind right firm that no matter what evil falls upon a person it ain't nearly so bad as the good Lord ought to have made it.'³⁵

³⁴ Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 213.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 273.

Regardless of the cruelty implicit in these remarks, Mrs. Spade remains for the reader an amusing figure because, for all her piety, she is able to do little harm. One of the minor characters not woven into the structure of The Deliverance, she stands apart from the plot involving the Blakes and the Fletchers. Since she causes little trouble, the reader can laugh at her narrow religion. Somewhat like Mrs. Spade is Mrs. Revercomb of The Miller of Old Church.

The inflexible logic of Calvinism had passed into her fibre, until it had become almost an instinct with her to tread softly in the way of pleasure lest God should hear. Generations of joyless ancestors had imbued her with an ineradicable suspicion of human happiness, as something that must be paid for, either literally in its pound of flesh or in a corresponding measure of salvation.³⁶

When her son, Abel, tells her of his coming marriage to Molly, Mrs. Revercomb feels that his emotion is "positively immoral."³⁷ Not as harsh as Mrs. Spade, Mrs. Revercomb manages to win the respect if not the sympathy of the reader.

Puritanical figures in the novels of the mature period are less picturesque and more frightening. Possessing the same qualities as Mrs. Spade and Mrs. Revercomb, they act on their beliefs and influence the progress of the story and the fate of the central characters. They thus become powerful and terrifying forces for destruction. Mrs. Burden, who has "always thought happiness immoral,"³⁸ recalls what her parents and her

³⁶ Glasgow, The Miller of Old Church, p. 226.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 269.

³⁸ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 23.

pastor once had to say about a fallen woman.

'This came,' scoffed her father (a plain man, and proud of it), 'as a punishment for round dances and wine-bibbing and bare necks in the evening, and neglecting to hold religious revivals in the spring of the year.' 'This came,' moaned her mother (a simple woman, and proud of it), 'from forgetting your modesty and failing to spurn the brazen instincts of men.' 'This came,' thundered her pastor (the voice of God, though a worm, and proud of it), 'from braving divine wrath and embracing the frivolous dogmas and the Popish ceremonies of the Episcopal Church.'³⁹

Among these Puritans the most other-worldly are, as Ada discovers, the most sadistic.

Yes, religion could be a bitter and a terrible thing! As a child, she had known that Mrs. McBride enjoyed punishing Ralph. Now she felt, with the same aversion, that the older woman found a thrill of cruelty in the Christian symbols of crucifixion and atonement.⁴⁰

No, she couldn't understand, Ada told herself, she could never, no matter how long she lived, be able to understand religion. Ralph's will had been broken and his life ruined because his mother had discovered that salvation was better than happiness.⁴¹

Like Oliver Alden, Miss Glasgow consciously rejected Puritanism, yet paradoxically held to many of the attitudes of that religion. She felt that she "had no right to seek happiness for myself in a scheme of things where so many mortal creatures, both man and beast, were enduring even upon earth the extreme tortures of hell."⁴² Happiness had never found

³⁹ Ibid., p. 189.

⁴⁰ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 201.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴² Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 112.

her, Miss Glasgow once said to an interviewer--a remark that need not perhaps be taken literally.⁴³ Other evidences of Puritanism in her thought will be noted later.

It was the inhumanity of that brand of religion, its cruelty, its willingness to ruin the lives of others for their own good, that angered her more and more. While Mrs. Spade may be amusing, Mrs. McBride is a horrible and terrifying power. Its righteous malignity repelled Ellen Glasgow from Puritanism and from all orthodox religion. Shortly before her death, she stated:

'There is only one sin--to my mind anything else that is called a sin may be an error of manners or a mistake in conduct, but these are not sins--there is only one sin, and that is cruelty.'⁴⁴

One aspect of religious thought conspicuously absent from Ellen Glasgow's work is a concern with the problem of evil. Stanley Timberlake, wrecking the lives of her lover, sister, and husband, killing a little girl in an automobile crash, and then trying to put the blame on a young Negro, is not a malevolent force since the author says of her:

She is not evil; she is insufficient. She is not hard; she is, on the contrary, so soft in fibre that she is ruled or swayed by sensation. She embodies the perverse life of unreason, the logical result of that modern materialism which destroys its own happiness. It was her father who said of her: "I sometimes think she has no real existence apart from her effect upon other people." That was the way I meant to depict her.⁴⁵

⁴³ Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," The Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), p. 137.

⁴⁴ Quoted by Robert Van Gelder in "An Interview with Miss Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (October 18, 1942), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 259.

Neither Stanley nor any other character shows real wickedness. There are no sinister figures in Ellen Glasgow's work—no Madame Merle, no Gilbert Osmond. A writer who rejects religion and thinks cruelty the only sin will scarcely be deeply interested in evil.

Far more important in her novels than evil is the presence of a life-force. This power appears indistinctly in a number of Ellen Glasgow's books and figures most prominently in Vein of Iron. The author's attitude toward that power is almost religious, though certainly not Christian, for in no other novel are Miss Glasgow's remarks about Christianity so bitter as they are here or her characters acting on Christian principles so cruel. Indeed Christian conduct seems at variance with this power. The religious conventions of Ironside demand that Ralph McBride marry Janet Rowan when he is found in her bedroom one night even though he has been tricked into going there. But the life-force does not concern itself with man's ideas of morality, for it lies beyond considerations of good and evil.

'I thought being good mattered. But it doesn't. It doesn't matter to life--it doesn't matter to God.'⁴⁶

Christianity is harsh. It justifies Ada's loss of Ralph as a trial of her faith in God.

'The only way to spoil a life is to take away God's grace, and nobody but God Himself can do that.'

'And God wouldn't, Grandmother, not the God I believe in.'

'Only as a trial of faith, my child.'

Ada sprang to her feet with a laugh that had begun as a sob. 'Then I'd better go up and put on something old,' she said. 'This is the only good dress I have, and

⁴⁶Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 123.

a trial of faith would certainly ruin it.⁴⁷

Religious thinking decrees that Ralph be made to suffer for fathering Ada's illegitimate child.

Grandmother's face had turned to stone. 'He should be made to feel remorse. He should be made to suffer for his sin.'⁴⁸

Life sweeps people along with it. Like Thomas Hardy, Miss Glasgow conceives of this power as neither cruel nor beneficent but indifferent to the happiness of the individual. The life-force gathers to itself all life, past and present, human and animal. Even that unrelenting Presbyterian Grandmother Fincastle senses this force.

And about her she could feel the pulse of the manse beating with that secret life which was as near to her as the life in her womb.⁴⁹

Ada, when she is a young child, feels quite close to this power.

Grandmother thought it was only silliness to pretend that things like trees and dolls had real feelings.⁵⁰ But they may have, she thought; you never can tell.

It is an omnipresent and a very mysterious influence.

No living thing moved in the landscape. Only the long shafts of sunlight were alive with the stir of doomed insects--or was it the thin drift of pollen?--not yet overtaken by winter, a vibration so faint, so fleeting, and yet so close, that it seemed scarcely louder than the humming within her ears.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 207.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 199.

Then, gradually, while the faint reverberations persisted, she became aware that activity was no longer suspended, that the breath of life was flowing back into the house. A board creaked, a clock struck, a door opened and shut, there was an almost inaudible movement, a slow pulsation, from the cellar below to the closed rooms overhead. As the pulsations grew longer, all the scattered threads of sound seemed to be gathered into a single strand of existence.⁵²

This force continues from generation to generation. John Fincastle I, Ada's great-great-grandfather, experienced it when "the mood of the wilderness flowed into him and ebbed back again."⁵³ Her ancestress Martha Tod, once married to an Indian whom her brothers murdered, also felt this power.

No one, not even her mother, had ever won her confidence again, or heard her speak of her life with the Shawnees. But as long as she lived, after her marriage to an elder in the church, she had suffered from spells of listening, a sort of wildness, which would steal upon her in the fall of the year, especially in the blue haze of weather they called Indian summer. Then she would leap up at the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox and disappear into the forest. When she returned from these flights, her husband would notice a strange stillness in her eyes, as if she were listening to silence.⁵⁴

Ada herself frequently feels this life-force, and never more strongly than at the time of the birth of her own son.

The steadfast life of the house, the strong fibres, the closely knit generations, had gathered above, around,

⁵² Ibid., p. 152.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

ink back
-- 55

underneath. She might sink back now, cradled in this blessed sense of security.⁵⁵

This primitive and basic power cannot be comprehended by man's reason, for it is much older than the mind. To live in harmony with this life-force man must, as both Ralph McBride and John Fincastle say, live without thinking.

If Ironside lacks the sombreness of Egdon Heath, the reader does feel something of Thomas Hardy's attitude in this book. Both writers reject Christianity. For Hardy, that religion, as symbolized in Christian Cantle of The Return of the Native, is virtually impotent and unable to meet life on the bleak moors. For Miss Glasgow, Christianity is vicious. Both authors believe that man finds contentment in the simplest way of life: Clym in cutting furze, John Fincastle in talking to his poor and uneducated neighbors. Both feel that the past still lives. Hardy mentions Celtic burial mounds, and Ellen Glasgow brings the history of several previous generations into her story. Both feel that some vague but powerful force drives life onward.⁵⁶ Although reviewers have spoken very briefly of Ellen Glasgow's similarity to Hardy, they have generally mentioned the two authors together as regionalists. To what extent Miss Glasgow is a regionalist or local colorist and how she differs from Hardy in that respect has already been considered. More significant is their similarity of thought--their determinism and their feeling of a driving

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that a number of Miss Glasgow's novels use the word "life" in the title: The Wheel of Life, Life and Gabriella, The Sheltered Life, and In This Our Life.

power behind life.⁵⁷

Though Ellen Glasgow may have been tempted to substitute faith in an impersonal life-force for a more orthodox Christian belief, in her early solutions to the problem of how to be happy she advances ideas which indicate the influence of conventional religious thought. Critics have lacked interest in tracing the development of Ellen Glasgow's thought and have completely failed to realize how close many of her ideas are to those held by some Christians. Even Miss Monroe, who attempts to give a "Christian appraisal" of the novelist, does not see the religious influence on her thought. Miss Glasgow suggests three ways by which one can achieve happiness; first, by turning away from it and doing one's duty; second, by self-sacrifice; and, third, by work. Although the author at first advocates these solutions with confidence, she finally rejects each of them.

