
Marie Fletcher

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/813

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
This dissertation has been microfilmed exactly as received

FLETCHER, Marie, 1913—

Louisiana State University, Ph.D., 1963
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
THE SOUTHERN HEROINE IN THE FICTION
OF REPRESENTATIVE SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS, 1850-1960

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in Partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Marie Fletcher
B.A., Northwestern State College, 1938
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1944
January, 1963
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Lewis P. Simpson for his help in the preparation of this dissertation and to the other members of the Department of English, Dr. T. A. Kirby in particular, for their encouragement during the writing. I should also like to thank my employers at Francis T. Nicholls State College for their interest in my work and for their confidence in me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE SOUTHERN DOMESTIC NOVEL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LOCAL COLOR FICTION OF THE SOUTH</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE SOUTHERN REALISTIC NOVEL</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FICTION OF THE SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION: FROM THE MADONNA TO THE MAGDALEN</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This study of the development of the Southern heroine in the fiction of Southern women writers from about 1850 to the present shows that the pure and beautiful lady who comes from a wealthy, aristocratic background is no longer dominant. An independent, capable, yet pretty woman who attains her status not by birth or wealth but by her inner worth has taken her place. In contemporary fiction the Magdalen has almost replaced the Madonna.

The changing character of the Southern heroine is developed in a series of essays which include detailed discussions of Southern heroines as delineated in the short stories and novels of representative writers. The first essay treats the sentimental heroine in the domestic novels of Caroline Lee Hentz, Mary Jane Holmes, Eliza Dupuy, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Augusta Evans, highly popular during the sentimental vogue of the 1850's and 1860's. The heroine in the local color fiction of Mary Noailles Murfree, Kate Chopin, and Grace King, who dealt with three areas of the South, is considered in the second section. This is followed by an essay on the Southern woman in the realistic novels of Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow, whose attitudes were foreshadowed by those of the local colorists. The
series is completed by a study of the heroines in the novels and short fiction of several women writers of the Southern Literary Renaissance. Among those most concerned with the change in Southern womanhood are Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, and Shirley Ann Grau.

Although the women in the novels and stories that are considered secure economic and political independence, it is the opportunity to develop their inner resources that they value most. There is less and less emphasis upon beauty and elaborate dress, until finally the fragile, often sickly blonde angel with golden curls, blue eyes fringed with jet, pure white complexion, and dainty hands and feet gives way to a larger, healthier, simply dressed young woman more often brunette than blonde. The "innocence and purity" symbolized by the white and gold heroine dressed in pure white loses significance. Love and marriage, still the greatest hope for happiness, are no longer to be depended upon for lasting bliss. Through the entire period Southern women writers express dissatisfaction with the double standard of sexual morality and begin to speak out against it; only in very recent fiction, however, do any of the heroines follow the same code as men. Though violating the ideal of chastity shows the spirit of independence in modern women, it does not bring them happiness and satisfaction; it merely
increases their problems and frustrations. The qualifications of purity, idleness, fragility, beauty, aristocracy, wealth, dependence, happiness, pride, and religious faith have all declined in importance during the past century. In 1850 the invariable quality for all Southern heroines was purity. Now there is no constant characteristic unless it is the endurance or fortitude which Ellen Glasgow has designated "the vein of iron"; it does not bring happiness or success but prevents defeat by life and helps women live gallantly, if without delight.
PREFACE

My intention in this dissertation is to present a series of essays on the fictional representation of the Southern heroine by Southern women writers from about 1850 to the present—that is, from the time when the traditional Southern lady dominated the literary scene through the period of the development of the woman sometimes called the "lady of worth" or the "democratic lady," who gradually replaces most of the "born ladies" in fiction. As far as I can determine this study is the first attempt to trace step-by-step the change that has taken place in the delineation of the Southern woman over a long period of time. It is also the only work on the Southern heroine in the fiction of women writers only.

The investigation begins with the sentimental heroine of the domestic novels which flourished in the South in the 1850's and 1860's. Local color fiction, which developed in almost every section of the country in the 1880's and 1890's, is the topic for discussion in the second essay. This is followed by a study of the Southern woman in the works of realistic novelists whose attitudes were foreshadowed by those of the local colorists. The series is completed by an
essay on the women characters in the fiction of the women
writers of the Southern Literary Renaissance. In each essay
there is rather detailed study of Southern heroines as pre­
sented in the short stories and novels of representative
Southern women authors. The purpose is to show how these
writers developed their fictional women and to indicate the
changes in the concept of the Southern heroine by following
the chronological development of Southern fiction and by
studying the fictional heroines in the sentimental novel,
local color fiction, the realistic novel, and the natural­
istic fiction of the period of disillusionment following
the World Wars, when William Faulkner's picture of the
South influenced most of his contemporaries, including the
women writers of the South.

The authors considered in this study are representa­
tive of the large number of Southern women who have written
about the South or its people. The main interest is in
their reaction as women, and as Southern women, to the
Southern ideal of womanhood. Because of the intensity of
her interest in the improvement of the position of woman
and because of the comprehensiveness of her gallery of
women characters, in nineteen novels written between 1897
and 1941, Ellen Glasgow is considered in greater detail
than any other writer.
CHAPTER I

THE SOUTHERN DOMESTIC NOVEL

The American novel, which came into being shortly before the end of the eighteenth century, was rooted in the sentimentalism of Samuel Richardson and the sensibility of Laurence Sterne. Since the first novels were written for a female bourgeois audience, it is perhaps only natural that they deal with love and marriage. The leading characters are girls with whom the readers can identify. They weep over the misfortunes and glory in the triumphs of the long-suffering heroines.

From Richardson's Pamela (1740) and even more from his Clarissa Harlowe (1748) comes the ideal of the pure young girl who is pious, generous, and, above all, virtuous. She must resist evil in the form of a male seducer in order to find lasting happiness in marriage. In Pamela the virtuous servant girl, through letter after letter, tells how she resists the advances of Lord B______ and finally induces him to marry her. The thousands of middle-class women readers who have suffered through her struggles with her rejoice in her marriage. It is her reward for virtue. They see no stain on her honor in her marrying the man who
tried to mislead her. Clarissa is the account of another pious, modest, beautiful heroine, but the story has a tragic outcome. Clarissa becomes the victim of the handsome, charming, but villainous Lovelace. After his other attempts at seduction have failed, he gives her drugs and then rapes her. Lovelace is aware that he has achieved a doubtful victory at best, because he has won only her body, not her heart and soul. Although Clarissa still loves him and can by marriage be redeemed in society, she refuses. She is afraid that she bears some of the guilt of the seduction. Slowly she dies of a broken heart. Her self-sacrificial death becomes a symbol of the victory of virtue even in its seeming defeat. Clarissa is for the middle-class women readers the ideal of purity to which all can aspire. Leslie Fiedler finds that the sentimental novels such as these honor Christianity but also confuse it with what he calls "the Sentimental Love Religion." In these novels "tears are considered a truer service of God than prayers, and the Pure Young Girl replaces Christ as the savior, marriage becomes the equivalent of bliss eternal, and the Seducer is the only Devil."¹

Not until fifty years after Richardson's triumph in England did the sentimental novel develop in America.

William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and its sequel *Lucy Temple*, and Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) are the early examples of Richardsonian fiction in America. They all portray females in distress. With the decline of Puritanism and the triumph of delicacy and good taste during the gentle revolution the theme of seduction was first expurgated and finally cast out. In the years between, there are many tearful stories of betrayal and desertion, but increasingly there are hints of suffering heroines being redeemed after death. Thus the rejection of the tragic ending is prepared for, though it is many years before a truly happy outcome replaces the tearful close. The mystique of virginity is so strong that seduction novels simply cannot end in true happiness; a nineteenth-century husband can accept only a virgin or occasionally a blameless widow as his bride. In the heroine's eventual triumph over her seducer, if only through death, the moral dominance of woman enters American literature. Ladies are pale and fragile and seemingly weak, but by being forbearing and forgiving, they turn their very weakness into strength. The defeat of the seducer in the American domestic novel by female writers is often considered in the twentieth century the symbol of the emasculation of the American male. Woman becomes the sexless savior of man. Since the old maid has an insecure economic and social position and is an object of ridicule or scorn,
the heroines always marry. But the wife can best demonstrate her wisdom, beauty, charm, courage, and worth by diminishing or removing the power of the male.

By the time of the sentimental vogue in America women were becoming writers as well as readers of novels and were soon able to compete equally with men and achieve financial success. It has been estimated that in the United States as early as 1820 one-third of the authors were women. Ambitious women, some of them unhappily married and some even deserted by their husbands, began writing to support themselves and to find positions equal to their abilities. These women found the answer to their personal dilemmas by writing domestic novels in which they established female superiority and made husbands mutilated creatures in the shadow of brilliant and accomplished wives or even had them disappear completely.2

From the "feminine fifties" on through the next two or three decades more and more of the domestic fiction was written by women. Though the seduction theme disappeared, the female readers still wanted to see women portrayed as abused and suffering but eventually victorious over men. The unworthy wooer or unworthy husband replaces the seducer.

2The idea of the emasculation or maiming of the male in sentimental fiction by female authors is fully developed by Helen Waite Papashvily in All the Happy Endings (New York, 1956) and by Leslie Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960).
After long months or years of tearful but unmerited suffering pure maidens or faithful wives are at last united or reunited with repentant lovers or husbands.

The vogue of the sentimental domestic novel in America after 1850 came in large part from the popularity of the seduction novels of the past but probably also from the taste for sentiment or feeling that came from the history, politics, and religion of the times from Revolutionary days on. Americans were accustomed to depending upon their "feelings" and to shedding tears.

A survey of nearly forty sentimental best sellers reveals a striking kinship among the books. All have a group of righteous characters who are good, kind, handsome, and usually talented or intellectual. They meet all kinds of obstacles and come near failure because of their stubborn and sacrificial loyalty to a code of honor or to their religion. Lovely heroines and handsome heroes, protective mothers and repentant fashionable ladies appear repeatedly. A young orphan, poor and neglected and even mistreated, becomes a governess or the ward of a wealthy and aristocratic family. The heroines, sometimes more than one in a novel, are not only beautiful but also inhumanly perfect. They are highly moral, usually deeply religious, gentle, and generous, sometimes proud and independent. To contrast with the saintly leading lady there may be a shallow worldly girl, but she usually is brought to see the error of her
ways and repent. There may be gay, impetuous, even flirta­tious girls and disillusioned belles and widows, but seldom are they really evil. The mothers, quiet and unassuming, are ideal women devoted to their families. Occasionally there are society matrons trying to arrange good marriages for their daughters. Property and money seem more important to worldly mothers than love.

The hero may have some faults, but he always comes under the influence of a noble woman who acts as his guide to heaven. Frequently he is older than the heroine and often does not marry until he is past thirty. Though not necessarily a church member, he must respect religion if he is to win the pure and noble heroine. Often he is led to church membership or even into the ministry through the in­fluence of his wife. He has great respect for ladies, all of whom he regards as delicate. He exacts respect for them from other people also. He is a professional man or a great property owner. Since a wife expects and wishes to "look up to" her husband, he has intellectual and cultural inter­ests to surpass those of his bride. Sometimes youthful exploits have made him cynical; if so, his faith is usually restored through the love and influence of the angelic young heroine. The earlier sin of seduction is replaced in the Victorian novels by desertion of wife or sweetheart. The guilty man repents and emerges from his trials and suffering as a noble character or he may learn that he has been
betrayed or misled and return to make amends. If he is really a rascal, he receives proper punishment, death or social condemnation.\(^3\)

Among the successful authors during the height of the sentimental vogue in America were Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Caroline Lee Hentz, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner, Maria Cummins, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Marion Harland, Mary Jane Holmes, Eliza Dupuy, E. P. Rowe, Mary Agnes Fleming, Lew Wallace, Fanny Fern, T. S. Arthur, Frances Tiernan, Caroline Howard Gilman, Ann Stephens, and, above all, Augusta Jane Evans. A glance at such a list shows not only that most of the authors were women but also that many of them were Southern women, either by birth or through long residence in the South. Nowhere did the great tide of sentimentality find more sympathetic acceptance than in the South. W. J. Cash, in *The Mind of the South*, sees the Southern attraction to the false feeling, excessive nicety, and denial of ugliness as an outgrowth of the South's qualms over slavery, which had ugly and brutalizing effects

---

\(^3\)William Perry Fidler has made a more complete study of the parallels of character and incident in over fifty sentimental best sellers and has noted many clues to their sales value in Chapter XVI, "Epilogue: Recipe for an Old-Fashioned Best Seller," *Augusta Evans Wilson* (University, Alabama, 1951). A composite pattern to which most domestic novels fit, except for slight and individual variations, has been drawn up by Alexander Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York, 1951), pp. 412-415.
on the white men as well as the Negroes.\textsuperscript{4} Even more important to the growth of sentimentality in the South than its prettifying of slavery to soothe its own conscience and to defend itself against Northern criticism was the importance it gave to Southern woman who could be possessed solely by the white males. The isolation of the plantation world which made the home the center of everything and made family ties stronger than in more closely settled areas also was favorable to domestic sentiment. There was usually intense love and respect for the wives and mothers around whom the family centered and from whom came many of the comforts of the home.

Men glorified Southern women in their fiction. Women born and reared to feel that they were the ideal creatures, whose duty it was to inspire husbands, sons, or sweethearts to live moral and even Christian lives, wrote sentimental domestic stories and novels. Of the large number of Southern female writers who won almost unbelievable popularity in their time five can serve as representatives. The works of Caroline Lee Hentz, Mary Jane Holmes, Eliza Dupuy, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Augusta Jane Evans take us from the beginning of the sentimental vogue until long past its peak, for their novels were published over a period of more than sixty years.

\textsuperscript{4}Wilbur J. Cash, \textit{The Mind of the South} (Garden City, New York, 1954), p. 95.
One of the first women to write highly successful sentimental novels with Southern heroines was Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz. She was born in Massachusetts in 1800 but came South shortly after her marriage in 1824. By 1856, the year of her death, she and her husband had lived and taught school in several Southern states. Mrs. Hentz, described by Caroline Brevard as "bringing no prejudices against Southern people or Southern institutions," adapted herself to her surroundings and learned to love the South deeply and sincerely. Southerners therefore claim her as one of themselves. In every moment she could spare, Mrs. Hentz wrote. Since it was domestic life that she liked most to sketch, any one of her eight larger novels can be used to illustrate the work described by one of her editors as having every page "purified by an exalted moral, true and hallowed by a Christian spirit." All of them can be fitted to the general sentimental pattern. In both Linda; or, The Young Pilot of the Belle Creole, 1850, and Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale, 1852, the girl of the title is the kind of Southern heroine who was becoming the stereotype in the

---

5 Caroline Mays Brevard, "Caroline Lee Hentz," Library of Southern Literature (Atlanta, Georgia, 1921), VI, 2376.

domestic novels of the 1850's and 1860's.

Mrs. Hentz introduces Linda Walton, of Linda, as a child of eight on a Southern plantation. It is almost ten years before the sweet-faced girl with large brown eyes and luxuriant hair in ringlets of "golden embrownment" has suffered enough for the author to give her happiness at last. She is then "the fair, young bride" of Roland Lee, whom she has loved since childhood with "a love as pure and constant as the flame that burned in Vesta's guarded temple." 7

On the death of her mother, a woman with "the face of an angel, . . . so white, so pure," 8 Linda becomes the heiress of large plantations in Louisiana. Because of her fortune, her cruel step-mother determines to subdue her and marry her to her passionate, undisciplined son. In her "simplicity, innocence, and purity," Linda endures mistreatment from her step-mother and shrinks from the wooing of her step-brother, Robert. She is heartlessly separated from the young man she loves. Because of illness and sorrow, her face of "pearly fairness" becomes "still fairer and more colourless" 9 but she keeps her look of "heavenly innocence." 10

9Hentz, Linda, p. 124.
10Hentz, Linda, p. 113.
To escape marriage she tries to flee to her Louisiana relatives. After harrowing adventures, she finds a refuge at last. The exposure and the frightening experiences during her flight bring on physical and mental illness. At last she is found by the fiery and exciting Robert on whom her prayers, her pleas, and her pious example have worked a miracle. Religion has transformed the lion into a lamb. The chastened Robert, now an evangelist, accepts Linda as the sister she has always wanted to be to him. He restores her to her lover and even performs the marriage ceremony. Happy though the bride is, she still has tears to shed. She rejoices over Robert's devotion to the ministry but thinks sadly of his rapidly approaching death from consumption.

In Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale, the owners of neighboring plantations plan to continue their "fellowship of interests" through the marriage of their children. When Eoline learns that Horace merely "consents" to the arrangement, her pride, that besetting sin of the Southern lady, leads her to refuse a reluctant bridegroom. The "delicate and lovely" young girl has "firm self-reliance" and "moral courage" as well as a gentle, modest manner. She secures what is spoken of as "a respectable position" as music teacher in a seminary for young ladies.

The author considers Eoline a noble girl, "who refused to sell her birthright for a miserable mess of pottage, and was willing to sacrifice wealth, luxury, and home,
rather than barter her soul's independence, her heart's liberty, her life's good."\(^{11}\) Her appearance she describes in an equally glowing fashion:

Her complexion had the fairness of the magnolia blended with the blush of the rose. Her hair of a pale golden brown, reminded one of the ripples of a sunlit lake by its soft waves, giving beautiful alternations of light and shade, as it flowed back from her face into the silver comb that confined its luxuriance. . . . Her eyes, blue, soft, and intense as the noonday sky in June, had a kind of beseeching loving expression,—an expression that appealed for sympathy, protection, love,—and her mouth had that winning contour, which suggests the idea of a slumbering smile.\(^{12}\)

Eoline's sweetness and beauty win a friendly response everywhere. Her employer, seeing her fair and "celestial blue eyes" and hearing her play sacred music, thinks her little lower than an angel, for "an aureole of purity and piety appeared to beam around her brow."\(^{13}\)

St. Leon, a wealthy young Creole, falls in love with Eoline. He considers her superior to him and to the entire world; therefore he tells her she was born for domination and offers her his homage. She, however, wants to look up to her husband. She wants an arm to lean upon, a spirit to sustain her, while she merely upholds and strengthens. Her


\(^{12}\)Hentz, *Eoline*, pp. 22-23.