The stern voice of the daughter of God is heard loudly in the early novels. Father Algarcife tells his congregation that "it is good for a man to do right, and to leave happiness to take care of itself."⁵⁸ In a spirit of self-dedication Daniel Smith of The Ancient Law decides to lead a "life which would find its centre not in possession, but in

⁵⁷There is need of a thorough study of the relationship of Miss Glasgow's art and thought to those of Thomas Hardy, as well as to those of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather. This study shows that a close similarity does exist, but can only indicate in a general way where those similarities are to be found.

⁵⁸Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 316.

surrender, which would seek as its achievement not personal happiness, but the joy of service."⁵⁹ Administering to the needs of others does finally bring happiness to Smith though he has not sought it. "Happiness is like everything else," explains the youthful writer, "it is only when one gives it back to God that one really possesses it."⁶⁰ Even more content is Mrs. Pendleton, Virginia's mother.

In spite of her trials she was probably the happiest woman in Dinwiddie, for she had found her happiness in the only way it is ever won--by turning her back on it.⁶¹

Duty, as Susan Treadwell discovers, is more sublime than love.

Love, which had seemed to her last night the supreme spirit in the universe, had surrendered its authority to the diviner image of Duty.⁶²

The ideas of doing one's duty and of turning away from happiness are closely related. Virginia Pendleton soon finds that fulfilling her obligations is a pleasure and that, without expecting it, she has stumbled onto happiness.⁶³

The influence of Puritanical thought is apparent in this concept. In his essay Characteristics Thomas Carlyle, typical spokesman for

⁵⁹ Glasgow, The Ancient Law, p. 61.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 326.

⁶¹ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 112.

⁶² This statement is omitted from the Virginia Edition of Virginia. It is found on page 257 of the original edition.

⁶³ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 254.

nineteenth-century Puritanism, advocates the anti-selfconscious way of life: happiness can be found only if it is not made an end in itself.⁶⁴

And in Sartor Resartus, adapting Johann von Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, he writes: "'Do the Duty which lies nearest thee,' which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer."⁶⁵

Ellen Glasgow, however, never shows that a person who forgets about happiness and concentrates on duty is content. She insists often enough that such people are happy, but she never makes them do or say anything to convince the reader of their joy.

One feels the spirit of Puritanism in Miss Glasgow's notion that happiness may be found through self-sacrifice, that there is a quality more important to man than his happiness. In "The Everlasting Yea" Carlyle talks about the importance of "Annihilation of Self (Selbst-tödtung)"⁶⁶ and quotes Herr Teufelsdröckh as saying that "'there is in man a HIGHER than Love of Happiness: he can do without Happiness, and instead thereof find Blessedness."⁶⁷ Roger Adams of The Wheel of Life might be a diluted version of the stormy, German professor.

To give one's self! Was not this final surrender of the soul the beginning of all faith as of all love!⁶⁸

⁶⁴Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (New York, 1899), III, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁵Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (Boston, 1897), ed., Archibald MacMechan, p. 177.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 174.

⁶⁸Glasgow, The Wheel of Life, p. 294.

Adams sacrifices his career and his personal life to his faithless wife. For this action his friends consistently speak of him as "saintly." The idea of self-sacrifice lies at the very heart of Virginia. The heroine gives up her interest in clothes, in her former companions, in her whole earlier way of life in order to devote herself wholly to caring for her husband and children. Once when she goes horse-back riding with Oliver and some friends, she feels guilty of neglecting the babies.

...Her conscience reproached her so bitterly at the thought that she was seeking pleasure away from the children that she hurried homeward across the fields before the others were ready to turn.⁶⁹

A few days later her son falls ill, and Virginia wonders:

Might not Harry's illness, indeed, have been sent to punish her for her neglect? A shudder of abhorrence passed through her as she remembered the fox-hunt....⁷⁰

After a life of complete self-effacement, Virginia is deserted by her husband, but the author can say of her:

Of the two, perhaps because she had ceased to wish for anything for herself, she was happier than Oliver.⁷¹

Gabriella, although in many ways unlike Virginia, shares for a time the latter's propensity for self-abnegation. "A passion for self-sacrifice" possesses her like "the piercing sweetness of religious ecstasy."⁷² In her maturity Gabriella nearly ruins her own chances for a second marriage by devoting all her energy to caring for her children, who do not appreciate

⁶⁹ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 238.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 357.

⁷² Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 20.

her devotion. Finally Mr. O'Hara points out that she is wasting her own life and ruining that of her children by her continuous self-sacrifice. Her friend Polly, a minor character, has always served other people and has thereby attained "the spiritual serenity...of a saint."⁷³

The difficulty with this idea that self-sacrifice leads to happiness is its failure to work. Virginia is finally deserted. Gabriella, abandoned by her first husband, finds happiness only after she ceases giving herself for others and begins to live her own life. Her friend Polly and Roger Adams achieve, the reader is told but not convinced, a kind of bloodless sainthood, a state suggesting beatitude more than happiness, and certainly one which cannot be set up as a possible goal for most people. Ellen Glasgow herself became critical of self-sacrifice as a sure road to happiness. Her first reaction appears in Life and Gabriella, for there the heroine discovers that self-effacement does not bring contentment. The author is dissatisfied with "self-sacrifice that is capable of everything but self-discipline."⁷⁴ In a later book Corinna Page scoffs at the "mock heroics" of self-sacrifice.⁷⁵ Roger Adams and Virginia and, at first, Gabriella lack discriminating intelligence and control in their zeal. Possessed by the ideal of giving themselves, they never stop to ask whether their sacrifice will contribute anything to the welfare of the person for whom they make it or whether that individual is

⁷³Ibid., p. 270.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 145.

⁷⁵Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 372.

worthy of it.

The third way to win happiness, suggests Ellen Glasgow, is through work, hard, constant, steady work. Once again her idea echoes the thunderous voice of Carlyle.

...Here or nowhere is thy Ideal; work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free....Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work.⁷⁶

In The Builders Caroline Meade after her broken engagement finds that "work had been the solution of her problem."⁷⁷ Later she is advised by David Blackburn that "work, not wealth, brings happiness."⁷⁸ Miss Glasgow, however, quickly rejected the notion that work itself can bring any very deep satisfaction. The Oakley family made a fetish of hard labor until "the habit had degenerated into a disease."⁷⁹ Dorinda ultimately wins happiness or at least the contentment of resignation, but hard toil is not responsible for her state of mind; her parents worked hard too, but their reward was certainly not happiness. Hard work like self-sacrifice too often becomes a mere habit. Neither Virginia's self-abnegation nor Mrs. Oakley's unresting labor was guided by any gleam of intelligence.

In the search for happiness Miss Glasgow finally turned her attention

⁷⁶ Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, pp. 178-179.

⁷⁷ Glasgow, The Builders, p. 26.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

⁷⁹ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 33.

to those qualities which make for a civilized man--kindness, a sense of continuity with the past, and fortitude. In Phases of an Inferior Planet Algarcife observes that "to be civilized is to shrink as instinctively from inflicting as from enduring pain."⁸⁰ The theme of gentleness reappears in the mature novels. Aunt Agatha, one of the fallen women of They Stooped to Folly, thinks:

It is horrible to be hunted. When human beings are civilized, they will stop hunting things to death. What would they think of a God that hunted men with immortal hounds? Yet they hunt animals that way. For pleasure--merely for pleasure. And women. They used to hunt fallen women, and witches too, as cruelly as they hunt animals now.⁸¹

Agatha's statement recalls the chase and pursuit theme which runs throughout Vein of Iron, and it also suggests George Birdsong of The Sheltered Life, a mighty hunter of ducks, who "was never so happy...as when he had just killed something beautiful."⁸² David Archbald, one of Miss Glasgow's fullest portraits of the civilized man, hates cruelty to animals or to people, but is scarcely optimistic about abolishing it.

Well, the wonder in every age, he supposed, was not that most men were savage, but that a few men were civilized. Only a few in every age, and these few were the clowns in the parade.⁸³

⁸⁰Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 47.

⁸¹Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 140. Aunt Agatha's remarks perhaps indicate Miss Glasgow's reaction to Francis Thompson's The Hound of Heaven. Comment on poetry is exceedingly rare in Ellen Glasgow's writing though she quotes two lines from William Wordsworth's The Prelude in Vein of Iron and the title of her last novel, In This Our Life, comes from the same poem.

⁸²Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 282.

⁸³Ibid., p. 108.

No truly civilized man stands alone in his age, but feels a continuity between the past and the present. That relationship may be expressed visibly in institutions which have come down from an earlier time or in customs and traditions which have survived. Even Nicholas Burr, ambitious son of a tenant-farmer, feels that the past is living as he steps onto the campus of William and Mary College.

When he reached the heavy iron gate of the college he swung it open and entered the grounds....For the first time those grim walls, which had been thrice overthrown and had risen thrice from their ashes, impressed him with the triumphant service they had rendered in the culture of his State. He saw it as it was, a sacred skeleton, an honourable decay. The illustrious hands that had procured its ancient charter seemed still to wave a ghostly benediction over its ancient learning. Clergy and burgesses, council and governor, planters of Virginia and bishops of London, had stood by at its birth. It was the fruit of the union of the old world and the new, and it had waxed strong upon the milk of its mother before it turned rebel. Later, to its younger country, it had sent forth its sons as statesmen who gave glory to its name. And through all its history, it had overcome calamity and defied assault. Thrice it had fallen, and thrice it had re-arisen.⁸⁴

Burr is also influenced by the more personal past of his own ancestors. Although a poor white, he has had a relative who was something of a scholar and who seems to keep alive in his descendant the desire for knowledge.

On the unearthly whiteness of the wall he beheld the pictured vision of that other student of his race, the kinsman who had lived toiling and had died learning.⁸⁵

The idea of the past as a source of strength is developed more fully

⁸⁴ Glasgow, The Voice of the People, pp. 103-104.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 189.

in Vein of Iron than in any other of Miss Glasgow's novels. Although three, really four generations, counting Ada's son, are alive in the book, the three generations of Fincastles who resided in Ironside before the story begins are constantly referred to and almost become figures of the novel. This sense of the past is conveyed most strongly through the old manse where the family lives. Everything in the house is old; even the coffee mill "had been used every morning and evening, except in wartime, for the last century."⁸⁶ The strong bonds with the past constantly draw the family away from Queenborough and back to the little village in the mountains. When Ada and Ralph do return, the sense of security and continuity is restored.

She had a sense, more a feeling than a vision, of the dead generations behind her. They had come to life there in the past; they were lending her their fortitude; they were reaching out to her in adversity. This was the heritage they had left. She could lean back on their strength; she could recover that lost certainty of a continuing tradition.⁸⁷

Ada draws courage from the past, and that is the most important quality which the civilized person needs in order to face life. A few critics have noted that Miss Glasgow considered fortitude essential.

J. Donald Adams remarked:

Every novelist as deeply intelligent as Ellen Glasgow must view the world with irony; but irony with nothing beyond it is defeat, and 'courage,' she once observed,

⁸⁶ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 115.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 394.

'is the only lasting virtue.'⁸⁸

Fred Lewis Pattee also mentions the place of courage in her novels; "The word," he writes, "rings through volumes of her work."⁸⁹ In view of the very strong emphasis which the novelist put on fortitude it is surprising that no scholar has tried to see what place that quality has in her concept of the civilized man.

Ellen Glasgow indicates briefly the value of courage in her early books and develops it strongly, almost didactically, in her mature novels. Eugenia Battle says: "'All the rest is courage....'"⁹⁰ As Dan Montjoy in The Battle-Ground runs away from his grandfather's plantation, he realizes that Betty, whom he loves, is a courageous woman.

The hand that had held him back when he would have gone out blindly in his passion was the hand of a woman, not of a girl, of a woman who could face life smiling because she felt deep in herself the power to conquer it.⁹¹

Roger Adams displays the same quality.

To live at all had been for him a matter of fine moral courage, and his light, delicate, emaciated, yet dauntless figure was in itself the expression of a resolute will to endure as well as to exist.⁹²

⁸⁸J. Donald Adams, "A New Novel by Ellen Glasgow," The New York Times Book Review, (September 1, 1935), p. 1.

⁸⁹Pattee, The New American Literature, p. 259.

⁹⁰Glasgow, The Voice of the People, p. 152.

⁹¹Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 170.

⁹²Glasgow, The Wheel of Life, pp. 46-47.

In these early novels the importance of courage does not receive as much stress as in the mature books. Gabriella is a brave woman and "despised people who submitted to circumstances, who resigned themselves to necessity, as if resignation were a virtue instead of a vice."⁹³ She once remarked: "Happiness and courage. I put courage first--before everything."⁹⁴ It is a quality, as Corinna Page discovers, which stands by people throughout their entire lives.

'I have had a mean life; but it isn't over yet, and I may make something better of the rest of it,' she thought. 'At least I have fighting blood in my veins, and I will never give up.'⁹⁵

When one of her weak friends remarks that "there ought to be something more permanent than love for one to live by," Corinna emphatically assures her: "There is something else.... There is courage."⁹⁶ Along with courage, as Dorinda Oakley knows, goes an absence of self-pity.

Her only hope, she felt, lay in the dogged instinct which told her that when things got as bad as they could, they were obliged, if they changed at all, to change for the better. There was no self-pity in her thoughts. The unflinching Presbyterian in her blood steeled her against sentimentality.⁹⁷

Dorinda conquers life because she faces it bravely.

⁹³ Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 144.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

⁹⁵ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 103.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 296-297.

⁹⁷ Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 172.

She realized, without despair, that the general aspect of her life would be one of unbroken monotony. Enthusiasm would not last. Energy would not last. Cheerfulness, buoyancy, interest, not one of these qualities would last as long as she needed it. Nothing would last through to the end except courage.⁹⁸

In The Sheltered Life Ellen Glasgow modifies her idea of courage. Eva admired and finally married George Birdsong because of his courage, but it was a physical bravery alone, the kind that allowed George to rush into a burning building and carry out a Negro baby. Such courage is not enough to enable a man to face life. What George lacks is fortitude, the power to "stand things."⁹⁹ Realizing that "courage alone...was not sufficient,"¹⁰⁰ General Archbald believes that "fortitude will be the last thing to go."¹⁰¹ The theme of fortitude runs through Vein of Iron, and there it is allied with the idea of the importance of a vital interest in living, of an affirmation of life itself.

To her father, Ada knew, death was a part of life, to be accepted with the animal faith which was nobler than vain conflicts with nature. To her grandmother, death was an act of God, and so justified. Yet they both valued existence; they had lived more happily because they had believed, each in a different way, that life was something more than mere living.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

⁹⁹ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 160.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁰² Glasgow, Vein of Iron, pp. 143-144.

Even after her loss of Ralph, Ada feels that she can "still love life and enjoy it."¹⁰³ Fusing her belief in the importance of endurance and of the affirmation of life, Miss Glasgow writes: "Then fortitude, which lies beyond courage, would renew itself from some inexhaustible spring of vitality."¹⁰⁴ The "inexhaustible spring" from whence comes the power of endurance is the life-force, which has already been discussed. The man of fortitude, the happy man, is the one who affirms life and thus is in harmony with it. Such a man has reached a state "beyond defeat."¹⁰⁵

In Miss Glasgow's novels a number of brave men affirm life. In her second book she says of her hero, Anthony Algarlife: "He had not loved beauty or youth; he had loved that impalpable something which resists all ravages of decay--which rises triumphant from death."¹⁰⁶ Only the "inner forces of his nature" have the power to affect the life of Nicholas Burr of The Voice of the People.¹⁰⁷ Most fully portrayed of the early characters who face life courageously and love it is Uncle Tucker in The Deliverance; about him the author writes:

...Tucker was a civilized soul in a world which, by and large, is not, and may not ever become, civilized. His

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰⁵Ellen Glasgow tells in A Certain Measure (p. 264) that she planned to write a sequel to In This Our Life entitled Beyond Defeat.

¹⁰⁶Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 306.

¹⁰⁷Glasgow, The Voice of the People, p. 286.

true companions in my books are General Archbald in The Sheltered Life and John Fincastle in Vein of Iron. This rare pattern of mankind has always attracted me as a novelist. I like to imagine how the world would appear if human beings were really civilized, not by machinery alone, but through that nobler organ which has been called, the heart in the intellect. My portrait of Tucker shows an immature grasp of my subject; and he is not entirely free from the quixotic idealism which clashed with decadent sensationalism at the end of the century. Yet his crutch also was firmly planted on the common ground; and this is as much perhaps as one has the right to expect from any romantic philosopher.¹⁰⁸

In the mature novels come stalwart characters like Dorinda Oakley, General Archbald, and John Fincastle. About the latter Miss Glasgow makes an important comment.

The serenity in his face bore that inner warmth which proceeds less from a state of mind than from a climate of soul. One was always sure, Ada thought, watching him while he pushed the papers aside, of a meaning, a purpose, in whatever he said or did. He had not acquired fortitude, she felt, he was fortitude.¹⁰⁹

Here the author goes beyond fortitude to the idea of an inner serenity. Man can and must, if he is to be happy, lead an inner life which is not dependent on external circumstances. Disappointment in one's career, a marriage that does not come up to expectations, other failures in life are compensated for by the inner life. John Fincastle, dying of hunger and exhaustion, says that he has had a good life and a happy one because through fortitude and affirmation of life he has lived an inner existence untouched by the vicissitudes of the external world which neither he nor any other individual can control. His happiness is "the only kind that

¹⁰⁸ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁹ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 90.

is safe. People can't break in on it."¹¹⁰ Such happiness is secure because, as his daughter explains, the core of life is in the heart, and his wife adds: "It is only in the heart...that anything really happens."¹¹¹

Miss Glasgow concludes that felicity is not to be found in love or in art. It is not to be won by mechanically doing one's duty or by indiscriminate self-sacrifice or by hard work that becomes a habit. Only the man who is kind, who has a sense of continuity with the past, who loves life, and who faces it with fortitude can be happy. He must lead an inner life where the things that happen to his spirit are more important than the uncontrollable events of the outer world.

The novelist's solution to the problem of how to live is, of course, a non-religious one and rests primarily on reason. Miss Glasgow is not perhaps entirely consistent, for the acceptance of life would appear to be more a matter of instinct than of intellect. She allows emotion to play but a small role in her final concept of happiness in spite of her remark that the core of life is within one's heart. The heart or emotion has little part in the happiness of men like Fincastle or Archbald, who are her fullest portraits of happy men. General Archbald's marriage proves a failure and a disappointment. John Fincastle remains, for all his strength and all his gentleness toward his mother, wife, daughter, and grandson, rather cold and forbidding. He gives no indication that his personal relationships bring him nearly the satisfaction that his

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 165.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 163.

inner life does. Ada finds both love and happiness, but just how she manages to combine those two qualities, which in Miss Glasgow's novels seem irreconcilable, never becomes clear. Ada does not lead the intense inner life enjoyed by her father, and her happiness impresses the reader as being more usual, almost more normal, than that of John's. When Ellen Glasgow said that the core of life is in the heart, she might better have said, as she did in one of her books, in "the heart in the intellect."

The characters whom she shows as happy are generally elderly. Fincastle is an old man at the time of his death and seems happiest when oldest; Archbald is in his eighties; Dorinda is well into middle age at the close of the novel. The implication is that happiness comes when all passion is spent, that only when one has escaped from the excitement of life--from concern with poverty or with art or with hate or love or indeed from any close personal or emotional ties--does happiness arrive. Happiness can be won through the inner life of the mind, but at the sacrifice of emotion and of human relationships. Her most contented people achieve their blissful state only after they have cut themselves off from the world: Dorinda lives with the land, Archbald with his memories, Fincastle with his philosophic idealism, but each is isolated from the world of men and women. At the very center of Ellen Glasgow's thought lies the paradox that a man must affirm life and face it with fortitude, yet that he wins happiness only by shutting himself off from other people and leading an inner life.

The concept of the civilized man who loves life, faces it with fortitude, yet leads an inner existence forms the essence of Miss Glasgow's attitude toward life. Yet this concept has gone unrecognized by her

critics. Some have talked rather glibly about the importance of courage; others have been fond of saying that she herself was a "civilized" author. Yet no one of them has tried to see the relationship, not always a logical and consistent one, among courage, affirmation of life, an inner existence, and happiness.

Although happy people like Dorinda Oakley and David Archbald and John Fincastle lead an inner life apart from society, they abide by the established moral code. They consider morality and civilization as practically synonymous. This close relationship between convention and ethics appears in Miss Glasgow's earliest novel, The Descendant. John Driscoll, the same person whose disapproval of art has already been noted, declares: "...Your fight against conventions is nothing more or less than a fight against morality."¹¹² Equally clear is her attitude in another early novel in which a minor character states: "I believe in the old conservative goddess of our fathers--Freedom shackled by the chains of respectability."¹¹³ Discussing political as well as personal ethics, David Blackburn remarks:

'If the American Republic survives, it will be because it is founded upon the level of conscience--not upon the peaks of inspiration.'¹¹⁴

'We hear a great deal to-day about the personal not counting any longer; yet the fact remains that the one enduring corner-

¹¹² Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 142.

¹¹³ Glasgow, Phases of an Inferior Planet, p. 250.