\(^{13}\)Hentz, *Eoline*, p. 53.
feeling about the duty of the wife is expressed in this way:

Woman feels that it is her office to watch in sickness and soothe in sorrow—to go down with the sufferer, even into the valley of darkness without fearing its shadows; but not to be foremost in the battles of life, nor to take the helm when the night is dark, and the billows are roaring, with the master pale and inert at her side.¹⁴

Despite his great love for her, Eoline cannot admire St. Leon because of his weakness and dependence. For her there is greater joy in feeling love and worship for another than in being loved and worshipped.

As is required by the sentimental pattern, the estranged characters are all reconciled. In the eyes of all Eoline is "an angel," one of "those heavenly beings sent to minister to languishing humanity."¹⁵ She completes the circle of happiness by marrying Horace. He is a man whom she can honor and esteem as well as love. Their marriage is the realization of her concept of the "clinging vine," which has always been her ideal of the proper relation of a woman to her lover. She describes her ideal as follows:

He must be a pillar of strength on which I can lean and cling round in the storm of life. His soul must be the eagle in ambition, and the eyrie of his soul near the sun; and the dove in tenderness, whose nest shall be lowly as my heart. Then the love he bears me must be illimitable as the heavens, and boundless as the air.

¹⁴Hentz, Eoline, p. 160.
¹⁵Hentz, Eoline, p. 212.
It must be firm as the mountains, and unfathomable as the ocean. . . . Round this marble pillar of strength the wild vine of sensibility must twine, the eagle must bear the myrtle in its talons, and the dove carry the laurel to its downy nest. So must all great and tender, and kind and glorious things blend together, ennobling and softening each other, and forming a perfect whole. No—not quite perfect. He must have some weakness, to sympathize with my poor humanity. And last of all, he must love me, not for beauty, not for talent, not for goodness—for he might imagine them all—but just because I am Eoline.16

After a shorter period of suffering than most heroines endure, Eoline is rewarded by a marriage, for which she gladly relinquishes her early spirit of independence and her brief career of teaching.

II

Another of the most popular American novelists of the 1850's and 1860's was Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth. She was born in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1819. Through the interest of her step-father, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte was given a fairly good education, and after graduation from his school, she became a teacher. In 1840 she married Frederick Southworth. It is generally thought that the marriage was unhappy and that she was soon separated from him.

About 1843 Mrs. Southworth, with two young children, returned from Wisconsin to Washington, D. C., and resumed her teaching career. On Christmas Eve, 1844, she began

16Hentz, Eoline, pp. 74-75.
writing and continued until she was past seventy years old. By 1853 she had won such great popularity that she received many liberal offers for her work. At the time of her death in 1899 Mrs. Southworth was regarded as the foremost writer of romantic stories and the best known among the general public of all writers of Southern birth. She was a leader of the sentimental vogue of the 1850's and, judging from the editions and sales of her works, she remained extremely popular through the 1880's and 1890's. Between fifty and sixty of her estimated ninety books were published serially during her lifetime. Regis Louise Boyle found that there were French, German, Spanish, and Italian translations as well as Canadian and British editions of the novels and that some of them were being reprinted in the United States as late as the 1930's.17 Almost needless to say, Mrs. Southworth accumulated a fortune by her writings.

Mrs. Southworth lived at various times in the West and East as well as in the South, and during the war she worked for the Union. In her novels, however, she often uses the Maryland and Virginia backgrounds and traditions that influenced her in childhood. She makes use of the sensational, the supernatural, and the violent, but with the Gothic elements of shock and suspense she combines the

pathos and sentiment already fashionable in Britain and rapidly coming into American fiction. In her early works particularly and always to a certain degree, Mrs. Southworth stresses a moral. She expresses faith in Christianity and in the divine institution of marriage. Her characters endure numerous almost unbearable trials in their passage from love through despair to happiness, usually in marriage.

She opposes injustice in any form, showing sympathy for slaves, poverty-stricken or abused people, illegitimate characters, and, especially, deserted wives. She had little to say publicly about her own disastrous marriage. In almost every novel, however, a wife, deserted by her husband, has to provide for herself and perhaps her family. In *Self-Made* there are five deserted wives. Sometimes wives are kidnapped and perhaps imprisoned, but even in the most frightening situations, their goodness and their purity protect them from evil assault except from husbands. In almost every case there comes the reunion, with the repentant husband acknowledging the injustice of his accusations against his wife's character and pleading for forgiveness. Marriage, even under these circumstances, is lasting.

Most of the heroines, though they may first appear as orphans or children of humble families, prove in the outcome to be from old aristocratic families and to have fortunes awaiting them. Very young girls are often married to middle-aged or elderly men, but these child brides are
usually soon to be well-to-do widows. Mrs. Southworth, who probably in real life often saw men outlive their wives and then marry young girls, sees nothing repulsive in such unions.

Haughty beauties, usually of foreign birth, are used to contrast with the angelic heroines—the simple, virtuous, long-suffering souls. So perfect are these girls that they assume an ethereal quality and often seem mere representations of goodness rather than real human beings. Their saint-like endurance carries them through all sorts of tribulations with their purity unsoiled.

The author delights in detailed pictures of the dress of the aristocratic heiresses and elegant old ladies of the great estates. She describes the sparkling jewels and the rich fabrics and colors of the ball gowns and traveling costumes and even the dainty, snowy underclothing scented with sweet gums and herbs. White organdies and muslins and laces, colored sashes, and rosebuds distinguish the young girls from their elders. Black satins and taffetas, as well as jewels of jet, distinguish young women in mourning, while stately old ladies with silver-gray hair present a majestic appearance in black velvet or silk with trimmings and shawls of white lace. Spinsters, on the other hand, dress plainly, in black alpaca perhaps, with few ornaments and wear their gray-streaked hair simply arranged.

Mrs. Southworth's first full-length novel,
Retribution (1849), received mainly enthusiastic reviews. John Greenleaf Whittier, says Helen Papashvily, considered it "as good as, perhaps even better than Jane Eyre," and many others agreed with him. In it the two leading characters are orphans. Hester Gray, the heiress to an immense estate in Virginia, has been reared in a boarding school. There she meets Juliette Summers, "a beautiful, but selfish, unprincipled, intriguing girl—to whom the plain, simple-hearted and generous heiress furnished a most convenient, profitable, and easy dupe."

Hester is a slight thin girl in delicate health. She has a dark complexion, shining brown hair, and large brilliant gray eyes. Usually she dresses simply in brown or gray. She can think only of loving a strong man with lofty intellect and morals, a man in whose wisdom she can find a perfect guide, but because she is plain, she has no real hope of matrimony. Shortly after leaving school, she is married to Colonel Ernest Dent, a strong and serious man more than twice her age. He is more often stern and gentle than loving but Hester is happy.

The beautiful Juliette, with the air and manner of a princess, has been Hester's protegee. She is a tall brunette

---

18 Helen Waite Papashvily, All the Happy Endings (New York, 1956), p. 61.
with shining black ringlets, large black eyes, and a rich complexion. When Hester invites Juliette to live in her home, she reminds Ernest that the girl is an orphan of refined sensibility and needs delicate treatment. That plotting young woman dresses in pure white muslin and wears no ornaments so that to the colonel she appears chaste and sweet. Hester provides beautiful clothes and rich jewels and introduces her to the upper social circles. Soon Colonel Dent and Juliette fall in love. Gentle, innocent Hester, who loves and trusts them both, never recognizes the situation. When she dies from consumption, they are free to marry. Their feeling of guilt at having betrayed her trust dooms their happiness, though for a time they prosper. Colonel Dent becomes ambassador to a foreign court, where Juliette, with jewelry and beautiful gowns a queen might have coveted, reigns like royalty over the social events. Mutual distrust leads to quarrels ever more serious, and the ambassador, who sadly recalls his "angel wife," Hester, is a broken man. Juliette becomes the mistress of a grand duke. Retribution has indeed overtaken Dent.

In Hester's daughter, life starts anew for the colonel. The "fair, slight, graceful girl in white muslin" is a "vision of purity."\(^{20}\) This "delicate" girl with her mother's

"large, clear, dark-gray hollow eyes" leads her father back into the idealistic path he once followed and to a Christian life. She risks poverty and "loss of caste" in order to carry out her "angel" mother's thwarted efforts to free the family slaves.

Capitola, of The Hidden Hand and its sequel, Capitola's Peril, combines the old and the new characteristics of an American heroine. She enters the story as an orphan on the city streets being rescued by a wealthy old Virginia major. Many villainous plots must be exposed and dangerous adventures played out before all of the long-lost relatives are discovered and the separated lovers re-united. The spirited and independent young hoyden, Capitola, is the object of some of the evil schemes. Instead of suffering and enduring as the domestic heroines are wont to do, she fights a duel with dried peas, overcomes a kidnaper, shouts back at her gruff old guardian, captures a dangerous brigand, and takes an active part in many other adventures.

Mrs. Papashvily, in All the Happy Endings, sees in Capitola the beginning of "the typically American version of the ideal woman that still exists." In early seduction novels it was behavior that counted rather than physical beauty. Consequently there were generalized descriptions

\[\text{21Southworth, Retribution, p. 300.}\]
\[\text{22Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, p. 128.}\]
of "meek gentle doves," with "pale polished cheeks" and general "fragility." Debilitating illnesses and childbirth took such a heavy toll that many husbands in life as well as in fiction outlived two or more wives. By the middle of the century health standards were improving, but not everybody was immediately strong and robust. Delicate health continued to play a part in novels too, because serious illness could accomplish almost anything a woman desired. The martyr-like role of a cheerful invalid, common in English fiction, did not remain fascinating to American women. The desire to lead active lives and to remain young and beautiful with fresh skin and clear eyes is reflected in Mrs. Southworth's description of Capitola:

Thick clustering curls of jet-black hair fell in tangled disorder around a forehead broad, white, and smooth . . . ; slender and quaintly arched black eyebrows played over a pair of mischievous, dark-gray eyes, that sparkled beneath the shade of long, thick, black lashes; a little, turned-up nose, and red, parting lips, completed the character of a countenance full of fun, frolic, spirit and courage.

Major Warfield takes Capitola to Virginia to rear her as a Southern belle. She is never the meek, mild heroine who is so fragile that she faints in the face of danger or falls into illness at the slightest disappointment. She is,

---

23 Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, pp. 126-128.

instead, gay and devilish, sweeping along with the air of a princess, dancing about the plantation, and looking always for new and exciting things to do. In dangerous situations she keeps her wits about her so that she solves mysteries and foils villains on every hand. She is so self-reliant that she never waits for a male protector but dares to accomplish on her own. Yet with all her independence and defiance of authority she is so frolicsome, witty, and charming that she is liked and admired by both men and women. Though the old major admits that Capitola is sometimes wild and reckless, he insists that she passed unscathed through the terrible ordeal of destitution, poverty, and exposure. He says, "She is as innocent as the most daintily sheltered young heiress in the country." In spite of her defiant manner and her mischievous behavior, the old man admires his ward. His greatest compliment is to tell her she should have been a man.

In the two books there are several other women characters who are far more like the traditional heroines than Capitola. They are the misunderstood and mistreated martyrs who suffer greatly before they find happiness.

Marah Rocke is a deserted wife. At thirty-five she is a hard-working seamstress earning a "poor and precarious" living for herself and her son. Mrs. Southworth describes

---

25 Southworth, The Hidden Hand, p. 159.
her as "refined" and "delicate" for one of her "supposed rank":

... her little form, slight and flexible as that of a young girl, was clothed in a poor but neat black dress, relieved by a pure white collar around her throat; her jet black hair was parted plainly over her 'low, sweet brow,' brought down each side of her thin cheeks, and gathered into a bunch at the back of her shapely little head; her face was oval, with regular features and pale olive complexion; serious lips, closed in pensive thought, and soft, dark-brown eyes, full of tender affections and sorrowful memories, and too often cast down in meditation beneath the heavy shadows of their long, thick eyelashes, completed the melancholy beauty of a countenance not often seen among the hard-working children of toil.  

At sixteen Marah, a friendless orphan, married a man of forty-five. At that time she had "a pearly skin like the leaf of the white japonica, soft, gray eyes like a timid fawn's, and a voice like a cooing turtle dove's." She adored her husband as "a sort of God," and he loved her as "an angel" until a false friend convinced him she was unfaithful. Since her desertion at seventeen, she has suffered from poverty, hard work, loneliness, and sadness. Only her love for her son and her faith in God have sustained her.  

Clara Day is fourteen when she meets Marah's son, Traverse. He sees that "the golden hair flowed in ringlets

---

27 Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 77-78.
around a fair, roseate face, soft and bright with feeling and intelligence." Her dark-blue eyes and intense heavenly smile completely fascinate the boy. At first he wishes "the fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed, white robed angel" were his sister, but soon the two are in love. Before Dr. Day dies, he approves their engagement and tries to provide for his heiress and her fiancé. Their happiness soon comes to an abrupt end when Clara's guardian refuses to honor her father's wishes. He separates the lovers and attempts to force Clara to marry his son. The daring Capitola intervenes to save her from the marriage. Clara's "pure, grave, and gentle expression" so touches Capitola's heart that she exchanges places with the bride and outwits the villain.

The usual happy ending finally comes. Marah is reunited with her husband, Major Warfield, after eighteen years of suffering and sadness. He knows now that she is as pure as the magnolia blossom she resembled when they married. Clara's fortune is restored and she is married to Traverse, the major's son and heir. Capitola is also an heiress. She marries the major's nephew, another person restored to his position. The second of the two books ends with the two brides pictured as "lovely in white satin and

---

Honiton lace, pearls and orange blossoms."²⁹

III

A second Northern-born sentimentalist who came South when she married was Mary Jane Holmes. She made her home for a time in Versailles, Kentucky. Eventually she settled in New York, but several of her books are set in the South and reflect Southern life. Her first novel, Tempest and Sunshine (1854), pictures Southern society in Kentucky and New Orleans just before the Civil War.

What she was trying to do in her novels of domestic life, Mrs. Holmes described in this way: "I mean always to write a good, pure, and natural story, such as mothers are willing their daughters should read and such as will do good instead of harm."³⁰ In her stories the characters are somewhat ordinary and there is little action, but conflicts arise from differences in personality, background, and social standing. While earlier domestic novelists had the struggle of life as woman against man, Helen W. Papashvily points out that Mrs. Holmes depicts a meeting of worthy but equal opponents: "Woman against woman, rival against rival,


³⁰"Some 'Lady Novelists' and Their Works: as Seen from a Public Library," The Literary World, XIII (June 3, 1882), 185.
youth against age, sister against sister.\textsuperscript{31} Thus the man, who is pictured as physically, mentally, or morally impaired, becomes a prize in the contest rather than a protagonist.

Though she did not achieve artistic success as a novelist of manners, Mrs. Holmes found writing profitable. She continued to publish until shortly before her death in 1907, but the life and manners she knew and told about had already disappeared. The total sale of her books was so great that it has been said that no other woman author in America, except Harriet Beecher Stowe, received such large sums from her copyrights. Among the best known of her many novels are \textit{Lena Rivers}, \textit{Meadow Brook}, \textit{The English Orphans}, and \textit{The Homestead on the Hills}.

In \textit{Tempest and Sunshine} two sisters represent the opposing terms of the title. Mr. Middleton, a well-to-do Kentucky planter, has passed on to his daughter Julia his quick, passionate temper. He calls the handsome girl "Tempest." "She was a brunette, but there was on her cheek so rich and changeable a color, that one forgot in looking at her whether she was light or dark. Her disposition was something like her complexion, —dark and variable."\textsuperscript{32} In direct contrast with this dark beauty is Fanny, who "showed

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{31}Papashvily, \textit{All the Happy Endings}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{32}Mary Jane Holmes, \textit{Tempest and Sunshine} (New York, 1886), p. 18.
by her face that she was an angel." This younger girl, given the pet name of "Sunshine" by her father and called "darling Miss Fanny" by all the plantation servants, is gentle and sweet to everyone. "Her face was very pale, and her bright golden hair fell in soft curls around her neck and shoulders, giving her something of the appearance of a fairy. Her eyes were very large and very dark blue, and ever mirrored forth the feelings of her soul." Julia, more beautiful and more intellectual than the retiring Fanny, is just "as false as fair."

The author early warns her readers to watch for the betrayal of good by evil. She describes the sisters as "purity and guilt" sleeping side by side, and "the angel of innocence spread his wing protectingly over the yellow locks of the one, while a serpent lay coiled in the dark tresses of the other." The wicked "Tempest" tricks Fanny into thinking her lover has deserted her. As is usual with angelic heroines, grief causes her to grow paler and thinner and to become seriously ill. Pride, however, helps her endure her disappointment. Where her sister is described as being like "a flashing diamond," her beauty seems like "the soft lustre of the pearl":

She was so pale that her skin seemed almost transparent, but the excitement of the evening brought a bright glow to her cheek which greatly enhanced her loveliness. She was simply attired in a plain white muslin, low at the neck, which was veiled by the soft curls of her silken hair. Her arms were encircled by a plain band of gold, and a white half-opened rosebud was fastened to the bosom of her dress.36

"Sunshine" dresses beautifully but suitably for an innocent young girl. Sometimes she wears "white muslin, festooned with wild flowers,"37 and on one occasion "white tarleton, embroidered in bouquets of lilies of the valley in silver," and with "a single japonica . . . among the curls of her bright hair."38 If she wears jewels, her neck is encircled by a necklace of pearls and her "white, slender wrists" have pearl bracelets. She looks, say her admirers, like "a bright angel."39

Fanny's innocence is no protection from her evil sister. The brunette beauty, Julia, brings heartbreak to Fanny by winning Dr. Lacey from her. The self-sacrificing heroine sadly but nobly and bravely accepts her fate, even having the house repaired and properly decorated for the wedding. The white hangings and draperies reflect the "purity" of the anguished girl who has been cheated of her

---

36 Holmes, Tempest and Sunshine, p. 144.  
37 Holmes, Tempest and Sunshine, p. 185.  
38 Holmes, Tempest and Sunshine, p. 252.  
love. Only during the wedding ceremony is Julia's treachery exposed so that the true lovers can be re-united. "Tempest" is at last properly punished and brought to repentance. "Sunshine" recovers from her near-fatal illness and "lives happily ever afterward" with her rich husband.

Marriage brings happiness to the other women in the story also. Even the flirtatious widow, who has tried to attract every young man to come upon the scene, becomes practical enough to realize that any husband is better than none. She accepts the older man whom she had once refused in order to make her romantic first marriage. One of the girls from New Orleans mourns that she, at twenty-two, is trying to become resigned to spinsterhood. The Middletons immediately invite her to Kentucky with prospects of finding a husband.

'Lena Rivers' is another Holmes novel with two sisters of opposite appearance and nature. Carrie and Anna Livingstone, the daughters of Kentucky plantation people, are subordinate characters to the little orphan 'Lena Rivers, who comes from the East to live with them.

The proud, imperious, and deceitful Carrie is hated by the servants and disliked by her equals. She is, however, considered pretty. Mrs. Livingstone, whose chief aim in life is to arrange "brilliant matches" for her daughters, instills in Carrie's mind the importance of appearing always at her best when with people of wealth and distinction.
Upon Anna, too, the mother tries to impress her aristocratic notions. It is in vain, however; "Anna was purely democratic, loving everybody and beloved by everybody in return." Carrie grows up into the "haughty southern belle." She is never so popular as the unpretending younger sister with her "laughing blue eyes and sunny brown hair," "delicate" figure, and complexion "white and pure as marble" but denoting perfect health.

It is soon obvious that the fair young 'Lena will be a rival for the sisters. 'Lena, with her long silken curls, is beautiful, though it is "as much a beauty of intellect as of feature and form." Mrs. Livingstone, aided and abetted by the proud and overbearing Carrie, is trying to promote "brilliant" marriages for her children. Since the sweet and unassuming niece attracts love and attention from everyone, it is against her that the matchmaking mother directs her ill will. Anna and her brother love their cousin and sometimes make their father see the injustice she suffers from his wife and older daughter. On one occasion, for example, he himself provides a richly embroidered white muslin dress

40 Mary Jane Holmes, 'Lena Rivers (New York, 1875), p. 46.
41 Holmes, 'Lena Rivers, p. 100.
43 Holmes, 'Lena Rivers, p. 73.
for 'Lena to wear to a party. Dressed in the soft muslin, she needs no ornaments except "a few natural flowers" intertwined in her "long, flowing curls."\textsuperscript{44}

After she has patiently endured misunderstandings, mistreatment, and a critical illness brought about by a shattered romance, 'Lena is revealed as the long-lost daughter of Mr. Graham. Therefore she is actually a member of an old South Carolina family, aristocratic and wealthy. There are now no obstacles to her marriage to Mr. Graham's step-son: "Very proudly Durward looked down upon her as he placed the first husband's kiss on her pure, white brow, and in the soft brown eyes, brimming with tears, which she raised to his face, there was a world of tenderness, telling that theirs was a union of hearts as well as hands."\textsuperscript{45}

The haughty Carrie and her mother fail in their evil designs. Having once said she would rather die than never marry, Carrie accepts old Captain Atherton in a moment of pique, and "thus she lives, that most wretched of all beings, an unloving and unloved wife."\textsuperscript{46}

In both \textit{Tempest} and \textit{Sunshine} and \textit{'Lena Rivers} the chief contest is between two beautiful women, with a handsome and wealthy husband as the prize.

\textsuperscript{44}Holmes, \textit{'Lena Rivers}, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{45}Holmes, \textit{'Lena Rivers}, p. 414.
\textsuperscript{46}Holmes, \textit{'Lena Rivers}, p. 416.
When her father's death left her in financial need, Eliza Ann Dupuy, of St. Petersburgh, Virginia, became a governess in the Ellis family, of Natchez, Mississippi. There she began her writing career with The Conspirator, a story of Aaron Burr. Finding her book successful, she gave up teaching and devoted full time to writing. She moved to Kentucky and contracted to write for the New York-Ledger, agreeing to furnish one thousand pages of manuscript yearly. Miss Dupuy's novels, all of them sensational, are filled with murders, robberies, madness, and other horrors. Among her forty or more works are The Planter's Daughter, A New Way to Win a Fortune, The Coquette's Punishment, The Concealed Treasure, and The Country Neighborhood.

Clare Desmond and Claudia Coyle are pitted against each other in the struggle for great wealth in A New Way to Win a Fortune. Their names as well as their appearances characterize the girls so that from the very beginning it is obviously a contest between good and evil. The prize is, of course, to go to the innocent young heroine but not until she has been the victim of many plots and counterplots and has suffered greatly.

Seventeen-year-old Clare is the daughter of an

---

47 Mildred Lewis Rutherford, The South in History and Literature (Athens, Georgia, 1907), p. 220.
impoverished Virginia gentleman. This lovely girl is described as "petite, slender, and perfectly formed, with a piquant face, the nose slightly retroussé, deep violet blue eyes, with black hair and eyebrows, a wilful little mouth, and a complexion radiantly soft and fair, with the clearest rose tint on cheeks and lips." When she goes to teach music in a nearby town, she becomes involved with John Spiers, a dashing but deceitful young man. He appeals to her by telling of his need for a "guardian angel" to prevent some "demon" from influencing him. When she assures him that she is no angel but a mortal woman in need of a husband to guide her, his plea is this:

"I ask you, a young girl, to save a human soul fluttering on the verge of—of the wild chaos of his own passions. You can make me noble and true as you are yourself; but if you refuse to hold out your dear hand to me, I must sink down—down—down into an abyss from which a lost spirit will ever cry out to you, 'You might have saved me, but like the Pharisee, you walked on the other side, and would not.'"  

Young Clare is taken into the home of her wealthy aunt, who has large holdings on the James River. There she finds in Claudia Coyle a rival for the inheritance of Mrs. Adair's property. Though Clare is startled and attracted


\[49\] Dupuy, *A New Way to Win a Fortune*, p. 34.
by the "regal loveliness" of the woman, she feels immediately that they are opponents in a duel. Claudia steps forward with "a slow, undulating movement" to welcome Clare. The first view of the "imperial" woman is described this way:

No goddess in marble could have surpassed her in regularity of feature or gracefulness of form; but those cold, impassive creations lacked the subtle vital charm which pervaded her whole person—speaking in her large, liquid, black eyes, smiling in her red, sensuous, though exquisitely formed lips. Her hair, of deep bronze hue, was gathered into a knot at the back of her head, from which long tendril-like curls fell upon her fair neck. Her arms were bare nearly to the shoulder, and a single bracelet, representing the coils of a serpent, was wound several times around her left wrist, the head of the reptile set with glittering gems, which gave it a venomous and almost lifelike appearance.  

The serpent-like Claudia and the rascally Spiers are lovers secretly in league to use Clare as a means of securing the Adair fortune. They are willing to resort to any means, even the desperate device of having Spiers marry Clare. The eccentricity of the old lady and the impetuous, somewhat willful and coquettish nature of Clare work in their favor. A long series of intrigues seems certain to bring victory to the plotters. Clare, however, is bright and clever and has strong, intelligent friends, particularly in the plantation manager and his son, Jasper. After she recovers from the desperate illness brought on by her troubles,

---

50 Dupuy, A New Way to Win a Fortune, p. 148.
they work together to defeat the enemy. She inherits Riverdale, where she lives on happily with Jasper as her husband.

Here again the conflict has been between two women, with the husband and fortune going to the innocent young girl. Miss Coyle, whose name, appearance, and actions all suggest the evil serpent, is of European birth and is a woman of the world in every sense, but she is no match for the purity of Southern womanhood. The young bride has both wealth and happiness.

V

One of the most truly Southern of the women who wrote sentimental fiction might easily have been the heroine of one of her own novels. With her family background Augusta Jane Evans would certainly have been among the belles of Columbus, Georgia, had not her father's business failure led him to move his family West. They lived in San Antonio during the Mexican War but in 1849 settled in Mobile, Alabama. Since the family was plagued by poverty, Augusta wanted employment. Not qualified to teach school, she determined to write. She was well aware of the moral stigma then attached to novels. She planned therefore, says her biographer, William P. Fidler, "to give her own compositions such religious fervor that any opposition to the form would
quickly disappear among her readers."\(^{51}\)

In 1854 Augusta Evans completed her first book, *Inez, A Tale of the Alamo*, a historical novel. *Beulah*, 1859, recounted the progress of the heroine from scepticism to religious faith. *Macaria*, 1864, was designed to glorify the Confederacy and lift the morale of Southerners. Miss Evans attained the height of her reputation in 1867 with *St. Elmo*, the immensely popular sentimental novel about the sardonic hero, St. Elmo, saved through the efforts of the Christian heroine, Edna Earl. The next year Miss Evans, in marrying Colonel Lorenzo Wilson, made the kind of brilliant marriage usually attained by her virtuous heroines. As mistress of Ashland, she reigned as first lady of Mobile, and perhaps of Alabama. Her rise from poverty to wealth shows in her own life as well as in the lives of her heroines, says W. P. Fidler, "that virtue, attended by circumspection, must inevitably find its just reward."\(^{52}\) Mrs. Wilson continued to write, next publishing *Vashti; or Until Death Us Do Part*, with divorce as its chief target. Then came *Infelice* (1875), a melodramatic story about an actress who exposed her bigamous husband and his degenerate father. In *Tiberius* (1857) the author introduced realism but again has a sentimental

---


heroine, Beryl, endowed with intellectual ability and unusual talents as well as moral fortitude, kindliness, and Christian hopes. Except for the short romance *Devoto*, 1913, Mrs. Wilson ended her literary career in 1902 with *A Speckled Bird*. It has the familiar pathetic situation in the major story but a modern theme concerning a "de-sexed" feminist in the minor plot. Mrs. Wilson died in 1909, just after her seventy-fourth birthday.

Most of the Evans heroines, like those of other sentimental novelists, are orphans taken into the homes of wealthy and aristocratic families, usually plantation people. These girls show considerable independence. Though boarding schools and seminaries attracted many of the daughters of Southern planters, Miss Evans describes her heroines as intellectual women interested in more than the rather light courses of study followed by young belles. They are seriously interested in languages, philosophy, history, astronomy, art, music, and even science and theology. It is by applying themselves to their studies that they can become artists, musicians, writers, or teachers, and gain independence. In *Macaria Irene*, though an heiress, spends long hours studying astronomy, and the orphan Electra dedicates herself to the study of art and becomes a successful painter. *Vashti* has an intellectual heroine in the title character and a musician in Salome Owen, the orphan. *Vashti* reads, writes, and paints to fill
her lonely days, while Salome studies foreign languages and
takes music lessons in order to prepare for her success as
an opera singer. *St. Elmo's* heroine, the orphan girl Edna
Earl, is tutored by a minister, who finds her mind better
than that of her fellow male student. She studies Latin,
Greek, Hebrew, and even a little Chaldee, all of which she
uses to prepare for her ethical writings which make her the
darling of the intellectuals in New York and win fame for
her in scholarly magazines.

The women characters in the Evans novels suffer,
usually long and silently, over the men in their lives.
They are very often the victims of loveless marriages, un­
requited love, and unworthy lovers, but the orphans at least
do not merely repine their fate or continue indefinitely as
wards of their benevolent patrons. They become writers or
singers or sculptors or painters, able to make their own
way in the world. In common with the typical heroine, how­
ever, they usually suffer a shattering illness. Constant
study and overwork as well as heartbreak cause the frail,
fragile women to succumb to consumption, brain fever, and
nervous breakdowns. Salome Owen, for example, works very
hard to prepare for the stage. At the very moment of tri­
umph her voice fails because she has relentlessly gone on
too far.

Religion, too, has an important place in the lives of
the women in these novels. They pray for their loved ones
and plead with them to become Christians as well as set good examples for them. Irene Huntingdon, in *Macaria*, gives her lover a Bible when he leaves to serve in the Confederate army. Her only happiness comes from learning that he has read the Bible, learned to pray, and become a Christian before he dies on the battlefield.

Mrs. Wilson's *St. Elmo*, often spoken of as "the most praised, best abused novel ever written," is perhaps the best illustration of the sentimental vogue as it was carried on from the feminine fifties to the sixties. Few books even yet have exceeded its popularity and sales in the United States. It is the unashamedly sentimental book that catered not only to the sensibilities of Victorian readers but also to their love of opulence and hunger for culture. Set at Le Bocage, Southern plantation with house and grounds fitted out in a grand and exotic manner, it traces the progress of the sardonic hero St. Elmo from sin to salvation, the salvation resulting from the influence of the Christian heroine, Edna Earl. The familiar Byronic hero, literary descendant of such rakes as Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, enlists the sympathy and eventually the love of "the innocent little girl from the Tennessee mountains" and, judging from the tremendous popularity of the novel, must have intrigued innumerable Victorian girls and ladies.

The orphan heroine, Edna Earl, is introduced as a "pure-hearted Tennessee child, . . . drinking drafts of joy
which mingled no drop of sin or selfishness in its crystal waves; for she had grown up alone with nature—utterly ignorant of the roar and strife, the burning hate and cunning intrigue of the great world of men and women. . . . "53 Soon the innocent child faces both sin and death. Too proud to live on charity and eager for "book learning," which even the mountaineers think a woman has a right to, she sets out to find work. She becomes the ward of the cold and proud, yet kind mistress of Le Bocage. Her gentle patience and her religious fervor help win Mrs. Murray's love also. The wealthy patroness arranges for Edna's education but warns the minister tutor not to make of her a bluestocking, one of those tiresome, pedantic, and disagreeable women. Proudly insisting that she will stay only until she can prepare to teach and repay Mrs. Murray, Edna accepts the opportunities offered her and proves a very capable student, even learning Greek and Hebrew.

Edna soon meets Mrs. Murray's son, St. Elmo, who is a proud and haughty "older man" of past thirty. His reputation is dark and mysterious, but the innocent girl pities rather than hates him. He speaks of her as a "stubborn sweet saint,"54 and is amazed but touched by her daring to

53 Augusta J. Evans, St. Elmo (Chicago, n.d.), p. 2.
54 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 54.
reproach him for being sinful and cruel. After four years of wandering, St. Elmo finds that Edna Earl has changed from a "pretty sad-eyed child into a lovely woman with a pure heart filled with humble ostentatious piety and a clear vigorous intellect inured to study, and ambitious of every honorable eminence within the grasp of true womanhood." With her large sparkling black eyes, her flexible red lips, and her full polished forehead, she has beauty of body as well as of mind and soul. He, like all others, sees that she has a pure heart, and he is greatly impressed by her having proved worthy of his trust during his long absence. At family worship, which she has initiated, he hears prayers for the first time in nineteen years.

With the pride of all sentimental heroines, Edna Earl holds aloof from society and works toward independence. Only her tutor understands her refusal of Gordon Leigh, who offers her a luxurious life as his wife. She is intellectually his superior and can never marry one by whose intellect she cannot be ruled and to whom she cannot look up admiringly. Edna falls in love with St. Elmo even though she feels that he is "a mocking devil, unworthy of the respect or toleration of any Christian woman." She prays for his soul and for strength to resist his magnetism.

---

55 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 87.
56 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 188.
Complications arising from the presence of three beautiful and flirtatious women, all effective foils to the saintly orphan, and assurances of a successful writing career send Edna to New York. Because of his "sinful nature," she refuses St. Elmo's marriage proposal. Impressed by her faithfulness to all trusts and her nobility of character, he pleads for her help and guidance in making amends for his irreligious life. He concludes, "Give your pure sinless life to purify mine." 57 Repelled by his past, she cannot put her faith in him, even though her old tutor adds his pleas. He reminds her of the good that a pious Christian wife can accomplish in the heart of her husband.

Edna is highly successful as a teacher and a writer. Although she defends the intellectual ability of women, she never advocates women's "Rights," which might injure a woman's services in the home and make her less capable of woman's "tender offices." 58 She considers intelligent, refined, modest Christian women the custodians of "national purity." She urges them to exercise their influence in their homes and on their husbands and children and to be all the phrase "noble Christian woman" implies. Never can she advocate giving a woman the right to vote, for that means "to trail her heaven-born purity through the dust and mire

---

57 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 278.
58 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 334.
of political strife."

She pursues her career, even to the detriment of her health, in order to be "an instrument of some good to her race." She warns against "deluded female malcontents" who threaten to invade man's kingdom and reiterates two assurances: "Those who rock the cradle rule the world" and "Woman reigned by divine right only at home."

Only after months of agonizing and suffering does Edna Earl, the most sentimental perhaps of all sentimental heroines, achieve her ultimate triumph: the salvation of St. Elmo, who through her Christian influence is ordained a minister. She is pale, thin, and ill when at last St. Elmo claims his "pure, noble, and beautiful wife." Now that she belongs to him, St. Elmo tells her that her literary career is to end.