¹¹⁴ Glasgow, The Builders, p. 109.

stone of the State is the personal rectitude of its citizens."¹¹⁵

David Archbald realizes the need for a code of morality: "The longer I live, the more I realize that we lack moral indignation. Not moral hysteria, which springs from cruelty, but sober indignation."¹¹⁶ From another novel Asa Timberlake almost seems to answer the General: "Well, anyway, the faculty of moral indignation isn't all that it used to be, and I doubt whether it ever exerted an undue influence in human affairs."¹¹⁷ Although disillusioned about the effectiveness of moral indignation, Asa "can't help harboring the absurd notion that there is a dignity attached to the state of man"¹¹⁸ and still clings to "that blind instinct for decency which mankind had picked up and lost, and picked up again, between lower and upper levels of barbarism."¹¹⁹ Man is accountable, presumably to himself and to other people, for his actions. "I am inclined to believe," says John Fincastle, "that a man may be free to do anything he pleases if only he will accept responsibility for whatever he does."¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 278.

¹¹⁶ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 277.

¹¹⁷ Ellen Glasgow, In This Our Life (New York, 1941), p. 197.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 213.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 434-435.

¹²⁰ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 62.

Morality in Ellen Glasgow's novels is defined, therefore, by codes of behavior rooted in the ideas of personal dignity and of individual responsibility. Only within the limits of orthodox morality may people find happiness. Searching outside may bring wealth, but not joy. In the novels of her mature period Miss Glasgow talks frequently about the claim which various people advance to "the right to be happy." In these books she discusses the relation between morality and happiness, but she is not thinking of happiness in quite the same sense as when she says that Dorinda Oakley, David Archbald, and John Fincastle are happy because they face life with fortitude, love life, and lead an inner existence free from the turmoil of the daily world. Those rather Olympian characters are her happiest people, but they live in a very rarified atmosphere. Happiness of a less exalted kind, the type which is satisfied with a job and a loving family, may be won by other and less unusual people. Always, however, the search must be kept within the pale of established morality, for it is only there that felicity is to be found. The admirable characters in her novels accept personal responsibility and do not claim that their right to happiness involves the privilege of being cruel to other people. Gabriella, the first woman to assert a demand for happiness, observes: "I have a right to be happy, but it depends on myself."¹²¹ Judge Honeywell's sister, Edmonia, who has led a somewhat irregular life, explains her attitude: "...I've always believed that happiness, any kind of happiness that does not make someone else miserable, is meritorious."¹²²

¹²¹ Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 265.

¹²² Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 158.

Milly Burden believes that she has a right to be happy as long as she plays fairly.¹²³ Aunt Meggie Fincastle tells Ada that pleasure is good if it is not selfish.¹²⁴ Ralph and Ada in their search for happiness violate the rule of pre-marital chastity, but they do so fully aware of the possible social consequences. Ada explains the reason for their action without any particular attempt to justify it.

'We wanted to be right. We meant well. It wasn't as if we had been strange, or wild, or bad, or dissatisfied with goodness. We might have been good and happy all our lives if only people had let us alone.'¹²⁵

Unlike Ada and Ralph, who have some excuse for disregarding convention, many people of the twentieth century, Miss Glasgow feels, have no concern at all with moral standards. Stanley Timberlake of In This Our Life defends her conduct by declaring: "'We have a right to be happy.'¹²⁶ Unlike Gabriella, Edmonia, Molly, Meggie, and Ada, Stanley says nothing about any responsibilities which she may have, and her frantic pursuit of happiness is conducted at the expense of other people. Too many modern Americans, the author believes, are like Stanley and reject the moral code and with it all that the civilized man believes in. Such persons have a "sparrow vision of life" because they are selfish and predatory. Instead of fortitude these happiness-hunters possess only a set of slogans about

¹²³ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 22.

¹²⁴ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 192.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 210.

¹²⁶ Glasgow, In This Our Life, p. 96.

the "right to happiness" and the importance of "self-development." Finding life too strong for them, they deny responsibility for their behavior and indulge in self-pity. Numerous characters cry out, "It wasn't my fault," and waste whatever power they may have in self-commiseration. Jenny Blair Archbald, for example, who "had never learned how to bear things alone,"¹²⁷ refuses to accept any blame for allowing herself to fall in love with George Birdsong and for the disaster which follows because she does not resist that infatuation. General Archbald has only contempt for George after that irresolute man tells him how sorry he feels for himself. "It was incredible; it was distressing; it was uncivilized."¹²⁸ Archbald believes that George wears "too thin a veneer of civilization."¹²⁹ The civilized man, the man who lives by the moral code in which Miss Glasgow believes, does not feel sorry for himself; his fortitude prevents any such self-pity. Strong men and women, like John Fincastle and his daughter, consciously avoid bemoaning their own troubles. When Mary Evelyn reminds her husband that he was sacrificed to the narrow piety of his church, he quickly replies: "'Don't make a martyr of me, my dear. You might tempt me to make one of myself. And a self-made martyr is a poor thing.'"¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 256.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹³⁰ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 61.

Just before her illegitimate child is born, Ada thinks:

She must not feel sorry for herself, not if it killed her. Self-pity, her father had told her, was the most primitive form of sentimentality.¹³¹

Again the idea of self-pity is contrasted with the concept of the civilized man, here by implication through use of the word "primitive."

The Romantic Comedians gives the fullest and most detailed picture of a weak and uncivilized person. Just before the story opens, Annabel Upchurch has been deserted by her prospective husband. She marries the elderly Judge Honeywell because there happens to be no one else around to marry at the moment and because she trusts that the Judge's wealth can compensate for any short-comings which he may have as a lover. Annabel insists on leading the active social life which as a woman in her early twenties she enjoys but which her much older husband cannot stand. Finally she meets a young architect, Dabney Songbird, falls in love, and runs away with him. Throughout her tempestuous career Annabel refuses to accept any responsibility for her behavior.

'It isn't my fault,' she retorted bitterly. 'I don't believe anything is anybody's fault.'¹³²

Nor is she bothered by any twinges of conscience.

'The terrible part is that she is without regret. I had almost said without shame.' Fantastically enough, this sounded to Mrs. Upchurch like an echo, and she wondered wildly how long it had been since she had heard that word applied to behaviour. Had the label, like the fact, become so antiquated that nobody was ashamed any longer?¹³³

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 209.

¹³² Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 78.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 189.

Though she lacks regret and a sense of responsibility, Annabel certainly has feeling. As she remarks of herself: "I haven't any moral sense, but I have a heart...."¹³⁴ Annabel, however, feels only for herself, never for anyone else. Her indulgent husband finally characterizes her self-pity as "remote from all the best traditions of true womanliness. Loveable, no doubt, but insufficiently civilized."¹³⁵ The heroine's self-pity Miss Glasgow condemns as "the favorite vice of a generation too 'hard-boiled' for compassion...the softest and most primitive form of sentimentality...."¹³⁶ Annabel's whole life reveals her to be a barbarian living in modern Queenborough. Her career is guided by her remark: "'Conventions don't matter. Love is worth everything.'¹³⁷ Yet convention, the author believes, supports morality, for, as she observes in her first novel, an attack on convention is an attack on morality. Annabel and others like her, men and women, young and old, are uncivilized because they ignore the dictates of established morality.

Asa Timberlake of In This Our Life, seeing the disaster which follows when his daughter Stanley pursues, like Annabel, a course of action which

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

¹³⁶ Ellen Glasgow, "What I Believe," The Nation, CXXXVI (April 12, 1933), p. 404.

¹³⁷ Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 224.

totally ignores social customs and seeks only personal happiness, especially that of a sensual nature, asks himself a serious question.

When the life of disconnected sensations met the shock of catastrophe, what was there to fall back upon except nothingness?¹³⁸

This problem, never as clearly and as concisely put as Miss Glasgow phrased it here, haunted her as she wrote her novels about the happiness-hunters. Obviously Asa had answered his own query: there was nothing to fall back on. The "life of disconnected sensations" is an uncivilized life, a disordered life, an ugly life.

The ugliness of contemporary life concerned Ellen Glasgow more and more as she wrote her mature novels. Beginning with relatively mild complaints about the acceptance of the mediocre in America, the author became increasingly caustic in her criticism of this country. Her first and most restrained complaint is found in One Man in His Time.

Elasticity, variability--were not these the indispensable qualities of the modern mind? The power to make quick decisions and the inability to cling to convictions; the nervous high pitch and the failure to sustain the triumphant note; energy without direction; success without stability; martyrdom without faith. And around, above, beneath, the pervading mediocrity, the apotheosis of the average.¹³⁹

One of Miss Glasgow's characters asks: "Could anything but a machine survive this mass production of mediocrity you call progress?"¹⁴⁰ In

¹³⁸ Glasgow, In This Our Life, p. 325.

¹³⁹ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 97.

¹⁴⁰ Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 268.

contemporary culture it is the average person who is successful. Curle Littlepage, "one of those fortunate natures who live in perfect harmony with the temper and tone of their age,"¹⁴¹ becomes a successful real-estate broker and wins a watch from the National Get Acquainted Club which is inscribed: "To Curle Littlepage, one of those public-spirited Virginians who are helping to make our country what it is."¹⁴² None of his friends see the irony of the engraving.

American culture not only produces characters like Curle, it also prevents the appearance of a finer type. David Archbald says that just as democracy glorifies the average person, so it prevents the rise of great heroes or of great beauties. Indeed, he adds, the quality of beauty is itself prohibited.

Beauty, like every other variation from type, was treated more or less as a pathological symptom. Did Americans, especially Southerners, prefer ugliness? Did ugliness conform, he pondered fancifully, to some automatic aesthetic spring in the dynamo?¹⁴³

More forthright than the General, Ada Fincastle condemns the unsightliness of the present era when she calls it "distraught, chaotic, grotesque."¹⁴⁴ "Disorder," the author felt, "was, or appeared to be, the dominant note

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁴³ Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 106.

¹⁴⁴ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 318.

of the age...."¹⁴⁵ Part of the current confusion comes from mistaking size for success.

Beneath it all [the social and physical changes] , informing the apparent confusion, there was some crude belief that the symbol of material success is size, and that size in itself, regardless of quality or condition, is civilization.¹⁴⁶

America is living in "The Age of Pretence, The Age of Hypocrisy, [The] Age of Asphalt."¹⁴⁷ In far stronger terms Miss Glasgow asserts that America is

Undoubtedly, a strange country, with its watered psychology, its vermin-infested fiction, and its sloppy minds that spill over.¹⁴⁸

With ugliness and its attendant confusion of thought goes physical disorder. John Fincastle remarks that "violence is the spirit of the age,"¹⁴⁹ and a minor character in the same novel observes:

'Folks are tired of being too decent. They want strong stuff, like they have in the movies. Only they want it real blood and thunder.'¹⁵⁰

Ellen Glasgow used violence in Vein of Iron, where the chase motif runs

¹⁴⁵ Glasgow, In This Our Life, p. 20.

¹⁴⁶ Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 57.

¹⁴⁷ Glasgow, The Romantic Comedians, p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 365.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 313.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 383.

throughout the book as already noted. Even more turbulence appears in The Sheltered Life, but there it is restrained, or at least hidden, until the end of the story. The reader does not see the wild deeds, but only hears of them at second hand. Two persons, an English woman, whom Archbald loved, and the General's own brother, committed suicide. The General recalls a murder in fashionable society and has vivid memories of a lurid hunting scene in his youth. Jenny Blair's father was accidentally killed while he was hunting, and George Birdsong, who loves to slaughter ducks, is never so happy as when he has just killed something beautiful. Toward the end of the novel, the First World War is raging, and America is about to become involved. Finally in the last scene of the book, violence confronts the reader directly in the shooting of George. Disorder, which has been throughout The Sheltered Life seething beneath the "thin crust of civilization," breaks out at the end and brings home to the reader the fact that, though often seemingly distant, it is really an alarming factor in the daily lives of Americans.

Ellen Glasgow contrasts with the violence and ugliness of the modern age the morality of the past. Like the nineteenth-century writers of Southern romance, she came to feel that the old aristocracy of Virginia lived by higher standards than the materialistic middle and lower classes. She considered that the upper class embodied the cultural and moral values which comprise civilization. Although in a few of her earliest books, she was mildly amused by the behavior of the gentry, she soon came to agree with earlier Virginian novelists that the aristocrats lived by a code which stressed personal rather than monetary values. The only critic to call attention to this change from satiric comment about the aristocracy

to appreciation of it is Henry Steele Commager.

The patrician South which she portrayed was already decadent, its interest artificial, its standards meretricious, its defences palpably vulnerable: she did not need to attack it, but could regard its lingering pretensions and its inevitable collapse with ironic detachment, as she could regard the triumph of the New South with equanimity. But by the 'twenties the threat to those moral values Miss Glasgow held precious came not from the persistence of the sentimental traditions of the Old South but from the absence of any tradition in the New, not from the dead hand of the past, a past which proved, indeed, surprisingly vital--but from the heavy hand of the present. Beginning with Barren Ground came a growing distaste for the vulgarity and emptiness of the new day and a grudging appreciation of the virtues still to be found in the old.¹⁵¹

Actually this dissatisfaction with the new order appears earlier than in Barren Ground (1925); it is clearly seen, as will be noted, in The Romance of a Plain Man (1909). Moreover there is no reason at all for Professor Commager's saying that Ellen Glasgow's appreciation of the virtues of the past was a grudging one.

The real importance of Miss Glasgow's changed attitude escaped Dr. Commager. Her protest against the mediocrity and materialism of the new order places her in the Southern literary tradition. At the center of nineteenth-century Southern romance there lies, as seen earlier in this study, a rejection of the materialistic values in American life. Miss Glasgow carried on that protest. She continued the aristocratic theme in Southern literature. Critics never tire of repeating that she rebelled against the Virginian literary tradition, against the "elegiac

¹⁵¹ Henry Steele Commager, "Traditionalism in American Literature," The Nineteenth Century and After, CXLVI (November, 1949), p. 314.

tradition in letters" as her latest critic expresses it.¹⁵² Those critics, however, think of the Southern theme simply as one of escapism. Escapism was only a surface aspect, not its essence. Miss Glasgow, however, never really took cognizance of that tradition's protest against uncivilized standards in America. Yet from the very same motive she proceeded to write about the upper class of Virginia. Thus the greatest irony of her career was that she perpetuated the tradition against which she thought that she reacted.

Ellen Glasgow's respect for the aristocracy is not, of course, based on social snobbery, but rests on her belief that that group has kept vital those qualities of kindness, of personal responsibility, of a belief in human dignity, which comprise the civilized man. Her aristocracy bears a close relation to Thomas Jefferson's concept of a "natural aristocracy," which he discussed in a famous letter to John Adams.

...I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents. Formerly, bodily powers gave place among the aristoi. But since the invention of gunpowder has armed the weak as well as the strong with missile death, bodily strength, like beauty, good humor, politeness and other accomplishments, has become but an auxiliary ground of distinction. There is also an artificial aristocracy, founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and the government of society.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years: 1885-1915 (New York, 1952), p. 348.

¹⁵³ Thomas Jefferson, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed., Andrew A. Lipscomb (Washington, D. C., 1904), XIII, p. 396. This letter is dated October 28, 1813.

Miss Glasgow attributes to the historic aristocracy of Virginia the qualities which Jefferson described as distinguishing the natural aristocracy.

Her first completely sympathetic picture of the Virginian aristocracy occurs in The Romance of a Plain Man. Ben Starr, the hero, rises from the poorest class of city dwellers, makes a fortune, and marries into the oldest family in Richmond. Although accepted by society for the sake of his wife, he is never at ease because he lacks the social graces and the education taken for granted in that class. To compensate for his lack of background, Ben determines "with a rush of ambition...to succeed to the fullest in the things in which success was possible,"¹⁵⁴ in other words, in the making of money. Ben feels that the traditions of the aristocracy, its emphasis on manners and on propriety should be swept away. He has "a blind sense of irritation at the artificial values, the feminine lack of grasp, the ignorance of the true proportions of life,"¹⁵⁵ which characterize the aristocracy but which to him seem unrealistic because they cannot be measured in dollars. In time, however, the aristocratic traditions prove stronger than Ben's materialism. Although he becomes rich through speculation in tobacco, oil, copper, and railroads, he can never impress his wife's aristocratic aunts who have barely enough to live on. Only when he realizes that his wife and her family are concerned about personal kindness and thoughtfulness, does Ben feel contempt for money.¹⁵⁶ Finally he renounces the opportunity to fulfill his life-long ambition to be president of a

¹⁵⁴ Glasgow, The Romance of a Plain Man, pp. 216-217.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 346.

great railroad in order to help his wife regain her health. Ben achieves stature only when he begins to act according to a code which stresses moral and personal values, not monetary ones.

When Miss Glasgow wrote this novel, she thought that the old aristocratic traditions still had enough vitality to deflect members of the rising middle class from their single-minded pursuit of wealth. In her mature work, however, she was far less sanguine about the ability of the old standards to convert the bourgeoisie. In One Man in His Time, Margaret Blair, raised in the aristocratic tradition, finds herself out of place in the twentieth century; she is ignored by the men of her own age and class. As she tells a sympathetic friend:

'It's gone out of fashion to be superior. Nobody even cares any longer about your being what you ought to be. I've been trained to be the kind of girl that doesn't get on to-day, full of all sorts of forgotten virtues and refinements. Nobody looks at me because everybody is staring so hard at the girls who are improperly dressed. There is only one place where I can be sure of having attention, and that is in an Old Ladies' Home. Old ladies admire me.'¹⁵⁷

In her last novel the author grew more bitter about the disregard which many people have for the past. A workman tearing down the beautiful old Timberlake mansion to make way for a gasoline station says to Asa:

'Well, I like to see things come and go. I'm always glad when I get a job clearing away something old.... I tell you, sir, what with automobiles and radios and movies, we've got a lot more to live for than folks used to have. Grandpa says we got everything to make us happy except happiness.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷Glasgow, One Man in His Time, p. 80.

¹⁵⁸Glasgow, In This Our Life, pp. 4-5.

The worker's attitude represents, Miss Glasgow feels, the modern attitude and reflects the deterioration of culture. This is, she says frequently, a "dying age."

Everywhere in the world outside old cultures were breaking up, codes were loosening, morals were declining, and manners, another aspect of morality, were slipping away. A whole civilization was disintegrating, without and within....¹⁵⁹

The decay of standards of morality reflects the decline of standards of art.

Of late it has become the fashion to disparage artistry; but that may be because there is, nowadays, so little among us. In our whole-hearted retreat to the Neanderthal, we have taken both the short cut and the easiest way. It would be astonishing, if we had not grown used to the almost daily exhibition, to watch the agility with which modern novelists spring up to discredit the art they have attempted to practise. One might imagine, indeed, that the proudest boast of many contemporary writers is that they are able to excel in pursuits that have nothing to do with the profession of letters, or even with reading and writing. To have won acclaim as a pugilist or a stevedore or a ditch-digger or a bull-fighter or a public enemy would seem to be the best introduction to modern literary success. However humiliating the fact may appear to those of us who still cherish a discredited art, that fact, as a matter of psychology alone, at least raises an interesting point. Does this increasing abasement of the mental before the physical processes of life rest upon an obscure masochistic impulse in the modern literary mind? Does the symptom spring from a subjective pathological source? Is it an effect of the prolonged maladjustments of what we call civilization?

Perhaps. Perhaps not. In the days of my youth such degradation of intelligence before instinct would have been classified as simple derangement of the reasoning faculty.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 221.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 53-54.

Herself a firm believer in the importance of reason and restraint, Miss Glasgow protested against "the present grotesque revival in Southern fiction, which is a remote logical result of our earlier hallucination, the sentimental fallacy."¹⁶¹ In more specific terms, she gave concrete examples of what she disliked in nineteenth and twentieth-century Southern literature. "Only a puff of smoke," she declared, "separates the fabulous Southern hero of the past from the fabulous Southern monster of the present--or the tender dreams of James Lane Allen from the fantastic nightmares of William Faulkner."¹⁶² Her reaction against nineteenth-century romance has attracted much attention. Yet when she and all of her critics speak of her revolt against the Southern literary tradition, they think of Virginian novels simply as literature of escape, of "whitewash tinted in rose" as Mr. Canby says. But the essence of the Southern romantic tradition is its protest against the materialistic standards of American life. From John P. Kennedy to James Lane Allen, Southern writers hold up for admiration the aristocratic way of life, a way of life that stresses personal qualities of dignity, kindness, and culture. The aristocratic manner of living is not dependent on wealth. As already seen, in Thomas Nelson Page's Red Rock the impoverished gentry after the War between the States are still superior to rich but crude scalawags who cannot emulate their way of life. And in Miss Glasgow's The Romance of a Plain Man Ben Starr, one of the wealthiest men of the new South, fails to win the respect

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁶² Ellen Glasgow, "Heroes and Monsters," The Saturday Review of Literature, XII (May 4, 1935), p. 3.

of his wife's aristocratic but poverty-stricken aunts because his materialistic aims are unworthy of a gentleman. Miss Glasgow perpetuated the Southern literary tradition against which she and her critics claim that she revolted. She did, of course, enliven that school of fiction by introducing an element of realism and of satire. As she herself remarked, Southern fiction needed blood and irony, both of which she supplied. Those ingredients served to revive Southern fiction. Injection of a moderate amount of realism into Virginian literature did not fundamentally alter the romantic tradition because the essence of that tradition is its dissatisfaction with vulgarity and materialism. Ellen Glasgow carried on that protest.