In Vashti; or, Until Death Us Do Part, the still youthful heroine, because of a secret sorrow that turned her hair white overnight, lives in complete isolation. Only in the end is it revealed that she is separated from a husband who married her merely for her fortune. With divorce out of the question for such a heroine, she looks forward

---

59 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 395.
60 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 201.
61 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 444.
62 Evans, St. Elmo, p. 480.
to death, the only release for her.

At twenty-three, Vashti, known as Mrs. Agla Gerome, is a study in gray. The gray-eyed, gray-haired, gray-clad, and gray-faced woman almost seems to be a gray ghost rising from the gray sea. At twenty-three she is a paradox of youth and old age. She is tall, slender, and nobly beautiful but with a wan face, "pure bluish gray eyes" enhanced by heavy black fringes, "prematurely silvered hair" matching her "pearl-colored muslin dress." On her dimpled wrists she wears quaintly carved jet serpents with blazing diamond eyes. The only color about the desolate gray woman is the blue glitter of a large sapphire ring in the form of a coiled asp with brilliant diamond eyes that twinkle with every movement of her frail hands and "marble-white fingers."

At Solitude Mrs. Gerome spends her time in melancholy pursuits. Only Dr. Gray gains entrance where the woman, spoken of as "regal," "imperial," or "queenly" in her gray beauty, waits and longs for death. When he notices blue ribbons and a blue-lined cloak added to her dismal costume, he learns that blue is a "mortuary" color. He watches over her through troubles and illness and learns of her tragic marriage at sixteen to a fortune hunter of thirty. For her,

---

63 Augusta Jane Evans, Vashti (New York, 1887), p. 77.
64 Evans, Vashti, pp. 81-82.
marriage is literally "until death us do part." She can find no consolation except in death.

The author carries us through years of sorrow while Agla suffers bereavements and illnesses and heartaches, growing thinner and paler but no less queenly in her fragile beauty. When at last her husband dies, Ulpian goes to his "brave, beautiful 'Agla'"65 to propose but it is too late.

The orphan adopted by wealthy Miss Grey is a healthy, frolicsome girl of sixteen. She has rosy cheeks and red lips, a heavy mass of dusky waveless hair worn in plaits and coils, and dark hazel eyes flecked with gold and topaz. When Dr. Grey comes home, Salome sees her future as an heiress less bright. She becomes resentful and rebellious and determines to become independent. Tirelessly she pursues her studies, and by embroidering at night earns money for language and singing lessons. The doctor's interest in Agla and in his ward increases her outbursts of fiery temper and her perverse behavior. She, growing rapidly into a beautiful woman, is jealous, for she wants his love rather than his brotherly interest and affection.

Proudly Salome gives up her inheritance to go to Europe to study and to begin her musical career. The silky-haired girl with her fresh daintily carved face and her outspoken honesty wins admiration everywhere. She turns aside

65 Evans, Vashti, p. 467.
all marriage proposals, because she already loves a noble man. At the peak of her triumph Salome's voice fails. Too proud to go home or to accept favors, she literally drops out of sight. Even after a dangerous illness she still refuses to marry Mr. Minge and struggles to support herself. When Ulpian finds her, she is no longer a passionately defiant beauty, but a thin white-faced woman with a sad, patient hopelessness about her. Her glossy braids are gone, and short locks cluster around the thin white face; along the polished chin show delicate traces of purplish veins. Her hands are almost transparent. Tearfully she bends over her lacework.

Salome inherits Mr. Minge's fortune and goes home wealthy after all. Gradually she regains her health so that when we see her in a soft white muslin, with pomegranate flowers in her hair, the author's description is of a girl "very lovely, very attractive, so full of youthful grace, so winning in her beautiful enthusiasm." She has tears of happiness and her cheeks glow with color as she shares with Ulpian the restoration of her lovely contralto voice. It is now a blessing rather than a curse ministering to false pride and vanity. Still the victim of unrequited love, Salome patiently endures and waits. She has put off her pagan rebelliousness for Christian forbearance.

---

66 Evans, Vashti, p. 471.
Eglah Kent, daughter of a Southern mother and a Yankee father, is the heroine of *A Speckled Bird*. Since her mother dies at her birth, Eglah is reared by her tall, very handsome grandmother, who is the widow of a Confederate general. The stately old lady has brilliant blue eyes and thick coiled hair with no gray, but sorrow makes her stern and sad, cold even to her beautiful granddaughter. The girl has long-lashed velvety-brown eyes, and curls of chestnut braided with gold. She is all Kent except for her hands and feet, which are "dainty, beautiful, patrician." \(^67\)

Besides being beautiful, Eglah is an intellectual heroine who "swept through college like a southern tornado" and carried off all the trophies for "mental attainments and physical perfection." \(^68\) It is to please her father that she achieves honors and that she leaves the Methodist Church of her Southern ancestors for the Episcopal Church. Charming and lovely, Eglah devotes herself to him and refuses all suitors. Noel Herriot, her father's step-son, offers wealth, culture, and devotion, but she turns him away too. When she finally marries Noel, it is only to save her father from disgrace. During the months of sadness and suffering when she hears nothing from him, she knows she loves him but has


\(^{68}\) Evans [Wilson], *A Speckled Bird*, p. 50.
lost hope of winning back his love or even his respect. Marriage for her means "until death us do part," but she offers him his freedom, saying:

"Divorce I hold a shameful blot on true womanhood, a menace to domestic and national morality, an insult to the Lord. Human law can no more annul my marriage than my baptismal vow; neither was made to man; both stand on that divine record only death can erase; they are locked among the sacraments of God, 'so long as ye both shall live.'"69

Eglah finds complete happiness when she learns that Noel wants what she can now give—"love that brings a pure woman gladly to her husband's breast"70 and his "own wife's pure lips."71

Nona Dane, at fifteen, is married to an eighteen-year-old son of a rich family. By a series of misfortunes she becomes a deserted wife. She is at first a simple, humble girl, whose "golden hair was twisted into little curls and waves and tendrils that glittered like gilt wire" and whose "large purplish-blue eyes" and "bright red lips" make her exquisitely beautiful.72 Later her dark violet eyes and glittering yellow hair are still outstanding features of her empress-like beauty. Her vivid coloring

---

69 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, pp. 419-420.
70 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 422.
71 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 423.
72 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 100.
suggests a tropical flower until one sees that she is more like "a frozen tulip under a sheet of ice, so hard was the gleam of the defiant eyes and the proud compression of red lips that had forgotten how to smile, that seemed never to have known the curves of tenderness." Though noble and courageous, Nona is bitter at her desertion and loses faith in man and God. She becomes a labor agitator and works for "the emancipation of her sex from bondage to God as well as to man." Through her, "the rights of women" outside the home are condemned as injuring the delicate moral fibers of feminine character and as destroying the identity of women as women. Poverty and hard work, the loss of her child, the terrors of strikes, finally her fatal wound during a strike are all described, with their attendant mental agony, before Nona forgives her estranged husband and is reconciled with God.

Both heroines, one an intellectual and the other a social reformer, are equally pure and beautiful. Though each tries, neither can find happiness except with her husband and in religious faith. Only by long suffering do the two learn the true role of woman.

Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz, Mrs. Mary Jane Holmes, Miss Eliza Dupuy, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, and Mrs. Augusta Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 73.

73 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 73.

74 Evans [Wilson], A Speckled Bird, p. 167.
Evans Wilson were all born in the South or were living there when they were writing their novels of domestic sentiment. Though these authors all used Southern settings and Southern characters, the plots and characterizations correspond closely to the sentimental pattern fashionable throughout the country during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The plantation, handed down from generation to generation, suggests a proud family heritage and stability as well as wealth. The traditional big house provides space and richness of background for balls and weddings, while spreading acres are accessible for horseback riding and carriage drives. Slaves, besides being used for humorous purposes, add to the atmosphere of ease and prosperity and account for the leisurely existence where there is time for all things. They provide opportunities for the heroes and heroines to show kindness and benevolence, but since all the slaves are happy and faithful and all the masters kind, there is nothing exceptional in their behavior to distinguish the heroes and heroines as Southern.

The activities of plantation life or of Southern life in general have no real part in the action of the novels, and in almost all instances the plots could just as well have been developed among wealthy people anywhere, in large houses in any section of the country. There are no distinctly Southern problems except the occasional awareness that eventually the slaves must be freed; but no conflict
arises from the situation to influence the action of the novels.

The dozen novels discussed in this section seem fairly representative of nearly forty read for consideration of the treatment of Southern women in domestic fiction. Of the more than twenty outstanding women characters the young heiress and the orphan girl appear most often. The orphans, poor and humble in the beginning, inherit fortunes from their sponsors, are revealed as long-lost members of wealthy families, or marry rich husbands. Almost without exception the girls are beautiful; only Hester, in Retribution, is plain, and she has sweetness, gentleness, and innocent goodness which amply compensate for her lack of physical beauty.

Descriptions are stereotyped. The young women are usually tall and slender, they are always dainty and fragile, and seldom do they have the bloom of health. Small hands and feet are the distinguishing characteristics of which the Southern patrician is proudest. Luxuriant hair, usually in golden ringlets but occasionally brown or black and once gray, is standard in any description. Only Vashti, with prematurely gray hair; Salome Owen, with plaits and coils; and Hester, with smooth silken braids, do not have curls or waves. When the conflict is between two beauties, the blonde is so sweet and pure that she eventually wins over her brunette rival. Large brilliant eyes—gray, blue, brown, or occasionally purple—are always fringed with long lashes,
usually jet. The whiteness of the skin is also a mark of beauty. During illness, another requisite for the sentimental heroine, increasing thinness and paleness only add attractiveness. Rich and elaborate costumes and sparkling jewels enhance the loveliness of the women, but white muslin and fresh flowers are sufficient for the innocent young girls. Older women are majestic and still beautiful though sometimes cold, aloof, or proud. Silver-gray hair adds to their stately, dignified appearance. Their worst failing is matchmaking, with attempts to arrange advantageous marriages for their daughters or their wards. Love usually finds a way to outwit such scheming women, however.

True happiness comes to sentimental heroines only in marriage. Often, however, they must overcome many obstacles and suffer great heartbreak before being wed or before finding happiness in marriage. The girls nearly all marry young, usually at fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen. Most of the husbands are considerably older. If she is not married at twenty-two, a girl may as well resign herself to spinsterhood. Since any marriage is better than no marriage, some girls accept men much older and even enter into loveless marriages. Worldly women, though never the heroines, may marry solely for wealth and position. In a society which puts such emphasis on matrimony there are few old maids. Marriage is considered lasting, and even when wives are deserted, they never consider such an evil as divorce. Almost
without fail the husband, who for any reason deserts his wife reappears to exonerate her of any charge of faithlessness and to beg forgiveness for his wrongdoing and neglect.

Nearly all of the heroines receive education, some of them going to boarding school and even college. The orphans, more often perhaps than the heiresses, are serious about real learning and about preparing for a career. For such proud girls independence can come through their becoming teachers, artists, writers, or singers. All of the authors have girls showing an interest in education; Mrs. Wilson's heroines are the most intellectual, however, for they have philosophical and aesthetic interests. They shed fewer tears and take more action than the heroines who depend on emotion rather than intellect. Devotion to religion and insistence upon Christian faith in lovers and husbands is also a stronger characteristic of the Wilson heroines than of any others in this study.

The one absolutely unvarying characteristic for sentimental heroines is purity, which of course refers to chastity. These girls are all as "pure as angels" and have "pure" minds, "pure" hearts, "pure" souls, "pure" smiles, "pure" voices, "pure" speech, "pure" love, and so on through an endless list. Their faces and figures are modeled on "pure" lines and the young dress in "pure" white. They are ladies in dress and in appearance and, above all, in behavior. They are said to look like princesses and queens, sometimes
being called Princess or Queen as an endearing name. Such adjectives as noble, queenly, majestic, regal, royal, and imperial appear again and again in pictures of the beautiful ladies of domestic fiction.

Basically the domestic or sentimental novels, almost always written by women for women, were ever the same. The center of interest was the home; the woman was always glorified so that her every thought, action, and word had far-reaching influence; her trials and tribulations and her joys were enlarged to heroic proportions. Helen Papashvily comments that at the time when the first Woman's Rights Convention was being held at Seneca Falls, New York, most men were congratulating themselves and one another on their good luck in having wives, daughters, and mothers who were content to remain quietly at home "to reign like queens over pretty parlors." Looking back at the time and the situation, she sees an even greater threat to their domestic kingdom and their complacency. It was the domestic novels, which were handbooks of a feminine revolt against the enemy of women—man.

Along with the diminution of man and his place in the lives of women came the beginnings of the destruction of the old feudal concept of the lady. Even when heroines started

---

75 Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, p. xiii.
76 Papashvily, All the Happy Endings, p. xvii.
out as poor girls of humble origin, as the orphans almost always did, the sentimentalists liked to carry them to dazzling heights. Yet these authors were essentially democratic in that they showed how a girl of ability and superior character could rise to the top through her own efforts. By means of education and training she could prepare for a career, usually as a teacher but perhaps as an author, an artist, or a musician. In this way she could make a place for herself economically and socially. By her virtue she could win admiration, respect, and, almost always, a wealthy husband as well. Since virtue is not dependent upon birth, every woman who distinguished herself in right living could become a lady, even a "great lady." Aristocracy of virtue, not depending upon rank, family, and long-established wealth, is suited to the democratic society developing in the last part of the nineteenth century. It comes from individual character and effort, not from the external advantages attainable only by the few.
CHAPTER II

LOCAL COLOR FICTION OF THE SOUTH

After the Civil War there was, as Edd W. Parks expresses it, "no pattern of Southern civilization to recreate," and as a result some writers were loyal to the Old South, some heralded a New South, and still others attempted to catch certain regional values and picturesque qualities before they disappeared.¹ With improved transportation and communication, the people became imaginatively aware of the immensity of the country and its richness and variety, not only in scenery and climate but also in racial stock, background, and tradition. It was this interest in local custom which led to the development of the "local color" movement in literature. During the 1870's, the transition period between the old sentimental romance and the recent realism, regionalism arose in the frontier sections and also in the older areas where the rich historical background furnished the local color of social tradition.²

¹Edd Winfield Parks, Segments of Southern Thought (Athens, Georgia, 1938), pp. 125-126.
Local colorists dealt with aspects of life that were passing or had already passed. They noted racial and environmental factors and attempted to capture other distinguishing features which affected character, whether for good or bad. The South, with its Negroes, its Louisiana Creoles and Cajuns, its Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas mountaineers, and its degenerate "Cracker" types, as well as its old plantation aristocracy, was an important region in the movement. The strange mixture of romantic impulse and realistic technique gradually led writers completely away from romantic dreaming to realistic presentation of their material. The movement, called "veritism" in the works of Hamlin Garland but known eventually as realism, in some cases went in another direction to result in the vogue for historical fiction. There was an enormous amount of writing about the South when what Arthur Hobson Quinn calls "the aura of romance" gently covered the landscape in much the same way that the haze concealed the sharp crags of the mountains, and the society and manners of an old chivalric regime, with the gallant plantation aristocracy and the quaint Negro servants, lent themselves to glamorous delineation. As the sectional literature increased, Vernon L. Parrington says that it came to rely more and more on "the beauty of truth,"

\[\text{Arthur Hobson Quinn, editor, The Literature of the American People (New York, 1951), p. 652.}\]
and gradually primitive realism developed from local color. In the seventies and eighties an almost insatiable demand for Southern local color arose. Among those who ushered in the new school of the South were Richard M. Johnston, who continued writing Georgia dialect sketches; George Washington Cable, who depicted life among the Creoles and Acadians of Louisiana; Grace King, who contrasted French and American manners; Kate Chopin, who used Creoles, Acadians, Negroes, and mulattoes, and set most of her work in the plantation country along Red River, Cane River, and the Louisiana bayous; Joel Chandler Harris, who romanticized the old regime of Virginia; James Lane Allen, who began writing as a celebrant of his state, Kentucky; and Mary Noailles Murfree, who was charming readers with tales of the mountaineers in Tennessee. In giving attention to their narrow fields most of these authors were turning toward realism, for, as Parrington tells us, the charm of their work lay in "fidelity to the milieu, the exact portrayal of character and setting." The very nature of the local color material lent itself to the writing of short stories rather than novels, which in many cases are only loosely connected


sketches.

Since the local color movement was a transition from the romantic sentimentality to the realistic and naturalistic fiction which began its development by the end of the century, we find in the portrayal of Southern women in local color fiction some old and some new characteristics. Many are from the middle class or even the poor white class and therefore have little or no formal education or gentle rearing. They speak in the dialect of an isolated region, wear unbecoming clothes, and even do manual labor—features completely foreign to the Southern heroines of pre-Civil War fiction. Basically, however, they have much in common with the genteel ladies of the past, for they still represent the ideal of the fragile and lovely girl who is pure of character. She is not, however, always pallid looking. She may have the bloom of health rather than the pallor of death on her cheeks. The woman's place is still in the home rather than in politics or the professions, and she almost always demonstrates marital fidelity and strong maternal feelings, which keep home and family intact. Impetuous heroines may be somewhat more rebellious and unconventional than in the past, though such unconventionality usually brings trouble rather than happiness. The degree of religious fervor a heroine shows depends upon the section of the country she is from, but there is nearly always the attitude that the heroine should be religious. It is part
of her feminine duty to lead her husband to salvation. Perhaps the greatest change in the treatment of women in local color stories is the growing frankness in the conversation and in the increasing attention to the physical aspects of love. The romantic depiction of love had shown it as almost completely spiritual, but with the growing trend toward realism, occasional caresses and kisses are allowed even before the betrothal.

Three of the more important women who began writing local color fiction in the 1880's were born in widely separated places and came from considerably different family backgrounds. The first to gain attention was the Tennessean Mary Noailles Murfree, followed shortly by Kate O'Flaherty Chopin and Grace Elizabeth King, whose works make use of the colorful foreign cultural element of Louisiana. We shall consider their characterization of young girls and also older women and see how realistic presentation begins to replace the earlier romantic concept of Southern womanhood.