In far stronger terms than she ever applied to nineteenth-century romance, she denounced the present "grotesque revival in Southern fiction."

The sense of horror is not only human, it is a useful, and entirely legitimate, literary motif. None of us, I imagine, is completely immune from its power. And Heaven forbid that I should set out as a champion of that forlorn hope, human behaviour. One may admit that the Southern States have more than an equal share of degeneracy and deterioration; but the multitude of half-wits, and whole idiots, and nymphomaniacs, and paranoiacs, and rakehells in general, that populate the modern literary South could flourish nowhere but in the weird pages of melodrama. There is no harm in the fashion, one surmises, until it poses as realism. It may be magnificent, indeed, but it is not realism, and it is not peculiarly Southern.¹⁶³

Miss Glasgow cleared the way for the more violent revolt of William Faulkner. Like many another rebel, however, she rejected the fruits of her own rebellion and disapproved of the wildness and coarseness of

¹⁶³ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 69.

present-day Southern literature. It seemed to her that such a character as Joe Christmas of William Faulkner's Light in August is unreal, or, granted his probability, is not worth writing about. Joe is not civilized as Miss Glasgow understood the term. His ferocity runs counter to the spirit of reasonableness which pervades her novels. Instead of drawing strength from the past, he can only curse it because it gave him his mixed heritage. Joe is not kind. He turns into a murderer. Neither is he brave: Faulkner makes quite a point of the fact that Christmas, though armed, does not try to fight when trapped. He is not the type of hero whom Miss Glasgow considered moral and civilized, whom she considered worthy of being classed with General Archbald and John Fincastle.

Ellen Glasgow's condemnation of twentieth-century literature, especially Southern literature of the type written by Faulkner, reflected a more fundamental concern than one of taste. Her objection was less aesthetic than it was moral. She disliked the elegiac and sentimental and commemorative tone of earlier Virginian novels because she could not believe, having been born only a decade after the close of the War between the States, that "life was like that." In more strenuous fashion, she denounced contemporary Southern literature because, to her, its emphasis on violence and immorality do not give a realistic picture of the South. To Miss Glasgow, Victorian romantic novels and modern stories of degeneracy seemed equally unreliable as presentations of Southern life. Yet, somewhat illogically, she felt that literature reflects the age which produces it. Therefore, moral bankruptcy in the novel mirrors a similar situation in life. Her protest against violence in life and literature was not, therefore, just a firm disapproval of boorish behavior, but a warning

that "on the farther side of deterioration lies the death of a culture."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ellen Glasgow, "Heroes and Monsters," The Saturday Review of Literature, XII (May 4, 1935), p. 4.

Chapter VII

"Good Manners and Social Morality"

Ellen Glasgow was a moralist, that is, she was concerned with the problem of how to live. She believed that the moral man is the civilized man and tried, especially in her mature novels, to show some civilized people. In her collection of critical essays she clearly states that one of her aims was to retrieve "a few lost graces of culture" from the past.

I should like, most of all, to rescue from encroaching oblivion the forgotten virtue of good manners, which embrace so large a part of social morality. And by good manners, I mean a subtle delicacy of perception and behaviour which unites consideration for others with a regard for sensibilities different in fibre and quality from our own.¹

She believed in the importance of being "well bred," a state not to be confused with being well dressed or wealthy. The well bred man has learned "acceptance of fate, or better still, superiority to adverse fortune" and is courteous, self-restrained, forbearing, and considerate of others.² Obviously when Ellen Glasgow said that the civilized man was the moral man, she was not thinking of morality as a definite, perhaps a narrow, code of right and wrong. Her concept embraced the entire personality and a whole way of life. To be moral requires more than being good in terms of a religious code. Mrs. Spade is virtuous in the

¹Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 119-120.

²Ellen Glasgow, "What I Believe," The Nation, CXXXVI (April 12, 1933), pp. 405-406.

sense that she lives by a Puritanical system of ethics, especially sexual ethics, and that she does her best to see that her neighbors live by it also. In her Calvinistic way, a way which George Santayana calls "a natural reaction against nature,"³ Mrs. McBride is righteous. Such goodness as Mrs. Spade and Mrs. McBride display is scarcely morality in the sense in which Miss Glasgow was thinking. If narrow piety is not enough, neither is beauty. Corinna Page tries to devote her energies and limit her interest to art, but, the author believes, her reverence for prints and paintings is an irresponsible escape from the duties of life. The two qualities of goodness and beauty must be fused together; there must be a mixture of Hellenic consciousness and Hebraic conscience in order to achieve the type of morality which interested Ellen Glasgow. For her, the moral life was a beautiful life, and the beautiful life, moral. Her finest characters, like General David Archbald and John Fincastle, lead this type of existence. They are remembered not because of anything that they do but because of the goodness of their lives and the beauty of their character. Appearing at the culmination of the novelist's career, they sum up her idea of the civilized and moral man whose life is good and at the same time beautiful.

This restless, uneasy, materialistic age is destroying such men, just as it has already wiped out the traditional concept of the lady. Speaking of the heroine of Virginia many years after she had written the novel, Miss Glasgow commented:

³George Santayana, The Last Puritan: A Memoir in the Form of a Novel (New York, 1936), p. 6.

For fantastic as her image appears nowadays, the pattern of the lady had embodied for centuries the thwarted human longing for the beautiful and the good.⁴

Fearful lest the standardized values of modern culture completely destroy the type of civilized person whom she admired, Miss Glasgow wrote that the new values were a "menace not only to freedom of thought, but to beauty and pleasure and picturesque living."⁵ Hamilton Basso observed of the author's interest in standards of value and their relation to the beauty of life that:

She has all her life been trying to oppose the dubious standards of a commercial era with the strictest standards of art--not art for art's sake alone, though art in itself is highly important, but because the same values that make for greatness in art also make for greatness in living.⁶

Ellen Glasgow's concept of the moral life as a beautiful life was shared by Henry James and Edith Wharton and Willa Cather. In the preface to The American James wrote of Christopher Newman:

All he would have at the end would be therefore just the moral convenience, indeed the moral necessity, of his practical, but quite unappreciated, magnanimity; and one's last view of him would be that of a strong man indifferent to his strength and too wrapped in fine, too wrapped above all in other and intenser, reflections for the assertion of his 'rights.'⁷

Note that James combines morality and aesthetics in this passage by

⁴ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 96.

⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

⁶ Hamilton Basso, "Ellen Glasgow's Literary Credo," The New York Times Book Review, (October 17, 1943), p. 5.

⁷ James, The Art of the Novel, p. 22.

speaking of the "moral necessity" and the "fine" and "intense" reflections which concern the hero at the end of his experience in Paris. The same blending of ethics and beauty is found in the introduction to The Tragic Muse.

It all comes back in the last analysis to the individual vision of decency, the critical as well as the passionate judgment of it under sharp stress....⁸

Decency is here considered from two points of view: the intellectual or moral, which James calls the "ethical," and the aesthetic, which he terms the "passionate." About his own favorite book, The Ambassadors, he remarked:

What it comes to, doubtless, is that even among the supremely good--since with such alone is it one's theory of one's honour to be concerned--there is an ideal beauty of goodness the invoked action of which is to raise the artistic faith to its maximum.

Here James comes out most clearly for his idea of the relation between beauty and goodness, for he stresses that there is "an ideal beauty of goodness."

Like Henry James and Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather also believed that morality was related to beauty. In the short novel A Lost Lady, Mrs. Forrester's decline is aesthetic more than it is moral. Her young admirer, Niel, discovers that during the absence of her husband a friend of hers has spent the night in her home. Early in the morning Niel is about to leave a bouquet of flowers outside her window when he hears a man laughing.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

⁹ Ibid., p. 309.

In that instant between stooping to the window-sill and rising, he had lost one of the most beautiful things in his life....It was not a moral scruple she had outraged, but an aesthetic ideal.¹⁰

The author plainly puts her emphasis not on the immorality but on the ugliness of the affair, for she speaks of a mere "moral scruple" as contrasted with an "aesthetic ideal." This same idea of the relationship, almost the equation, of morality and beauty is found in what is probably Miss Cather's best-known book, Death Comes for the Archbishop. As young Bishop Latour rides through the desert, he comes upon a tree growing in the shape of a cross.

The traveller dismounted, drew from his pocket a much worn book, and baring his head, knelt at the foot of the cruciform tree.

Under his buckskin riding-coat he wore a black vest and the cravat and collar of a churchman. A young priest, at his devotions; and a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance. His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man,—it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat severe. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth—brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing.¹¹

This is the gentle, scholarly, saintly man whose fate it is "to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality."¹²

¹⁰ Willa Cather, A Lost Lady (Boston, 1938), pp. 81-82. (Originally published in 1923).

¹¹ Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop (Boston, 1938), p. 21. (Originally published in 1927).

¹² Ibid., p. 294.

The goodness of Father Latour is reflected in his love of beautiful objects, his respect for tradition, both Christian and pagan, and his gentleness toward his inferiors.

Mrs. Wharton was also a believer in the idea that morality and beauty of life accompany one another. As she stated in The Writing of Fiction: "In vain has it been attempted to set up a water-tight compartment between 'art' and 'morality.'"¹³ In The Age of Innocence Newland Archer does not want Countess Olenska to become his mistress, although they love each other, because such a relationship is an ugly one.

...He was conscious of a growing distaste for what lay before him. There was nothing unknown or unfamiliar in the path he was presumably to tread; but when he had trodden it before it was as a free man, who was accountable to no one for his actions, and could lend himself with an amused detachment to the game of precautions and prevarications, concealments and compliances, that the part required. This procedure was called 'protecting a woman's honour'; and the best fiction, combined with the after-dinner talk of his elders, had long since initiated him into every detail of its code.

Now he saw the matter in a new light, and his part in it seemed singularly diminished. It was, in fact, that which, with a secret fatuity, he had watched Mrs. Thorley Rushworth play toward a fond and unperceiving husband: a smiling, bantering, humouring, watchful and incessant lie. A lie by day, a lie by night, a lie in every touch and every look; a lie in every caress and every quarrel; a lie in every word and in every silence.¹⁴

New York society believes, mistakenly, that Newland and Ellen are carrying on an affair. One evening while they are talking on the street, Newland sees two of his friends approach, then change direction in order to avoid

¹³ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, p. 28.

¹⁴ Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence (New York, 1920), p. 308.

embarrassing the couple.

While he [Newland] watched her he was aware that Lefferts and Chivers, on reaching the farther side of the street corner, had discreetly struck away across Fifth Avenue. It was the kind of masculine solidarity that he himself often practised; now he sickened at their connivance. Did she really imagine that he and she could live like this?¹⁵

The Countess, who has under Newland's tutelage learned that "there are things so fine and sensitive and delicate that even those I most cared for in my other life look cheap in comparison,"¹⁶ finds that the "perfect balance" between her loyalty to Newland and to her relatives stirs and tranquillizes her.¹⁷ It is aesthetic as well as moral values which keep Newland and Ellen from violating the code of conventional morality in their youth and, years later, when there exist no barriers to Newland's seeing her, he refuses for fear "lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge."¹⁸ Newland's life is moral and beautiful because he surrenders his love for Ellen rather than desecrate it. Discussing the contemplation of beauty as opposed to the attempt to possess it, Professor Van Meter Ames makes a statement which explains Newland's attitude and behavior.

The Non Toccare of the art museums must be the motto of all seekers after beauty. It is not enough to handle it with care; we must not touch it; hardly may we breathe

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 364-365.

in its presence....The aesthetic experience stops with contemplation of the values for their own sake, without going on to actualize them, and without dreaming that they have already been achieved.¹⁹

The relationship, a rather intangible but a definite one, between morality and beauty interested Ellen Glasgow and Henry James and Willa Cather and Edith Wharton. For each, the moral life was a beautiful life. Because of this common interest, it is not surprising to find these authors distressed over the lack of aesthetic appreciation in contemporary culture. In Virginia young Oliver Treadwell tries to make his landlady understand his interest in literature, but fails completely.

What appalled him was not the opposition, but the utter absence of comprehension....The smiling incredulity in Mrs. Peachey's face ceased to be individual and became a part of the American attitude toward the native-born artist.²⁰

Dismay at the typical American attitude toward beauty is voiced by Willa Cather in Death Comes for the Archbishop. Bishop Latour is anxious to construct a beautiful cathedral, one which will express the beauty of his religion, and incidentally for the reader, will reflect the beauty of the Bishop's own personality. What he has seen of American taste in architecture, however, frightens him.

'I wish to leave nothing to chance, or to the mercy of American builders. I had rather keep the old adobe church we now have than help to build one of those horrible structures they are putting up in the Ohio cities. I want a plain church, but I want a good one. I shall certainly never lift my hand to build a clumsy affair of red brick, like an English coach-house.'²¹

¹⁹ Van Meter Ames, Aesthetics of the Novel (Chicago, 1928), pp. 16, 48.

²⁰ Glasgow, Virginia, p. 91.

²¹ Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 281.

Miss Cather did not limit her remarks about American Philistinism to her novels. In a letter to The Commonweal entitled "On Death Comes for the Archbishop" she expanded her criticism.

May I say here that within the last few years some of the newer priests down in that country have been taking away from those old churches their old homely images and decorations, which have a definite artistic and historic value, and replacing them by conventional, factory-made church furnishings from New York? It is a great pity. All Catholics will be sorry about it, I think, when it is too late, when all those old paintings and images and carved doors that have so much feeling and individuality are gone--sold to some collector in New York or Chicago, where they mean nothing.²²

Although art may mean nothing in a museum, it does have significance in the culture which produced it. The function of art provided the topic of another of Miss Cather's letters. Disturbed by criticism which insists that art should promote social reform, she pointed out that the purpose of literature and the other arts is not to serve as propaganda.

When the world is in a bad way, we are told, it is the business of the composer and the poet to devote himself to propaganda and fan the flames of indignation.

But the world has a habit of being in a bad way from time to time, and art has never contributed anything to help matters--except escape. Hundreds of years ago, before European civilization had touched this continent, the Indian women in the old rock-perched pueblos of the Southwest were painting geometrical patterns on the jars in which they carried water up from the streams. Why did they take the trouble? These people lived under the perpetual threat of drought and famine; they often shaped their graceful cooking pots when they had nothing to cook in them. Anyone who looks over a collection of prehistoric Indian pottery dug up from old burial-mounds knows at once that the potters experimented with form and colour to gratify something that had no concern with

²² Cather, On Writing, p. 6.

food and shelter. The major arts (poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, music) have a pedigree all their own. They did not come into being as a means of increasing the game supply or promoting tribal security. They sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man.²³

Like Misses Cather and Glasgow, Henry James was critical of his contemporaries for their lack of interest in things artistic.

'What does your contention of non-existent conscious exposures, in the midst of all the stupidity and vulgarity and hypocrisy, imply but that we have been, nationally, so to speak, graced with no instance of recorded sensibility fine enough to react against these things?--an admission too distressing. What one would accordingly fain do is to baffle such calamity, to create the record, in default of any other enjoyment of it; to imagine, in a word, the honourable, the producible case. What better example than this of the high and helpful public and, as it were, civic use of the imagination?--a faculty for the possible fine employments of which in the interest of morality my esteem grows every hour I live. How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well from time to time, in its place, some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape? One does, thank heaven, encounter here and there symptoms of immunity from the general infection; one recognizes with rapture, on occasion, signs of a protest against the rule of the cheap and easy; and one sees thus that the tradition of a high aesthetic temper need n't, after all, helplessly and ignobly perish.'²⁴

In this long passage of baffling prose James observes that the indifference of English-speaking people to aesthetics is related to their indifference to violations of the established moral code. The function of the literary artist, he holds, is to create a protest against the vulgarity and the stupidity and the ugliness of the modern age.

²³ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

²⁴ James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 222-223.

Living a moral and a beautiful life is, for Ellen Glasgow and Henry James and Mrs. Wharton and Miss Cather, partly a matter of discrimination and taste. The criticism which each of these authors directed against contemporary life was not merely a protest against lack of appreciation of artistry, but was also a complaint against low standards of morality, for art and morality are, in their view, inseparable. These writers were not primarily concerned with proper appreciation of the fine arts, the sort of erudition sometimes offered in academic courses of "art appreciation." Aesthetics and morality for these novelists concerned the basic problem of how to live. Life, not etiquette, was their interest. In one of Miss Glasgow's novels the unpolished Governor Vetch is, at a dinner party, faced by an awesome array of forks beside his plate, but after a moment's hesitation he deliberately picks up the one which he prefers. Taste, as the governor shows, is a matter of personal dignity, not a knowledge of the minutiae of protocol. The person of genuine refinement does not allow himself to be easily upset. Ada Fincastle's great-grandmother one morning received unexpected visitors while she was bare footed, and Ada's aunt was entertaining a distinguished foreign philosopher when the younger woman's son blurted out that John Fincastle had just had his lunch in a charity soup-kitchen; yet neither woman lost her dignity or poise. The ease, the charm, and the graciousness with which these ladies met embarrassing situations was part of the beauty of their lives. The same idea that the beauty of outward actions reflects an inner quality of worth and dignity is found in the novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton and Willa Cather. The charm of Chad Newsome's life is reflected in the lovely furnishings of his Parisian apartment.

Countess Olenska's renunciation of her love for Newland is indicative of the dignity of her entire life. Mrs. Forrester's delightful dinner parties possess the exquisite grace of her own personality, and Bishop Latour's love of beautiful objects reflects his fine character.

Appreciation of physical beauty alone, however, is not enough to make one's life beautiful; indeed aesthetic appreciation may sometimes be a shield to hide one's real character. Mrs. Culpepper in Ellen Glasgow's One Man in His Time owns a home cluttered with beautiful paintings which her wealth has enabled her to acquire but which she cannot appreciate. Her collection testifies to her fortune, not to her personality. In James' The Portrait of a Lady interest in physical beauty conceals the trivial nature of Edward Rosier and the evil character of Gilbert Osmond.

Concern with morality and beauty of style must go together if a novel is to be great. Mrs. Wharton observed, and the others would agree with her, that:

A good subject, then, must contain in itself something that sheds a light on our moral experience. If it is incapable of this expansion, this vital radiation, it remains, however showy a surface it presents, a mere irrelevant happening, a meaningless scrap of fact torn out of its context.²⁵

The most significant figures portrayed by these four moralists are men such as John Fincastle and Lambert Strether and Newland Archer and Bishop Latour, all of whom combine beauty of personality with goodness of character. Only when this fusion has been effectively demonstrated does the novel, and the life which it tells about, become meaningful.

²⁵ Wharton, The Writing of Fiction, pp. 28-29.

Ellen Glasgow's consideration of the morality displayed by her characters in their search for felicity led her to study the morality of the whole modern age. She conceived of They Stooped to Folly as a satire only, but as the story unfolded in her mind, it became "a serious study, with ironic overtones...of contemporary society."²⁶ When she was working on Vein of Iron, her interest in the morality of society was so great that she said:

From the beginning, I had known that I was engaged upon a family chronicle, that I was studying, not a single character or group of characters alone, but the vital principle of survival, which has enabled races and individuals to withstand the destructive forces of nature and of civilization.²⁷

Finally, in In This Our Life she set herself the problem of making "an analysis in fiction of the modern temper."²⁸ Thus, her ultimate concern centered upon the apparently nearing collapse of civilization.

In studying American culture, Ellen Glasgow usually looked at the South. Most of her novels, and all of her best ones, are set in Virginia. She dealt with the people and the places which she knew best, with the aristocratic class in Virginia. She wrote of that class because its high cultural traditions were opposed to monetary standards of value. Thus she carried on the Southern aristocratic protest against materialism. Criticism of materialistic aims in American life was not, however, confined to Virginian literature. It has been observed that Northern realists such

²⁶ Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 237.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 169.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 249.

as John W. DeForest in Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty and Henry Adams in Democracy used Southern characters to express opposition to America's stress on financial gain. Better known than his novel is The Education of Henry Adams. There the author pictures impressionistically the restless, chaotic materialism of American life shortly after the turn of the century.