I

Early in the 1880's Mary Noailles Murfree was enchanting her reading public with her mountaineer stories. Ernest E. Leisy says that Charles Egbert Craddock, as she signed her work, dealt with the "poor whites of the Great Smoky Mountains, setting the cramped, barren lives of these
people against the somber grandeur of the ranges."⁶ Born in Murfreesboro in 1850 into an old Southern family of wealth and tradition, she was reared chiefly in Nashville, in an atmosphere of culture and a Southern social regime. For fifteen summers she went to the little mountain town of Beersheba and from there made trips into the wilder regions. Her regional stories and novels, set in this area, have been criticized as being the work of an outsider who saw the mountains with the eyes of the city vacationer impressed with their wildness, their moodiness, their loneliness and remoteness.

Miss Murfree gives such careful description of externals that one may see rather than feel the characters, even the major personages, but the one thing that Leisy says must certainly have touched her heart as she traveled through the valleys and into the remote coves is "the pitiful loneliness and heart-hunger of the women."⁷ She created unforgottably human women in Celia Shaw, Dorinda Cayce, Letitia Pettingill, Alethia Sayles, Cynthia Ware, and a few others. She tells without sentimentality somber stories of shy, uneducated but eager mountain girls destined to disillusionment, a fact which Alexander Cowie attributes to the

⁶Leisy, American Literature, pp. 184-185.
⁷Leisy, American Literature, p. 313.
sadness with which she saw "the flickering life of man." 8

Mary Noailles Murfree began her literary career in the little essay called "Flirts and Their Ways," in which she gives several varieties of flirts. After the "dashing" flirt puts men through the mill they turn to Miss Demureness, the "feminine" type, who shudders at the thought of "woman's rights" and finds frequent opportunities to force young men to pat her hand and call her "my poor angel." 9 She goes on to characterize the others, and like the sentimentalist, but with a disapproving rather than approving attitude, she makes the pious flirt the most formidable, "with her sweet urgings to a certain young man that he forsake the pomp and vanities of this wicked world. Soon, if he is not careful she will work complete regeneration of his soul." 10 Perhaps this trivial essay helps explain Miss Murfree's keen feminine observation, yet partly masculine viewpoint. Even though she was often an onlooker rather than an active participant, she could see and expose artificialities, not with malice but with pleasant irony.

Miss Murfree, using the pseudonym of Charles Egbert Craddock, obtained success with her sketches and tales

9 Edd Winfield Parks, Charles Egbert Craddock (Mary Noailles Murfree) (Chapel Hill, 1941), p. 51.
10 Parks, Charles Egbert Craddock, p. 61.
published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and then collected in *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884). She went on to write twenty-five books, both novels and short story collections, chiefly about the mountains and the mountaineers, but they were in large manner repetitious of her early works set in the same region. Her first volume is generally considered to contain most of her best sketches, and her first mountain novel, *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains*, though perhaps less artistically constructed than *In the "Stranger People's" Country*, has greater sweep and power. These books, about an area not previously treated in fiction, seemed new and fresh. In later works the author repeats the plots or central ideas as well as the characters. It was certainly unintended criticism when her brother wrote that Miss Murfree "delineated types and individuals,"\(^{11}\) but today his comment is considered an exact description of the limitation in her characters. There is almost always "a sharp-tongued shrewish old woman," usually a widow, who scolds and browbeats even the bold, fierce sons. There is often a spoiled child who dominates as effectively as the old crone, while the fiery, superstitious mountain preacher, or the "rider," strikes fear into the hardest-hearted rascals. Most stories have an educated city man, officers of the law, moonshiners

\(^{11}\) Parks, *Charles Egbert Craddock*, p. 177.
or other lawbreakers, and a blacksmith.

But it is the beautiful young girl, found in all six novels of mountain life and in most of the sketches, that we are interested in. Though living in the harshest of circumstances, she is delicate and fragile—so slight in physique, in fact, that she usually is not considered good matrimonial timber by the mountain men. Isabella D. Harris, in a study entitled "Charles Egbert Craddock as an Interpreter of Mountain Life," calls attention to eight mountain girls with descriptions remarkably similar to the one of Euphemia Sims, in The Juggler, with "dark silken eyebrows, each describing a perfect arc . . . large lustrous, gray-blue eyes, long lashed, deep-set,"12 or to that of Selina Teake, heroine of In the Tennessee Mountains, whose eyes were like "those deep, limpid mountain streams with golden brown pebbles at the bottom."13 Miss Harris says the author indicates that her lovely mountain heroine, whose very fragility prevents her being favored by the mountain men, is an exception among mountain women and that "perhaps it is not so much Miss Murfree's idea of a mountain girl as her idea of any young girl or of womanhood which adorns her

---


The heroines are always purity itself, so far as sex is concerned, for illicit love never enters any of Miss Murfree's work; after all, it had no part in her idea of life. There were certain subjects which no lady thought about, much less wrote about. E. W. Parks says Mary Murfree would probably have agreed with a later woman writer, Maria Thompson Daviess, who insisted that mountain feuds had never developed over "a breach of chastity by a mountain woman," since there was no such thing in the mountains of Tennessee.\(^\text{15}\) Parks hastens to add that court minutes would have told a far different story; on one occasion, for example, a prosecuting attorney said in a speech that he had never seen "so many bastards testify in one court before."\(^\text{16}\)

Mary Murfree's most popular novel, The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains, is the story of a religious fanatic, Homer Kelsey, interwoven with the account of a conflict between officers of the law and the Cayce men, who are moonshiners, and Rick Tyler, who is hunted as an


\(^{16}\)Parks, Charles Egbert Craddock, p. 110.
accomplice in a murder. Kelsey's announcement of his loss of faith causes him to be believed guilty of illegally rescuing Rick and it is only with difficulty that he is cleared. The story ends with his martyrdom, for when the Cayce family plan to murder the man who raided their still, the prophet substitutes himself for the intended victim and dies a Christian martyr.

Dorinda Cayce is the typical Craddock heroine—a rare beauty living on a mountain farm but exhibiting qualities of a true lady—pride, maternal affection, loyalty, justice, morality. She uses the illiterate speech of the other mountaineers, wears coarse clothing, and drives the ploughshare, but even so she has a rare and delicate spirit and a somewhat fragile appearance, as is indicated by this description:

Her face was grave, but there was a smile in her eyes, which had the lustre and depth of a sapphire, and a lambent glow like the heart of a blue flame. They were fringed by long black lashes, and her hair was black, also. Her pink calico sun-bonnet, flaring toward the front, showed it lying in moist tendrils on her brow, and cast an unwonted roseate tint upon the clear healthful pallor of her complexion. She wore a dark blue homespun dress, and, despite her coarse garb and uncouth occupation and the gaunt old ox, there was something impressive in her simple beauty, her youth, and her elastic vigor.17

Though she is only seventeen, Dorinda can "cook

"tasty" and keep house and her family are urging marriage. Her affectionate care of a domineering child indicates her maternal feeling—essential in a good wife or even in just a good woman. Attracted to Rick Tyler, she is loyal as long as she considers him innocent of charges against him, but she has pride, too, for when he asks whether she would have married him before he became involved with the law, she proudly replies: "Air you-uns thinkin' ez I'll 'low ez I would hev married a man four months ago ez never axed me ter marry, nohow?"\(^{18}\)

When Rick's jealousy prevents his helping secure the release of the prophet unjustly accused of helping him escape from prison, Dorinda's sense of justice and of right lead her to break her engagement: "And when he protested that he was jealous because he loved her so, she said she valued no love that for her sake grudged a word, not in generosity, but in simple justice to liberate an innocent man in the rigors of a terrible doom."\(^{19}\) Bewildered at her rejection, Rick insists that he knows she once loved him, but she replies drearily: "No, I never loved ye. I loved what I thunk ye war. But ye warn't that--nuthin' like it! Ye war suthin' else. I war jes' in love with my own


\(^{19}\)Murfree, *The Prophet*, p. 283.
foolishness." Dorinda, who has never been able to become a professing Christian, has nevertheless a strong sense of justice and high ideals which she lives up to. She has the nobility of character that makes her a self-sacrificing heroine who uncomplainingly sees her dream of happiness die rather than accept a man who is not worthy.

The novel *In the "Stranger People's" Country* centers chiefly around a pigmy graveyard. The superstitious natives are afraid to disturb the graves of the "little people," whom many of them think were children. Therefore when an archaeologist comes into the mountains along with a politician, there are clashes between the outsiders and the mountain men. Adelaide Yates, who identifies the "little people" with her own child, quarrels with her husband, Steve, who has agreed to help Shattuck, the archaeologist. In his anger he rushes off to a dance without her. A fight breaks out because Guthrie thinks Letitia Pettingill slights him for the politician Holmes. Steve, going for the doctor, unfortunately becomes involved with a band of robbers, who hide their loot in one of the graves. When Shattuck and Fee Guthrie go to make excavations, a violent clash occurs in which Guthrie is killed and Shattuck barely escapes.

---

Letitia Pettingill, like Dorinda, lives in a crude mountain cabin and speaks in the mountaineer dialect, but she too has the appearance of the beautiful but fragile heroine of the Southern plantation lady. The description emphasizes not only her beauty but also her smallness which makes her contrast with the buxom beauty of the other mountain girls:

"A scrap of a girl" she was esteemed in the mountains, being a trifle under the average height, and delicately built in proportion. . . . Her complexion was of a creamy tone; the hair, curling on her brow, and massed at the nape of the neck and there tied closely, the thick, short, curling ends hanging down, was dusky brown, not black; and her eyes, well set and with long dark lashes and distinctly arched eyebrows were of that definite blue which always seems doubly radiant and lucent when illumined by an artificial light. Her small straight features had little expression, but her lips were finely cut and delicately red.  

To the outsider Letitia, with her "delicate hands," "tiny feet," and "spirited face," is beautiful, but mountain men do not consider her "well-favored" and are concerned about her "cur'us kind o' mind." One insists that "leetle ez she be . . . she's ez quick an' keen-lookin' ez a knife-blade in a suddint fight, an' mighty nigh ez dangerous."  

---


22Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 36.

23Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 36.
Letitia Pettingill, like Dorinda, lives in a crude mountain cabin and speaks in the mountaineer dialect, but she too has the appearance of the beautiful but fragile heroine of the Southern plantation lady. The description emphasizes not only her beauty but also her smallness which makes her contrast with the buxom beauty of the other mountain girls:

"A scrap of a girl" she was esteemed in the mountains, being a trifle under the average height, and delicately built in proportion. . . . Her complexion was of a creamy tone; the hair, curling on her brow, and massed at the nape of the neck and there tied closely, the thick, short, curling ends hanging down, was dusky brown, not black; and her eyes, well set and with long dark lashes and distinctly arched eyebrows were of that definite blue which always seems doubly radiant and lucent when illumined by an artificial light. Her small straight features had little expression, but her lips were finely cut and delicately red.21

To the outsider Letitia, with her "delicate hands," "tiny feet," and "spirited face," is beautiful, but mountain men do not consider her "well-favored" and are concerned about her "cur'us kind o' mind."22 One insists that "leetle ez she be . . . she's ez quick an' keen-lookin' ez a knife-blade in a suddint fight, an' mighty nigh ez dangerous."23

---


22Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 36.

23Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 36.
Other objections are that she seems able to read men's thoughts and never could "git religion." One mountaineer continues the criticism by saying:

"I ain't so mighty partic'lar 'bout men Christians, though I'm a perfesser myself, but religion 'pears ter me ter kem sorter nat'ral ter gal-folks. 'Tain't 'kase she's too religious that she ain't a-dancin'. It's jes' 'kase nobody hev asked her. She ain't no sorter favorite 'mongst the boys."24

In spite of her beauty, Letitia is denied the happiness of marriage. She, with her curious mind, is attracted to the outsider Shattuck, and when he leaves, only half-realizing her love for him, he promises to return. He easily forgets but Letitia lives out her life in loyal expectation of his return. The author tells us, "The years of watching wore out her life, but not her faith. And she died in the belief that her doom fell all too soon, and that he would come and find her gone. And she clung futilely to earth for his fancied sorrow."25

This attraction for an outsider is common among Miss Murfree's mountain women but usually only another source of disillusionment. Even Fee Guthrie's shrewish stepmother, described now as a "tur'ble 'oman," remembers all through

24 Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, pp. 36-37.

the years, a chance remark of the politician Rhodes' grandfather, who called her "lettuce-bird" and thus pleased and sweetened her disposition when she was a fiery girl. At her recollection of such compliments after long years, her animated appearance makes it easy to see that she too once was a beautiful woman: "A faint color gleamed in her parchment-like cheek, a yellow gleam in her black eyes, the woman seemed to have grown suddenly young." 

Besides the certainty of ugliness in old age there is the certainty of disappointment for the mountain girl who loves an outsider. This is indicated by Rhodes' surprised comment on learning that Shattuck thought the grandfather had once been in love with Mrs. Guthrie: "My grandmother was a lady. As to beauty ... why, such things as prettiness and coquetry were never thought of in connection with her. She was a lady, and when you've said that you've said it all. And she was such a superior woman!"

The young girl of the mountains can be beautiful but the older woman is always the ugly crone. Fee Guthrie's step-mother, whom he describes as an "everlastin' wild-cat o' a step-mom," seems a rather extreme example, for he

---

26 Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 189.


28 Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 69.
goes on to tell how she beat him and his brother so viciously that he bit her until she became afraid of him. Adelaide Yates is a young woman of twenty, "with a pale oval face and dark hair, and serene dark gray eyes," but already she is changing from the lively, coquettish mountain beauty Steve married. He complains:

"'Fore she was married she never had no 'pinions on nuthin'—ez frisky as a squir'l an' ez nimble. An' now days she ain't got nothin' but 'pinions, an' air ez sot in her doctrines an' ez solemn ez the rider, an' ez slow-spoken. . . . It's time Adelaide had fund out who's the head o' this hyar fambly. 'Tain't her, . . . an' she ain't a-going' to l'arn no younger."  

Evidently Adelaide is on her way to becoming the usual shrewish older woman. Youth, beauty, and sweetness do not last long in the mountains, and there are none of the charming great ladies of Grace King's New Orleans stories or of Kate Chopin's Creole tales.

In "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove," Mr. Harrison, father of four eligible daughters, gives a dance, which almost ends in tragedy because of a feud in which the flirtatious Mandy Tyler becomes involved. The old peach peddler, who sets the background for the story, is, however, the best drawn of the women, for she is another of the ugly and dismal older mountain women, such as Miss Murfree sees.

---

29 Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 2.
30 Murfree, In the "Stranger People's" Country, p. 23.
as the future of a pretty slip of a mountain girl. She describes her as follows:

Not more cheerful was Mrs. Johns; she was tall and lank, and with such a face as one never sees except in these mountains,—elongated, sallow, thin, with pathetic, deeply sunken eyes, and high cheek bones, and so settled an expression of hopeless melancholy that it must be that naught but care and suffering had been her lot; holding out wasted hands to the years as they pass,—holding them out always, and always empty. She wore a shabby, faded calico, and spoke with 'the peculiar' expressionless drawl of the mountaineer.31

Celia Shaw, heroine of "The Star in the Valley," is another pure and fragile girl, who does not impress the mountain boys favorably. Hi Bates describes her by saying,

"She's a pore, no 'count critter. . . . Not ez thar is any harm in the gal, ye understand. She's a mighty good, soft-spoken, quiet sort o' gal, but she's a pore, white-faced slim little critter. She looks like she hain't got no sort 'n grit in her. She makes me think 'o one o' them slim little slips o' willow. . . ."32

As in the case of Letitia Pettingill, the outsider, Chevis, gets a different impression. He sees and recognizes "the slight figure, with that graceful poise acquired by the prosaic habit of carrying weights upon the head, and its lithe, swaying beauty reminded him of the mountaineer's


comparison,—a slip of willow." Later when he meets her at the spring in her coarse dress and rough shoes, he reflects dreamily on her flowerlike beauty and natural purity in this fashion:

But it seemed as if the wild nature about her had been generous to this being toward whom life and fortune had played the niggard. There were opaline lights in her dreamy eyes which one sees nowhere save in sunset clouds that brood over dark hills; the golden sunbeams, all faded from the landscape, had left a perpetual reflection in her bronze hair, there was a subtle affinity between her and other pliant, swaying, graceful young things, waving in the mountain breezes, fed by the rain and dew.34

Always Chevis thinks of her as a "slip o' willow," admires her "pure, white, star-shaped" flower of a face, and considers her above her uncouth surroundings. He admires her heroism and courage when she walks miles through the snow to warn a family of her father's plot against them. She is able to perform nobly even though she has had no religious training. Perhaps, Miss Murfree decides of her, "without any philosophy she stood upon the basis of a common humanity."35 But admiring though he is, Chevis, like the outsiders in the previous stories, is unaware of the girl's love and leaves. He, however, never quite forgets. Years

---

later he learns of her death shortly afterward—presumably of heartbreak, in the manner of the sentimental heroines of the century past.

Cynthia Ware, in "Drifting Down Lost Creek," shows loyalty to a faithless lover and patient, but not bitter resignation to being an old maid in a society where marriage is almost a necessity for a woman. Cynthia has a delicate cheek and flame-colored hair that makes a halo about her face but there is an intense fiery spark in her eyes. When Evander Price, the hot-tempered young blacksmith with whom she is in love, is imprisoned for murder, she believes him innocent and, ignorant though she is of legal affairs, makes every effort to free him. Faithfully and patiently she awaits his return, only to learn that he is free but has gone elsewhere and has married. Cynthia does not pity herself because she has worked and waited. She does not grudge what her love has given him but only her wasted feeling. She can only weave and spin and grow pale as she tries to forget, saying only, "... I always 'lowed ez I counted on livin' single."36

Again the best character is the old woman, Cynthia's mother: hard, shiftless, hectoring, garrulous, malicious, and razor-tongued. She dominates all within her reach.

She is shrewish and gossiping, just as disagreeable as Miss Murfree's description of her appearance suggests:

She was a tall woman, fifty years of age, perhaps, but seeming much older. So gaunt she was, so toothless, haggard and disheveled, that but for her lazy step and languid interest she might have suggested one of Macbeth's witches, as she hovered about the great cauldron.37

In the Clouds again has a mountain girl, Alethia Sayles, attempting to save her imprisoned lover, Mink Lorey, and again she succeeds; this time, instead of deserting her for town life as Evander Price deserts Cynthia Ware in "Drifting Down Lost Creek," he gives his life to save the judge who convicted him. Alethia is a remarkable example of the humble girl pictured as a natural lady, with the usual delicacy of a Mary Noailles Murfree heroine:

Her fragile eyes were bright but singularly grave. The soft sheen of her yellow hair served to definitely outline the shape of her head against the brown logs of the wall. The locks lay not in ripples, but in massive undulations, densely growing above her forehead, and drawn in heavy folds into a knot at the back of her head. She had the delicate complexion and the straight, refined lineaments so incongruous with the poverty-stricken mountaineer, so commonly seen among the class. Her homespun dress was of a dull brown. About her throat of exquisite whiteness was knotted a kerchief of the deepest saffron tint. Her hands and arms—for her sleeves were rolled back—were shapely, but rough and sun-embrowned. She had a delicate, serious manner that very nearly approached dignity.38

37 Murfree, "Drifting Down Lost Creek," p. 3.
On various occasions the author mentions her "golden hair," her "delicate coloring," her "lithe figure," all characteristics of the traditional Southern belle, but notes, as of other delicate girls, that hers is not the type of beauty which most appeals to the rural admirer.  

Alethia has qualities of natural leadership and a distinction of manner, voice, and presence which make so powerful an impression that in another age or in other circumstances she might have reached any heights. Her desire to improve the crude, lackadaisical mountaineers is thwarted at every turn, but she still practices a religion of deeds. She is always composed and in control of the situation in which she finds herself. When she steps into the courtroom, the spectators and the judge are soon aware of her sincerity and her intelligence, and when she speaks, her natural refinement sounds louder than her uncultured dialect.  

The usual contrast to the heroine appears in the following description of Mrs. Sayles, Alethia's mother:

A sharp-featured woman of fifty sat in a low chair by the fire, wearing a blue checked homespun dress, a pink calico sunbonnet, and a cob-pipe—the last was so constantly sported that it might be reckoned as an article of attire. She was not so old as she seemed, but the loss of her teeth and her habit of crouching over the fire gave her a cronish aspect.

39 Murfree, *In the Clouds*, p. 443.

40 Murfree, *In the Clouds*, p. 38.
Mary Murfree almost invariably sees her fragile heroine, pure and beautiful as Nature itself, but indicates that she will become harsh and crude in old age. The strange miracle of the sweet, trusting, loving, yet heroic girlhood appears amid the lonely, half-mournful life of the mountain people and is intensified by the attitude of the faded, gaunt older women, who are "holding out wasted hands to the years as they pass—holding them out always and always empty." There is disillusionment facing the heroine. A faithless mountain lover deserts her, or an outsider, unaware of her love or uncaring, leaves her to live on in poverty and work and to remain single. Since her fragile beauty does not particularly appeal to the mountain men, she may not have any suitors at all; or if she has one and he proves faithless, she is not likely to have another. If she does marry she becomes a tyrant, domineering over rather than loving and helping her family. The mountain woman spins and weaves and grows old but with none of the graciousness and charm of a plantation lady of the Old South or even of the Creole or Acadian Madame or Mademoiselle in Reconstruction times pictured by Miss Grace King and Mrs. Kate Chopin.

II

Kate O'Flaherty Chopin also often draws some heroines from among the poor people but from a more colorful culture
than that of Miss Murfree's mountain life. She was born of mixed French and Irish stock in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1851. After her marriage, at nineteen, to Oscar Chopin, she lived in New Orleans for ten years and then for several years on a large plantation near the little French village of Cloutierville, in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. After her husband's death she managed the plantation for about a year before returning to St. Louis. When in 1888 she began writing, she drew upon her experiences among the Louisiana French people. She knew the Acadians, the Creoles, the free Negroes, and the mulattoes who dwelt along the rivers and the drowsy bayous of the cane-plantation country as well as the French in New Orleans.

Mrs. Chopin's work consists of numerous uncollected stories and sketches; two novels, *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899); and her two collections of Creole short stories, *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). She is best remembered for these two striking volumes of stories about people whose knowledge of antebellum opulence was largely a tradition. Though her characters are seldom drawn from the plantation aristocracy of the Old South, where the chivalric code of feudalism flourished, the women and girls, often poor and always speaking in the dialect of the Creoles and Acadians, display the same ideals of faithfulness, loyalty, and chastity as the ladies of wealth and social prominence in the sentimental and historical fiction
of pre-war days.

The important thing with Mrs. Chopin is character rather than situation or incident, and she is most often concerned with the response of the characters—especially the women—to the passion of love. Her interest is chiefly in young people in the first blush of romantic passion. The maidens are unspoiled but impetuous, not particularly introspective, not afraid to follow their hearts; though there may be some preliminary coquettishness, they follow their instincts which lead them straight and true. "At the 'Cadian Ball," for example, tells of Alcée Laballière, who because of his pique at the behavior of Clarisse, who is cold and kind by turns, attends the 'Cajun dance to see the vampish Calixta. When Clarisse, tall, slim, graceful, dainty as a lily but hardy as a sunflower, realizes what he is about, she follows her heart and goes to rescue him from the vamp. She tells him, "... I knew if you didn't come back, now, tonight, I couldn't stan' it. .  .  .  .  ."41

In her first novel, At Fault, Mrs. Chopin shows her knowledge of feminine psychology and her attitude toward marriage, though at times it seems that she makes her heroine, Thérèse Lafirme, almost too narrow in her condemnation of divorce. Mrs. Lafirme, a widow, owns and manages a

41Kate Chopin, "At the 'Cadian Ball," Bayou Folk (New York, 1895), p. 279.
Louisiana plantation on Cane River. She is attracted to David Hosmer, a timber buyer, but rejects him when she learns that he is divorced and that his wife is still living. Thérèse insists that it is his duty to remain with and care for the woman he married no matter how coarse she now seems. As a Catholic she shrinks from a situation which can have no place in her existence. Her attitude is made clear by this statement: "There was no question with her of dwelling upon the matter; it was simply a thing to be summarily dismissed and as far as possible effaced from her remembrance."\textsuperscript{42} She therefore denies herself so that right may be done. David remarries Fanny and brings her to Louisiana to live, but she soon tires of the isolated country life and reverts to alcoholism. Finally, Fanny is drowned in a melodramatic accident, and the way is clear for David and Thérèse. In the conventional ending, Thérèse, after "following what seemed only right," seems to have proved that constancy and patience can bring happiness.

Mrs. Chopin's most ambitious work is \textit{The Awakening}, the novel which tells of the awakening of Edna Pontelliere from the easy comfort of a marriage of convenience to a realization of what she considers deeper soul needs. Edna, a Kentuckian, has impetuously and somewhat rebelliously married the Louisiana Creole, Léonce Pontelliere, against

\textsuperscript{42}Kate Chopin, \textit{At Fault} (St. Louis, 1890), p. 42.
the wishes of her Presbyterian parents, who do not approve of him because of his Catholicism. During a summer vacation on Grand Isle, Edna is sharply contrasted with the other New Orleans matrons so that the qualities of Creole wives and mothers are emphasized. Edna cannot devote herself exclusively to her husband and children. She hugs the children passionately one moment and then forgets them the next and is even gratified by their occasional absence, while the Creoles, mothers in every sense of the word, think about and work and plan for their children constantly. She is willing to give them her life and her money but not herself. Robert Le Brun, a young Creole, has always flirted with the vacationing Creole matrons. Completely faithful to their husbands, they enjoy his attentions but attach no importance to the situation though it seems somewhat shocking to Edna. This summer when Robert pays court to her, she finds herself falling in love with him and the matter becomes critical. She, unlike the Creole women, cannot live on with her husband and remain dutiful and faithful now that all is not ideal. She revolts against their way of life in New Orleans and even moves out of her husband's home, but since she is unable to overcome personal and social obstacles in the way of fulfillment of her love for Robert, Mrs. Pontelliere commits suicide rather than relinquish her newly discovered independence. Unable to find happiness, she can only escape life. She is not like the Creoles in being a long-suffering,
faithful, and loyal wife and mother when her love is gone.

The Creoles are remarkably unselfish and the girls capable of great loyalties which triumph over almost everything. As Joseph J. Reilly says, "For them love is the great, the crucial and transfiguring experience, the door swinging open to whatever earthly paradise there be, glorified by nothing but the abiding sanction of the heart." They look for their greatest joy in marriage and family but their sense of loyalty will lead them to sacrifices for the happiness of others too. In "No-Account Creole," in Bayou Folk, Euphrasie has promised to marry Placide Santien, whom she thinks she loves. Then she realizes that her heart is elsewhere—that it is Offdean she really cares for. Loyal to Placide, she fights against her feeling for Offdean and plans to remain faithful to her promises. Placide, equally proud and courageous, gives her up, careful to let the community think it is she who is releasing him.

We see faithfulness triumphing again in the completely feminine woman in "Madame Célestin's Divorce." The little Creole woman, perhaps unconsciously coquettish, is pretty and appealing. With her pathetic helplessness and her wavering, Madame Célestin fascinates the old judge who chats each day on his way to work. Her story of her

---

husband's desertion arouses his sympathy and he advises a divorce. In defiance even of parish priest and bishop, both of whom stress the duty of a good Catholic to stand everything, she is ready to do so until her errant husband comes home and, as she tells the judge, "promise me on his word an' honor he's going to turn over a new leaf."\textsuperscript{44}

Mentine, slender and lovely, marries Jules Tradon and goes to Avoyelles to live. Doudouce, her old sweetheart, remains faithful. When he hears how she has fared after living in poverty and bearing several children, he goes to rescue her. She is already old, faded, and bedraggled, but he loves her even more now and can offer her a comfortable, even prosperous life. She, however, loves her ineffectual husband, and "A Visit to Avoyelles" ends with Mentine turning from Doudouce to gaze after her husband going toward the field. "A Sentimental Soul," in \textit{A Night in Acadie}, is the story of long faithfulness to a memory. Mamzelle Fleurette loves a blacksmith who has married an unworthy woman, but she does not despair. After he dies Fleurette cherishes his memory. When his widow re-marries, she is finally happy in the feeling that he is now hers.

Strong maternal feelings are important in the make-up of the French woman. In "Athénaïse" the young Creole wife,

\textsuperscript{44}Kate Chopin, "Madame Célèstin's Divorce," \textit{Bayou Folk}, p. 169.
after two months of marriage, leaves her husband. Though he has done nothing specific that she can blame him with, she simply does not want to live with a man and have him and his belongings around. She spends a leisurely enjoyable month in New Orleans; then she finds that she must return to her husband. With her realization that she is to become a mother, there is a great change in her attitude toward her husband and her one thought is to get back to him. She wants him to know at once, and as she thinks of him,

the first purely sensuous tremor of her life swept over her. She half whispered his name, and the sound of it brought red blotches into her cheeks. She spoke it over and over, as if it were some new sweet sound born out of darkness and confusion, and reaching her for the first time. She was impatient to be with him. Her whole passionate nature was aroused as if by a miracle.45

"Regret" is an appealing little tale of Mamzelle Aurélie, seemingly a thoroughly independent woman. She has never married, for she has found satisfaction in life by managing her plantation. When a neighbor leaves her children in Mamzelle's care for a few days, she is almost overcome. It is difficult at first to become accustomed to looking after their many needs and to hearing the laughter

and chatter that interrupt the serenity of her life. Then
the mother arrives to take the children away, and when she
sees them go out of sight and hears the last echo of their
gay voices, Mamzelle suddenly becomes unhappily aware of
the strange stillness. The story closes with Mamzelle
Aurélie sitting forlornly at her table:

She gave one slow glance through the room, into which
the evening shadows were creeping and deepening around
her solitary figure. She let her head face down upon
her bended arm, and began to cry. Oh, but she cried! Not
softly, as women do. She cried like a man, with
sobs that seemed to tear her very soul.46

Thus Mrs. Chopin describes the unhappiness of a woman with­
out marriage and children and shows the folly of a woman's
being unnaturally independent and trying to substitute a
job for a family.

In Mrs. Chopin's stories the middle-aged or even the
old woman, though no longer the belle of the balls, still
attends dances and other social activities, often along
with the young people. She continues to be very much aware
of her appearance and to retain her interest in pretty
clothes. She may remain gracious and charming even though
she grows old, and, if occasionally lacking in the warmth
and impetuosity of youth, she can still be attractive. In
"A Matter of Prejudice" a woman's love for children and her

46 Kate Chopin, "Regret," A Night in Acadie, p. 154.
devotion to the care of the sick leads to her reunion with her son, from whom she has been estranged because of his marriage. The proud and prejudiced grandmother, who nurses her grandchild through an illness, and thus finds happiness, is described in this way: "She was straight and slender. Her hair was white, and she wore it in puffs on the temples. Her skin was fair and her eyes blue and cold."  

Another characteristic of Mrs. Chopin's Creole women is their relaxed manner of uninhibited conversation, with no hint of prudishness. They speak frankly of subjects not at that time usually discussed freely, especially in groups of both men and women. In "Athénaise," for instance, the young wife finds that her friend Sylvie has talked with their journalist friend and others about her pregnancy and that all are aware of her condition and her reason for returning to her husband. Sylvie does not hesitate to talk frankly with any man of "suitable age and discretion." Then Edna Pontelliere, a Kentuckian, is shocked at finding an entire absence of prudery among her charming and highly respectable associates at Grand Isle. The women give animated descriptions of accouchements, with no details withheld. Robert Le Brun tells to various young women what seems to Edna, with her Presbyterian background, a somewhat

---

risqué story, and the members of the group openly read and discuss a daring book which she feels she can look at only in secret. The Creoles feel no sense of embarrassment. This behavior would not seem worthy of comment today, but in nineteenth-century America it was a step toward modern realism.

Throughout her work Kate Chopin upholds the Creole belief in the purity of womanhood. Religious training in this region where the Roman Catholic Church is dominant probably has considerable influence in developing the attitude toward woman: the Creole girl lives to become a Creole wife; she should marry once, and, once married, she should be a devoted and dutiful wife even though her husband and her life in general may prove anything but ideal. To satisfy the strong maternal instinct, a woman should by all means have children to complete the family.

III

Another local color writer from Louisiana is Grace Elizabeth King. Born in 1852 into a socially and politically prominent New Orleans family, she lived both in New Orleans and on a plantation in St. Martin Parish. Her work is undoubtedly the outcome of her education and life in the atmosphere of a semi-French culture. It is said that Richard W. Gilder, on a visit to New Orleans about 1884, asked Miss King why Creoles had taken a bitter stand
against George Washington Cable and his works. When she explained that Cable preferred colored people to whites and quadroons to Creoles, Gilder suggested that someone else then should write better. Her response was *Monsieur Motte* (1888).\(^{48}\) Two collections of stories or sketches, *Tales of A Time and Place* and *Balcony Stories*, as well as *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, usually spoken of as a novel, also describe the people, the traditions, and the culture of the old French city and surrounding area. Most of the stories are connected in that they develop one or both of the two themes dominating Miss King's work—the passing of the old aristocracy of feudalism before the onslaughts of commercialism and the struggle of women in their changed circumstances after the war. Most of her feminine creations are Gallic, with their whimsical ways, their timidity, their passion and intensity, their simplicity, their gentility. She is particularly good with her pictures of aristocratic elderly women, remnants of the past of Louisiana. Miss King's works show the Creole emphasis on marriage as the only way of life for a woman who hopes to be happy but also the emerging of a more independent heroine—one who chooses her own husband, even in opposition to family, and one who marries into the middle class, usually for love rather than

As her stories more and more became realistic sketches of social conditions during and after Reconstruction, Grace King left fiction for history and biography. It was not until such people as Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell that any other Southern writer followed George W. Cable's example of attacking Southern life and tradition, though Miss King insisted that she did not romanticize in her tales except that romance in New Orleans was the truth. She expressed it in this way:

I am not a romanticist, I am a realist à la mode de la Nouvelle-Orleans. I have never written a line that was not realistic, but our life, our circumstances, the heroism of the men and women that surrounded my early horizon—all that was romantic. I had a mind very sensitive to romantic impressions but critical as to their expression.49

Both of Grace King's novels show the changes the war brought to the aristocracy, particularly the women. The new merchant class—mere clerks—become acceptable as husbands for the genteel; and women, taught by the war to assume responsibilities, are more independent of the men in their family, though seldom openly rebellious.

Monsieur Motte tells of the Creole girl Marie Modeste, who at seventeen is ready to graduate from the

aristocratic Institute St. Denise, where she has been as a boarding student since she was four. Her old nurse Marcélite, the quadroon hairdresser, has watched over her and taken her beautiful clothes from her uncle Monsieur Motte, who, it is understood, is sending her to school and will take her home with him later. Then it is revealed that there is no uncle and that the quadroon has supported Marie, who now of course has nowhere to go.