As he came up the bay again, November 5, 1904, an older man than either his father or Motley in 1868, he found the approach more striking than ever--wonderful--unlike anything man had ever seen--and like nothing he had ever much cared to see. The outline of the city became frantic in its effort to explain something that defied meaning. Power seemed to have outgrown its servitude and to have asserted its freedom. The cylinder had exploded, and thrown great masses of stone and steam against the sky. The city had the air and movement of hysteria, and the citizens were crying, in every accent of anger and alarm, that the new forces must at any cost be brought under control. Prosperity never before imagined, power never yet wielded by man, speed never reached by anything but a meteor, had made the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid. All New York was demanding new men, and all the new forces, condensed into corporations, were demanding a new type of man--a man with ten times the endurance, energy, will and mind of the old type--for whom they were ready to pay millions at sight. As one jolted over the pavements or read the last week's newspapers, the new man seemed close at hand, for the old one had plainly reached the end of his strength, and his failure had become catastrophic.²⁹

Ellen Glasgow, like Henry Adams and Henry James, like Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, protested against this type of civilization and the type of man needed to control it. So did the lesser writers of Southern fiction in the nineteenth century. Like those minor novelists, Miss Glasgow admired the Virginian aristocracy, but she wrote of it with a

²⁹ Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography (Boston and New York, 1918), p. 499.

difference. The cloying sentimentality of the older fiction is in her work replaced by a restrained realism and a brisk irony. Miss Glasgow, then, combined two significant traditions of American literature: she blended the aristocratic Virginian tradition and its protest against vulgarity and materialism with the school of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather, and the concern for the unison of beauty and goodness as the formula of an ideal morality.

Chapter VIII

Ellen Glasgow: An Evaluation

Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow has been largely ignored and hence undervalued by recent critics of American literature. Mr. Henry S. Canby and others have accounted for that neglect by the conventionality of her technique and of her ideas. Conventionality, however, does not of itself detract at all from her stature as a novelist. Yet if critics read her work with more care, they would speak with less condescension of her accomplishment.

More disturbing than the traditional nature of Miss Glasgow's novels is their want of emotional power. Her work lacks warmth. In some of the early novels there is a maudlin sentimentality; in a number of the mature books there are irritable outbursts against certain aspects of life which the author found intolerable. Genuine, deep feeling is rare in her prose. A competent stylist in her mature period, she wrote in a firm, lucid, and polished manner but not in a moving way. The impact of her novels is frequently diminished by faulty structure. Even in her finest books, Barren Ground and Vein of Iron, irrelevant events and reliance on coincidence mar the architectonic quality and thus weaken the force of the narrative. Lack of imagination also contributes to the coldness of her fiction. In the early historical novels Miss Glasgow becomes so much interested in the accurate portrayal of actual places in Virginia that her emphasis sometimes shifts from the situation to the preservation of local antiquities. Deficiency of invention accounts for the very considerable amount of repetition in Miss Glasgow's plotting. The re-use of similar material in one book after another makes her stories

rather dull.

The coldness of her novels is further deepened by the personalities of the characters and the ideas which they express. Dorinda Oakley, David Archbald, and John Fincastle are among her best drawn and most admirable figures. Yet there is about them a chilly atmosphere. They win the reader's respect and admiration but not his friendship and affection. Dorinda and Archbald and Fincastle have cut themselves off from human contacts; they are dehumanized. Each has submerged, perhaps killed, the emotional side of his nature. Most of the characters whom Miss Glasgow presents as admirable set little store in happiness and reject love as of minor importance or value. The author in her distrust of man's emotions and impulses reveals a strong Puritanical strain. Hers is, however, a Puritanism from which the heart of that faith is lacking: the writer has no religious belief.

Instead of religion Miss Glasgow offers the code of the civilized and moral gentleman. This code requires that a person be kind, have a sense of continuity with the past, believe in personal dignity and responsibility, love life, face it with fortitude, and lead an inner existence. The combination of good manners and high moral standards makes life beautiful.

The code of the gentleman is obviously one which only a small number of persons can live up to. There can be only a few gentlemen. Yet Miss Glasgow applied the standards of this code to all Americans. As she aged she became increasingly critical of her compatriots for their failure to live up to her ideal of the gentleman. She was more and more pessimistic about the moral tone of contemporary life and

indeed about the entire future of American culture. In her last books, In This Our Life and A Certain Measure, the author seems quite alienated from current life and is given to excited scolding of Americans for their failure to abide by the standards of gentlemanly behavior. She grew very fond of referring to this as a "dying age" and of speaking about the "deterioration of culture."

Whether her analysis of this age as one of decline is correct or not, only time will tell. Her criticism of contemporary life, however, is weakened by her obvious failure to understand certain important aspects of it. Enchanted with her own conception of the past, she became steadily more alarmed about the present-day neglect of that heritage. Miss Glasgow conceived of the modern attitude not as apathy toward the past but as vicious delight in destroying it. Therefore, as recently noted, she has a workman in In This Our Life tell Asa that he likes to "get a job clearing away something old." She confused indifference to the past with a wicked glee in demolishing it.

Even more detrimental to her stature as a social critic was her failure to understand, or at least to treat of, certain aspects of Southern life. Although she set out to write a social history of Virginia, her achievement as a novelist-historian is not impressive. As previously pointed out, she virtually ignores the laboring classes and the Negroes, devotes relatively little attention to the middle class, emphasizes the old aristocracy. Thus she concentrates her attention upon that class of society which has been of decreasing importance in the last one hundred years. She overlooks the racial problem. In her novel Virginia she indicates in the most delicate way possible that Cyrus Treadwell has an illegitimate mulatto son, but once the fact is discreetly revealed,

nothing more is said about it. In In This Our Life the author's attitude appears to be that Negroes are happiest and most well-off when they keep to humble positions in society. Another problem of the South which Miss Glasgow fails to deal with in significant fashion is the rise of industry. Certainly she talks about industry in The Romance of a Plain Man, in The Sheltered Life, and in In This Our Life. But her discussions are limited to denouncing the ugliness of manufacturing establishments and to criticising the materialistic standards of value which accompany a highly industrialized civilization. She does not show changes which the coming of industry makes in the way of life or in the thinking of Southern people. Whether or not industry, which creates wealth, can relieve the poverty of the South, she does not say. In fact, she fails to show Southern indigence. Certainly there are many poor people in her novels; their destitution, however, is personal and eventually overcome. It is not regional poverty. Even in Barren Ground the author is not greatly concerned about the run-down condition of the soil. Ellen Glasgow was quick to denounce as "casual" those literary critics who believed that the restoration of the land was an important part of the story. Her failure to understand or at least to deal with these important aspects of Virginian life accounts for the indifference or hostility of commentators, especially Southerners like Donald Davidson. Indeed that gentleman has written of her:

Like a good many 'liberal' Virginians of her time, she was defective in her knowledge and understanding of the Southern situation, and in her 'social' novels of the Barren Ground type there wasn't enough dramatic power and insight to make up for these defects....What I specially disliked, in the 1920's, was that Northern critics assumed that she 'understood' the South. She knew little about it. Her kind of Virginian knows only Virginia, and not all of that. In that respect she was

a thoroughly parochial 'liberal.'¹

Sociological considerations are on the periphery of literary interest. Miss Glasgow, however, definitely invites such criticism by the stress which she puts on her social history of Virginia. Though some critics may be inclined to castigate her for her blindness, it is well to keep in mind what Willa Cather had to say about Balzac's presentation of life in Paris: "The city he built on paper is already crumbling." Had Ellen Glasgow given a more detailed, perhaps a more balanced picture of the South her work might have historic interest only.

If any of her novels live and become a permanent part of American literature, it will not be because of what she tells of the history of Virginia. After all, who reads James Fenimore Cooper to find out about Indian-warfare or who looks into Nathaniel Hawthorne to study the social customs of colonial New England? Ultimately a novel must survive on the basis of its artistry and of what it tells about life. Certainly Miss Glasgow was aware of this fact; A Certain Measure is concerned primarily with the art of the novel, and she also says in that book that great literature will "increase our understanding of life."

Nevertheless critics have paid little attention to either her art or her thought. She is a neglected and hence undervalued writer. A few comments have been made about her handling of point of view and probability of character, about her humor and her epigrammatic style, but no critic has gone into those matters thoroughly. In those aspects

¹Letter from Donald Davidson, dated Nashville, Tennessee, March 4, 1952, to Thomas McR. Kreider.

of the novel wherein she achieved the highest degree of artistry, her accomplishment has gone unnoticed--her treatment of the passage of time, her use of prose rhythm, her figures of speech which compare a concrete object with an abstract concept, and her employment of imagery and symbolism to create a unified mood.

What Miss Glasgow has to say about life has been noticed even less than her art. Some critics have talked vaguely about the importance of fortitude. None, however, has pieced together her basic conception of the civilized man. While critics have indicated her similarity to Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather, they have not studied that relationship in detail. Scholars and historians have considered her a rebel against the Southern literary tradition, but they have thought, as she herself did, of that school of fiction only as one of escape; they fail to see its protest against materialism and vulgarity. Miss Glasgow was not a rebel but a rejuvenator of Virginian literature. She resuscitated a literary tradition dying of sweetness by adding genteel realism and irony. Finally, her role in the development of American literature has escaped the critics: she fused two traditions, the Southern aristocratic tradition protesting materialistic standards of value and the humanistic and moral tradition of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather.

Contrary to what even her friendlist critics say, Ellen Glasgow is a figure of considerable stature in American literature. Hamilton Basso once remarked that though none of her novels is great her total accomplishment may be so considered.² The "total accomplishment," by

²Hamilton Basso, "Ellen Glasgow's Literary Credo," The New York Times Book Review, (October 17, 1943), p. 5.

which Mr. Basso meant the social history of Virginia as represented in the twelve-volume Virginia Edition, is, to be quite honest, encumbered with a number of inferior novels. Probably none of the work of the early period will survive; it does not deserve to. Of the work of the mature period several are fine novels--Virginia and Barren Ground and The Sheltered Life and Vein of Iron. Her critical essays, A Certain Measure, should not be overlooked in any list of her better work. Of these books Vein of Iron is the finest. In spite of minor faults of structure and the tendency of the action to drag at times, the novel possesses real artistry. With fine skill Miss Glasgow makes her characters live, especially Grandmother Fincastle; she covers a span of thirty years successfully; she handles the double point of view effectively, employs prose rhythm to set the tone of the book and to suggest the personality of her characters. And she conveys the idea of man's cruelty by a highly artistic use of imagery and symbolism. In the same book her concept of the civilized and moral man is most effectively presented. Although John Fincastle is, like all her fine characters, not so appealing as he should be, he is an admirable man. He combines goodness with beauty of character. Loving life, he faces it with fortitude, indeed with gallantry. In spite of disappointments and rebuffs, he can truthfully say, when he is dying of hunger and exhaustion, that he has been happy. In no other book does Miss Glasgow present so clearly her concept of the civilized man, and in no other book is her artistry equally high. Vein of Iron is her most important contribution to American literature and may be expected to take its place among the minor classics of fiction.

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