Madame Lareveillère, from the institute, is the widow of an old aristocrat whom she had taught the process of repentance and led back into the church as was so often the case for a heroine in sentimental fiction. She now decides to marry Goupilleau, a notary public, and adopt Marie. Since Monsieur is only a notary, he is not her social equal—as social lines were drawn in the old régime—and Madame at first makes her consent to marry him seem, even to him, based on "the exalted motive of duty and self-sacrifice," but soon even her friends sense that this is not the case. What a change has come to a lady of the Old South! She is marrying a man without family background, without a fortune—but then it is "since the war."

The emphasis on marriage—and early marriage—is shown through the account of the brilliant Creole ball where Marie meets a young Frenchman with whom she falls in love. The girls—eighteen, seventeen, sixteen—feel they are out not a moment too soon, for, after all, their mothers were
married at fifteen, fourteen, even thirteen.

Impoverished though he is, the Creole father feels he must give a ball, because, as he says, "My dear lady, we must make an effort for our young people; we must marry our daughters." Asked on what basis they can found families, he replies, "On love, pure and simple; it is the best we have, having no money." Marriage is a necessity for happiness, or even existence. As one girl expresses it, "If I do not get married, I do not want to live;" and another puts in, "Not to get married is to confess one's self simply a—a Gorgon." A third insists, "But it's a woman's vocation! What must she do else?" And there is no else—except the convent.

Miss King describes the girls at the ball as fragile looking, with their "newly-bloomed faces," and says that "they walked, spoke, were graceful, fascinating, charming, grandes dames, by inspiration or tradition." Their timidity leaving them, they use "their dangerous woman-eyes with childish hardihood." They are ready for romantic

51 King, Monsieur Motte, p. 241.
52 King, Monsieur Motte, p. 285.
53 King, Monsieur Motte, p. 206.
54 King, Monsieur Motte, p. 206.
conquests.

Of Marie's marriage contract, drawn up at the direction of the groom's mother, a friend remarks that it is like all marriage contracts—"they are all against the women, the poor women!" But Marie, showing the new spirit of independence, refuses to accept it: "I give nothing, I will take nothing,--nothing! . . . I give nothing but love! I want nothing but love!"[^55] Almost as surprising is the unrestrained way the young couple embrace and kiss as if the wedding were past so that one Creole of the old school "would have had to acknowledge at the confessional that it was not so much because it was shocking as because it was a sin, that forced her to turn her back on them."[^56]

Mrs. Talbot, in *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, illustrates the changed circumstances of an aristocratic New Orleans woman after the war. Once dressed in the height of fashion, she now wears cottonade dresses spun and woven on the plantation and crude shoes made of alligator skins, while she sees shop girls dressed in finery and owning business places. The end of the war does not mean the end of her physical toil, for slavery, which had formerly kept women from domestic drudgery, is no more. Still a typical Southern lady in some senses of the word, she entertains her

husband by listening to him and defers to his wishes, as when she gives instructions to her daughters' teacher by echoing her husband's old-fashioned ideas in this way:

"He has a perfect horror of learned ladies, 'blue stockings' who quote Latin and Greek and talk algebra and astronomy. They are to him, simply, ladies with big feet. He likes ladies, those who are good looking, who dress well, have exquisite manners, who talk well, who have tact."57

Girls, learning the piano, must be careful to keep their fingernails long, oval, and transparent, because such nails are the mark of a lady—one who never works with her hands, who certainly never washes and scrubs. All that girls need to know is how to take their place in society.

During the hardships on the plantation, Mrs. Talbot has had to depend so much upon her own intelligence that it is a surprise to hear the shopkeepers talk to lady customers as if they have the intelligence of children, but instinctively she again assumes "the amused attitude of a lady who could not burden her mind with such details as the trouble she gave people or the price of things."

58 To the manager of a shop, being a lady is to be easy, careless, extravagant, and utterly indifferent to her money and to the trouble she gives. To be hard-working, saving, and bargaining is being


58 King, *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, p. 94.
a woman, being what his own common, coarse mother was.

"Mimi's Marriage," in Balcony Stories, also illustrates the stress on marriage and tells of another Creole girl who, after the war, marries below her social level and is happy. Mimi, the usual fragile heroine, describes herself as "so blonde, so blonde, and so small" and dreams of marrying a handsome brunet with a large house and plenty of servants. But when a girl is poor, beauty is not enough, and Mimi gives up hope of any marriage. Then, encouraged by her step-mother, she marries a clerk, a good, kind husband who takes care of her and all her family. At first she cries because he is not the handsome brun of her dreams, but a blond and not good looking and small. Though she knows that her father, a gentleman of the old régime, would never have approved of a clerk, she soon realizes her good fortune and adores her husband whom God has sent her.

Another frail and fragile heroine—the Southern ideal in the nineteenth century—appears in "A Delicate Affair." As an old gentleman reminisces, a proud old lady of eighty plays solitaire, never hesitating to cheat to get out of a tight place. In his recollections of youthful days, the old man speaks again and again of Madame's best friend, one whose friendship she dropped after marriage, suggesting

---

that "Bah! Lose a game for a card!" must have been her motto always, in love as well as in solitaire. The old gentleman recalls the delicate beauty of the friend and comments, "What there is in blue eyes, light hair, and a fragile form to impress one, I cannot tell; but for us men it seems to me it is blue-eyed, light-haired, and fragile-formed women that are hardest to forget."\(^60\) He regrets that such fragile, sensitive, trusting women should be unhappy and that their love should be sacrificed, and their hearts bruised while God seems to favor the black-haired ones: "She was so slight, so fragile, and always in white, with blue in her hair to match her eyes—and—God knows what in her heart. . . ."\(^61\)

The deprivation of war and Reconstruction days brings out a new kind of fierce pride in a New Orleans lady. In "The Old Lady's Restoration," Balcony Stories, a woman for three generations descends gradually into poverty, dispensing of one thing after another that she once considered necessary and growing farther and farther from old friends. When her fortune is miraculously restored, the former associates are impatient for her to take her place among them again. Finally they seek her out to welcome her back. They find her proudly enjoying the comfort of five-cent

\(^60\) Grace E. King, "A Delicate Affair," Balcony Stories, p. 212.

bouillon, the luxury of clean cotton sheets, and the friendship of the hard-working poor people who have been her friends for fifteen years, and still are.

Miss King has in "The Story of a Day" a heroine with the loyalty of some of the mountain girls in Mary Noailles Murfree's work. A woman of twenty-five, "almost a possible grandmother, according to Acadian computation," seems well in the grip of advancing years. At thirteen, beautiful Adorine was happily planning her wedding when the young man was lost in a bog. Now Adorine spins and looks out over the prairie, faithful always to the memory of her lost love.

Miss King, like Mrs. Chopin, shows that the maternal instinct can be strong even in the woman, who, because of lack of beauty and perhaps for other reasons, too, has never married. In "One of Us" an obscure singer, tired of the road and with no hope of marriage, decides to go to an asylum to be a nurse and servant to the children. In her pleading to be taken on, she says:

"Think! Never to have held a child in my arms more than a moment, never to have felt a child's arms about my neck! Never to have known a child! . . . I would bathe and dress them, play with them, teach them their prayers; and when they are sick they would see no difference. They would not know but what their mother was there!"63

---

Mary Murfree, Kate Chopin, and Grace King are called local color writers because they treat of different regions or groups of people where, as we have seen, the peculiarities of landscape, speech, manners and customs differentiate one locality very definitely from all others. In all three it is the purity of Southern womanhood that is foremost in the depiction of the heroine, regardless of whether she is a girl from an old plantation family near New Orleans, a daughter of a Tennessee moonshiner, the daughter or wife of a Creole farmer along the bayou, or a woman from Old New Orleans itself. Neither does it matter whether she is rich or poor, illiterate or cultured. In Mary Murfree and Grace King it is the frail and fragile heroine who is ideal, and in Miss King's stories she is also usually blonde to emphasize even further her flower-like purity. Mrs. Chopin also makes her heroines beautiful, of course, but puts less emphasis on smallness and fragility.

In every region the goal for the heroine is marriage and children. Once married she must remain faithful and loyal even to a memory. If she is unable to marry or if she marries and has no children, she feels the lack very deeply. In some ways Miss Murfree's mountain girl is more independent and unconventional than the others for she does not feel quite so compelled to marry. She is, however, unhappy in her disillusionment if she does not and grows shrewish with age whether married or single. Often she
does not have the comfort and sustaining power of religion such as nearly all of the sentimental heroines of the past had and such as the Louisiana Creoles and Acadians, almost invariably Roman Catholic, have in the fiction of Miss King and Mrs. Chopin.

Miss Murfree and Mrs. Chopin, who draw characters from the poor people, let them at least partially characterize themselves by their speech in the dialect of their areas. Grace King's women, though poor, are usually educated, but certainly not "blue stockings." They usually have recollections of the rich and cultured life of earlier times so that although the ladies no longer have beautiful clothes and have to do drudgery just as during the war, they maintain the social graces of the Old South as much as possible. With marriage of supreme importance they see no happiness, actually no real existence, without marriage, and most of them are wed quite young. Families make every effort to help daughters find husbands even though marriages are no longer arranged. Girls from the old aristocracy marry into the merchant and working classes and feel thankful for good husbands, honest and able to care for them. There is pride but not haughtiness, and ladies who cook, wash, and scrub at home often give to the outside world the impression that they are careless and extravagant and thoughtless, for that manner is still expected of a lady in the old sense of the word. Miss King and Mrs. Chopin both
see older women as pleasant, attractive people, unlike the shrews in Miss Murfree's mountain tales.

Though the heroines of Mary Murfree, Kate Chopin, and Grace King have some of the characteristics of the traditional Southern lady, changes are already appearing in their ways of living. The only constant quality is the ideal of pure, chaste womanhood found in all regions represented by these three writers.
CHAPTER III

THE SOUTHERN REALISTIC NOVEL

In the 1890's when the vogue for local color writing was declining, two other paths opened to writers—realism or historical romance. In some of the regional writers, as we have seen, local color comes very close to realism; in others it is seized upon only as an opportunity to revive and to idealize the plantation legend. The defeated South furnished a romantic subject for historical novels about the war itself and also for stories showing the lost splendor of the old régime. Because in retrospect the splendors were more dazzling and the faults were forgotten, there arose what Mary Louise McGlothlin calls "a chorus of magnification."¹ Every hill has a mansion, and houses, once spacious, become palatial. The white-columned mansions are set in groves of orange trees with snowy blossoms, and roses bloom in profusion. Princely gentlemen and girls lovelier than ever before stroll in the magnolia-scented labyrinths of shade or ride thoroughbreds after the running hounds and

the fleeing fox. The Southern belle chooses as her husband the suitor who shows the greatest loyalty to the Confederacy or who exhibits the greatest bravery in battle, or she marries the Federal officer who saves the plantation. Always the faithful servants, though now free, remain loyal to "Old Marster" or "Old Miss" and make the slave system seem justified and the Lost Cause the right one.

The popularity among Southerners of the romanticizing of the Old South is explained by Arthur Hobson Quinn as "a grateful form of escape, a balm to hurt pride, a belt of gold that concealed the hidden wound," while for Northern readers it was also "a grateful form of escape, but with a difference—a recrudescence of long-cherished chivalric myth."² It is his belief that, in spite of the Glasgows, Faulkners, and Caldwells, "most Americans still prefer the myth of the Old South of moonlight and magnolias to the sociology of the Tobacco Roads."³

J. B. Hubbell reminds us that Bret Harte's romantic pictures of the forty-niners did not appear until the mining period was over, Hawthorne did not write his novels until the New England imagination had created a legendary portrait of the Puritans, and Cooper's Indians were romantic

³Quinn, The Literature of the American People, p. 657.
only because they were no longer scalping settlers. In the same way a host of writers looked back on the plantation South and saw it as glamorous. Both Northerners and Southerners wrote of the splendor of the old way of life and of the loveliness and purity of the Southern woman. Among the most outstanding of the "glorifiers" were Joel C. Harris, Harry Stillwell Edwards, James Lane Allen, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich, but in the opinion of Francis Gaines it is in Thomas Nelson Page's *In Old Virginia* that we have the culmination of the theme, for "he expresses the supreme glorification of the old régime, 'he wrote the epitaph of a civilization.'"

It is Page's tendency to over-idealize the past which Hubbell says led later Virginia writers to react against him, even in his own lifetime. Mary Johnston began her writing career with a long list of romantic historical novels, most of them about the past of Virginia. Then in 1913 she published *Hagar*, described by Hubbell as "a protest on the part of the New Woman of the South against the code of 'Southern Chivalry' which motivated Page's heroines."

---


James Branch Cabell, in *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck*, wrote a burlesque of Page's "Meh Lady," while Ellen Glasgow in *The Deliverance* treats the situation of his *Red Rock* in a completely different fashion. When the positions of overseer and plantation owner are reversed, Page sees it all as a great injustice to the planter and his family, but Glasgow sees in the blind widow living on in the overseer's cabin unaware of the downfall of the Confederacy a symbol of the entire South blindly unaware of the changes in the world and still clinging to the outworn ceremonies of tradition.

Militant feminism antagonized many Southern men and some women, and thus established more firmly than ever admiration for the dutiful wife and mother. Countless Southerners would have echoed the chivalrous bachelor whom Fred Lewis Pattee tells about in *The Feminine Fifties*. In taking a stand against women's "Rights," he made this statement: "Since boyhood I have been taught that women are angels and I have believed it, and the voting place with its sawdust and tobacco juice is no place for an angel."\(^7\)

On the other hand, there were gradually many supporters of the feminist movement, particularly among the intellectual women who contributed to the literature of the

---

\(^7\) *Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties* (New York, 1940), p. 92.
time. As is indicated in accounts of the hardships of war and Reconstruction, the Southern lady had learned lessons from her experiences and was forming her own opinions. She had found that she could use her hands and her mind and that she could actually get along without men. She had managed a plantation, perhaps, and had supported her family, or she had worked for pay in town. She had had a taste of independence. Also when she saw Negroes vote while she still could not, she sometimes felt a stirring of resentment and a desire for greater freedom. For these reasons, among various others, the role of woman in fact and fiction was beginning to change.

By the time of Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow the pleasant realism which William Dean Howells described as dealing with "the more smiling aspects of life" was already giving way to a grimmer, harsher realism which led into the naturalism of the twentieth century. Before their deaths it was becoming unfashionable to write about ladies and gentlemen or even of many decent or admirable people in the upper social groups. The extent of the change is indicated by Jay B. Hubbell's reference to a survey of contemporary fiction made by a Southern scholar. The investigation shows that in twentieth-century novels by Southerners "the gentleman plays a sorry role indeed," and the same thing can be

8Hubbell, The South in American Literature, p. 804.
Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow, both Virginians reared in the traditions of the plantation South, are two Southern women writers who show in much of their work a definite swing away from romance and sentiment to realism.

The first to be considered for her realistic treatment of the Southern woman is Mary Johnston, born in 1870. Though she resided in various places and traveled considerably, she lived chiefly in Warm Springs, Virginia. She wrote twenty-three novels, fifteen of which are concerned wholly or partially with Virginia. The first ones are straight historical fiction, but with the two Civil War books, she enters what Edward Wagenknecht calls her sociological period. He says, "This aspect finds its best expression in Hagar, in which Miss Johnston lent her voice to an eloquent expression of the twentieth century woman's demand for emancipation from traditional labors and for complete equality with man, and it culminates in The Wanderers, a series of studies in the changing relations between men and women." In most of her novels, even the historical ones, there is some note of the movement to make

---

advances in the position of women. For example, in her very first book, *Prisoners of Hope*, the love of Patricia Verney for an indentured servant goes against all traditions of the girl's class. In *Hagar* the heroine insists that if a woman is to be worthwhile she must be independent, that she need not feel obligated to marry, and that she can live a happy and useful life even if she does not find love and marriage. Wagenknecht says, however, "Hagar, too, knows the sting of sex, fights the old past briefly and decisively when she finds herself falling in love with another woman's man, and at last comes herself to the mating."\(^{10}\) The author's interest in woman's suffrage does not cause her to ignore in *Hagar* the basic governing forces in life. In *Michael Forth*, in which Miriam too fights for the emancipation of women, Miss Johnston pictures marriage with its proper fulfillment, placing it far above a mere physical relationship.

In *Hagar*, described by her grandmother as a detestable "new woman," who is bent on "unsexing woman and unsettling the minds of working people," Mary Johnston gives a realistic picture of a woman in the democratic society emerging in the twentieth century. Though born a lady in the traditional sense, she is in direct contrast with the ideals treasured by her plantation family, who are clinging

\(^{10}\)Wagenknecht, "The World and Mary Johnston," p. 197.
to the past rather than looking to the future. While still a child, she has difficulty conforming to the "ladylike" behavior expected by her family, and the older people blame Maria, her weakly rebellious mother, who is "without blood and traditions" of the Ashendynes, of Gilead Balm. The overseer's wife, fearing she will grow up a rebel, warns her: "Look-a-here, honey, there ain't a mite of ease and comfort on that road." Even so, Hagar departs drastically from the role traditionally assigned to the Southern girl. By becoming a successful writer she earns enough money to live independently and to be able to devote time and money to the fight for women's rights and to join in the socialist movement for the improvement of working people everywhere. Though there are many problems for her to overcome, Hagar works out a satisfying way of life as a career woman. Eventually there is marriage, too, though she does not "marry money and social position," as her early training has directed. Her husband is an engineer rather than a plantation scion. He accepts the fact that she intends to continue her work and is willing to help in her efforts toward "a fairer social order."

Not even in appearance does Hagar fit the pattern set for a Southern heroine. There is no indication that she is small, fragile, and helpless, eager to be helped or

---

\(^{11}\)Mary Johnston, *Hagar* (Boston, 1913), p. 35.
protected. She has dark hair and skin and her family consider her ugly, but a schoolmate, more magnanimous, says: "I shouldn't call you ugly. . . . You aren't pretty, and I don't believe anyone would ever call you so, but you aren't at all disagreeably plain. You've got something that makes people ask who you are. . . ."\(^{12}\) Also Hagar is strong-minded and independent, even in childhood, as is indicated by an incident relating to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Aunt Serena assures her, "Your grandfather wouldn't let it come into the house. No lady would read it."\(^{13}\) She does anyway. She recalls that her family were disturbed by her reading *The Scarlet Letter*, which seems harmless to her; perhaps they are just as mistaken in their condemnation of Darwin. Later it is Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, of which they disapprove, because it will "threaten the unsettling of a certain divine status quo."\(^{14}\) For them the woman of the past, "the eternal feminine," remains the ideal. Hagar must not get a job and earn money; in fact, no girl should work if there is a male relative who can support her, and, if there is not, for a girl who knows "how to make the best of herself, there inevitably arrives her own establishment and the right man to take care of


\(^{13}\) Johnston, *Hagar*, p. 2.

\(^{14}\) Johnston, *Hagar*, p. 150.
Mrs. LeGrand, widowed by the war, runs a school to support herself, but it is certainly not by choice. As she sees it, "It's part of the degeneracy of the times that you begin to see women--women of breeding--in all kinds of public places, working for their living."16

Hagar is stirred by hearing an Englishwoman, a Fabian, tell of industrial and social unrest, of conditions among workers, and of the needs of women. Later in New York when she sees conditions in the slums, she desires even more to succeed as a writer, not only to satisfy her need for creativity but also to earn money for practical aid to the labor movement. During travels with her invalid father, she keeps up her work and gains literary acclaim and financial success. As soon as it is possible, she insists upon returning to America to work for improvement of conditions for workers, though her father objects: "This comes of the damned modern independence of women. If you couldn't write--couldn't earn--you'd trot along quietly enough! The pivotal mistake was letting women learn the alphabet."17 She yearns to serve the cause of women more fully also. As an idealistic realist she wants "Knowledge,

15Johnston, Hagar, p. 75.
16Johnston, Hagar, p. 76.
17Johnston, Hagar, p. 261.
knowledge,— wisdom, wisdom,— action. . ."¹⁸ in order to help woman become "the arbiter of her own destiny, the definer of her own power, with an equal goal and right-of-way—."

Hagar attains her goal of action by giving her fortune, her own earnings, and her time to the cause of working men and the suffrage movement. Her disapproving grandfather considers women "perpetual minors" who never should have been allowed to come of age or control property.²⁰ As to working with the suffragettes, "brazen women who want to be men," Old Miss cannot accept it: "Women Righters and Abolitionists!—doing their best to drench the country with blood, kill our people and bring the carpetbaggers upon us! Wearing bloomers and cutting their hair short and speaking in town halls and wanting to change the marriage service!"²¹ Mrs. LeGrand considers the whole thing vulgar and agrees wholeheartedly that woman's place is in the home but does, in a superficial manner, defend suffragists:

"Some of them are pretty and dress well and have a good position. I was at a tea in Baltimore and there were several there. I've even heard women in Virginia—women that you'd think ought to know better—say that

¹⁸Johnston, Hagar, p. 270.
¹⁹Johnston, Hagar, p. 274.
²⁰Johnston, Hagar, pp. 301-302.
²¹Johnston, Hagar, p. 316.
they believed in it and that sooner or later we'd have a movement here."22

Cousin Ralph, traditional Southerner, concludes his objection in this way: "Woman, I take it, was made for man, and she'll have to continue to recognize that fact. Good Lord! It seems to me that if we give her our love and pay her bills, she might be satisfied!"23 The general opinion is that a woman should not exhibit her mind and should defer to men, but she can, as Mrs. LeGrand indicates, use her femininity to get what she wants, for "a woman who knows what she is about can pick and choose and turn everything to account."24

Mary Johnston rejects the old concept of woman's place in marriage and the double standard in sexual morality. The grandmother stresses the fact that Ralph is the handsomest man at the university and tells Hagar not to believe tales of his wildness, because "all men are a little wild at first."25 This attitude is an example of the old custom of a woman's ignoring the lax morals of the men in her life but adhering to their standard of purity for herself. Ralph sets great store by the family plans for the

22Johnston, Hagar, pp. 316-317.
23Johnston, Hagar, p. 317.
24Johnston, Hagar, p. 320.
25Johnston, Hagar, p. 74.
couple, but Hagar shrugs aside the custom of a family's arranging a marriage for a woman. When he visits her in her New York apartment and insists that without a man and a child it is not a home, she assures him that he is mistaken. She says, however, that if she meets a man "whom I loved and who was my comrade, and who loved me and saw in me his comrade, my home would probably open to that man." Ralph, who wishes submissiveness of mind—"the other person's mind"—feels that "naturally men dominate women." His final pronouncement is, "All this rebellion of women is unthinkable!"

Miss Johnston pictures Rachel Bolt, romantically married at eighteen. Soon she becomes a perfect example of the tragedy brought about by the family and social pressures on a girl to marry young and to accept any handsome dashing young man of good family despite his reputation for wildness. It is clear to her that failing to give a girl training and preparation for marriage and condoning, or at least ignoring, moral laxness of husbands are two social evils that cause unhappiness for many girls of her time. Like many another "properly brought-up girl," Rachel is expecting to fall in love, marry in white satin and old lace, and "be romantically happy and provided for ever

---

26 Johnston, Hagar, p. 365.
27 Johnston, Hagar, p. 369.
after." She tells Hagar, "I was packing my trunks for a voyage—and I didn't know where I was going. I didn't know anything about it. No one offered me a Baedeker." In spite of the general worship of "the Institution of Staying Together at any price," she finally resorts to divorce to end the horror of a marriage to a charming but dissolute man:

"I had married a handsome beast—a cruel one, too. He treated me like a slave, bought for one purpose, kept for one purpose. I wasn't enough for him—I found that out very soon. But those others were freer than I. They made him pay them... He would have said that he paid me, too; that he supported me. Perhaps it's true. I only know that I am going to have Betty taught to support herself."30

Rachel's greatest hope for better things in the twentieth century is a "movement to free the young girl." It is men whom the world does not call wicked and women who are never allowed to ask questions but allowed only to dream romantic dreams who are involved in such marriages as Rachel's—miserable marriages that parents try to keep going because of the family name.

Hagar is the "new woman," who does not subscribe to

---

28 Johnston, Hagar, p. 215.
29 Johnston, Hagar, p. 216.
30 Johnston, Hagar, p. 218.
31 Johnston, Hagar, p. 220.
the code of uselessness and helplessness which Southern men of the old régime expected of their women. Since she works to fulfill her inner self and to earn money for practical purposes as well, she is not dependent upon any man and sees no need for being dominated by one. It is on her qualities of character and her service to society that she would wish to be evaluated. Though she is born a lady, she becomes also through her own efforts a democratic lady of worth.

II

In a study of the fictional portrayal of the woman of the South in realistic fiction Ellen Glasgow's novels are even more invaluable than Mary Johnston's. Though Miss Glasgow was born and bred of the Genteel Tradition in aristocratic Richmond during the period of "magnification" of the Southern legend, she lived on into and continued to write during the twentieth century, when realism grew more intense and naturalism reversed the picture of the traditional Southern woman, innocent and spotlessly pure.

An attractive and intelligent young woman of aristocratic background, Ellen Glasgow might well have become a Southern belle. Instead she became a successful novelist who, even in her first book, The Descendant, broke with the ideal of gentility of the Old South. She revolted against Southern tradition, she explains in The Woman Within, more
because it was cruel than because it was false.32

Ellen Glasgow, born April 22, 1873, was descended from Scotch-Irish stock on her father's side and pure Tidewater Virginia on her mother's. She seems from the first to have been influenced by these contrasting heritages. Her father, who was educated at Washington College and later read law, was associated with the Tredegar Iron Works for many years. In telling of her background in The Woman Within, Miss Glasgow speaks of the lack of compassion in this man with an "iron vein of Presbyterianism" and says that of all men he is the last one her mother, with her generous, sensitive, sympathetic nature, should have married. She says that she inherited nothing from her father except the color of her eyes and a share in a trust fund but from her mother everything, both mental and physical. She concludes that from this union of opposites she derived "a perpetual conflict of types."33

In spite of what his daughter thought, the fact that Mr. Glasgow had a good library and was himself a great reader no doubt had an influence on her. Perhaps her feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as the fortitude she considers so important for all people, particularly for


33Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within, pp. 15-16.
women, may have come, partly at least, from the austere Calvinist, who gave to his family everything they needed except love. He never in his entire life, Miss Glasgow writes, "committed a pleasure," but she gives him credit for being unselfish with his family and having a fine sense of integrity and justice.34

Ellen Glasgow had a deep intense love for her beautiful and sensitive mother, who, it seemed to her, suffered in a marriage far from ideal. Closely associated with her mother, even during a period when she had a severe nervous illness, the young girl was deeply affected by her mother's unhappiness and frustration. She felt that strained relations in the home kept most of the children from being able to make normal adjustments in life. She herself was almost completely estranged from all except one brother and one sister and thus withdrew more and more into the loneliness which continued in varying degrees throughout her life. She took refuge in omnivorous reading and that, together with the reaction against the family tensions, led to her leaving the Presbyterian church and her rejection of any orthodox religious belief.

Quite early she seemed to see life as grim and tragic. In her autobiography she tells of how, while still quite young, she was driven to unchildlike brooding over

34 Glasgow, The Woman Within, pp. 15-16.
"a sense of exile in a hostile world" and the vague presence of "an evil face without a body."\(^{35}\) Always frail in health, she suffered from nervous headaches and was concerned and embittered by her increasing deafness, which added greatly to her sense of isolation. It seemed to her that personal sadnesses came often in her life. Such things as the illness and death of her mother, the early death of a favorite brother-in-law, the suicide of her brother Frank, the illness and death of her sister Cary, as well as the death of Gerald B--., the man she loved but could not marry, all confirmed her feeling that her life was marked for tragedy.

In her search for reality both science and religion failed her, and her reason and emotion were in perpetual conflict. In *The Woman Within* she writes:

> Emotionally, I was a believer; intellectually I was a skeptic. Yet my essential problem had not altered since that moment of dumb fear when I saw a face without a body looming toward me from the sunset. My necessity was what it had always been. How can an oversensitive nature defend itself against the malice of life? How can one learn to endure the unendurable? Not the cruelty of civilization alone, but the cold implacable inhumanity of the universe?\(^{36}\)

In order to endure in an inimical universe, Ellen Glasgow turned her back on the escapist, sentimental, romanticized

\(^{35}\)Glasgow, *The Woman Within*, p. 25.

attitudes typical of aristocratic ladies of Virginia. It was not tradition but inner strength, inherited perhaps from her Presbyterian father, that sustained her. She found that she must and could build her own defenses from her inner resources.

It is the "vein of iron," mentioned often in her novels and eventually used as the title of one, that one must depend upon in life. According to Edward Wagenknecht, the phrase meant to Miss Glasgow "that character is fate, 'that imagination is a creative principle and depends little upon the raw material of life,' that life itself is a struggle with barren ground and that one may 'learn to live gallantly without delight,' that it is impossible to defeat a human being who will not acknowledge defeat."37 She never pretended to be happy but spoke of having achieved "the freedom of despair." It did not seem possible, or even desirable, to achieve happiness in a world filled with suffering for man and beast, in a world where the great sin was cruelty. But, continues Wagenknecht, she believed that "if happiness perished, honor remained, and the power to endure, and the intelligence to adjust oneself to live an undefeated life even under the most unfavorable conditions."38

---

38Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel, p. 279.
In her novels Ellen Glasgow over and over shows the danger of a woman's depending too much upon the emotion of love, which is so impermanent that it will play havoc with her life. The happiest women are those who develop their own capabilities and depend upon their inner strength rather than upon emotion. In connection with these views it is interesting to know that, though Miss Glasgow remained single all her life, it was by choice rather than by necessity. She was in no way a plain and embittered old maid who criticized love and marriage merely because they were something she could not have. Love, she comments, is valued most by those who have never had it.

In *The Woman Within* Miss Glasgow tells in considerable detail about the men in her life. The first was Gerald B____, whom she could not marry because he was already married, but his intellectual companionship meant a great deal to her. She grieved deeply when he died. Then there was a brief engagement to a writer, though she indicates that she never actually thought she would marry him. Later she was engaged to Harold S____. Although their association lasted for twenty-one years, she says they were happy only seventeen months of that time. There were various partings and reconciliations, but perhaps more than anything else it was his absorption in his Red Cross work and his long absence during the war that drew them apart. Of her feelings when he sailed for the Balkans in 1917, she
writes that "one of those clairvoyant insights, so unreasonable and so infallible, told me that something had died at our parting. Yet we were never nearer in spirit than at that moment. . . . We were looking ahead to a future together—though, because of my terror of deafness, I knew then, as I had always known in my rational mind, that marriage was not for me—that so close a possessiveness was not, and could never be, what I needed from life." Later she tells of the "the blissful tranquillity" of falling out of love and, after the breaking of her engagement, of her relief at being free and belonging to herself again. She says, "The obscure instinct that had warned me, in my early life, against marriage, was a sound instinct." She reveals too that she had no strong maternal feelings and did not want "to have babies," as a member of a publishing firm told her she should do when she was trying to get her first novel published.

In her life as well as in her fiction Ellen Glasgow indicates that living by emotion is not enough. She calls attention to her many interests and friends, as well as to her work, as the things that saved her when she experienced the anguish of a broken love affair. She simply refused to

---

40 Glasgow, The Woman Within, p. 245.
be defeated by life and that in itself is a kind of triumph. She concludes her autobiographical account with this statement: "And I have come, at last, from the fleeting rebellion of youth into the steadfast—or is it merely the seasonable—accord without surrender of the unreconciled heart." 42

Ellen Glasgow has been called a feminist and undoubtedly she is in some senses of the word, but she never defends women merely as women. Elizabeth Monroe says that her interest in women is only part of a larger concern "with democracy" and "with all people who do not fit into their environment." 43 Among these, she explains, are the following:

The woman who is capable of infinite development and wants more out of life than homage cannot find her place in a society that stifles intellect in favor of what it calls womanliness. The woman who for some reason or other does not marry becomes either a household drudge for her more fortunate relatives, or a patroness of charities devoted to genteel ends. The woman who is unfortunate enough to "forget herself" must consent to be buried alive; she is treated with forbearance so long as she accepts her fallen state in a fashion becoming a lady, but to recover a measure of happiness is past forgiveness. 44

42 Glasgow, The Woman Within, p. 296.
Before the first World War Miss Glasgow was interested in Ibsen and his championing of women's rights. For a time she gave her support to the suffragist movement in Virginia but was never a crusader and eventually seemed to lose all interest in the matter. The feminist movement was important, she thought, less for what it might accomplish specifically than for the possibilities it might open for woman's development: "For what we call the woman's movement is a revolt from a pretense of being—it is at its best and worst a struggle for the liberation of personality." She makes it evident that she is less concerned with women's political rights and their right to higher education than with their mental development and "a life outside the emotions." Stuart Sherman, in "Ellen Glasgow: The Fighting Edge of Romance," says she insists "that the average woman is a failure and that the average woman's life is founded on a lie, a vital illusion, namely, that the sexual attraction which draws her to her man in the mating season is enough, is her supreme and sufficient affair with life." Since she sees sexual passion as evanescent, there runs through nearly all of her novels this refrain: "There ought to be something more permanent


than love to live by."47

The old Southern tradition that "woman's best preparation for life is to know nothing about it" or what Elizabeth Monroe describes as "a system of education in which woman has been trained only to feel, and man to prefer the appearance of honor to its reality"48 does not give the proper basis for enduring marriage. Ellen Glasgow does not, Miss Monroe continues, offer a solution to the problem brought about by woman's depending entirely upon one emotion, but she is not deceived by the idea of professional equality of women and men nor by economic independence for women as a panacea. She reaches the conclusion that Miss Glasgow would not likely consider woman's place in society today much better than it was in Civil War times. Even though women have more opportunities now, they are enslaved by competition in industry just as they once were by the traditions of a romantic code. Working with men in industry and the professions is not so important as the right to a home and security and the free development of one's inner resources.49

Though there are some dissenting opinions most


49Monroe, The Novel and Society, p. 159.
critics consider Ellen Glasgow a realist. Frederick McDowell calls her "the first self-conscious and consistent realist in the South." He cites as evidence the squalid life of rural farmers presented in somber tones in her first book, The Descendant. In 1897 it was daring for a Richmond woman to write at all but certainly more so for her to mention illegitimacy and free love in an age which was accustomed to "moonlight and magnolia" sentiment. Miss Glasgow herself says that she conceived and wrote her early novels in revolt, "not only from the school of local colour, but from the current Victorian tradition in letters, and, more especially, from the sentimental elegiac tone this tradition had assumed in Virginia." She was not a "pure realist," she says, but a "verist," for "the whole truth must embrace the interior world as well as external appearances."

When Barren Ground appeared in 1925, the publishers announced that realism had at last crossed the Potomac. Stuart Sherman, recalling the democratic realism in The Voice of the People, counters, "Realism crossed the Potomac

twenty-five years ago, going North!"53

Douglas Southall Freeman describes Miss Glasgow as "a personal idealist" to whom cruelty, even to animals, is the greatest sin. Although he considers her a realist, he qualifies the term to mean "unflinching fidelity to those aspects of life her interest, her taste, and her upbringing lead her to describe."54 He goes on to say that if muck is on the road she has chosen, she will go through it and never let the reader know she is holding back her skirts, but she is too well-bred and too normal to choose a road just because there is filth on it.55 John Edward Hardy considers her an idealist, though not a romantic idealist, in the manner of older Southern novelists. Sometimes she is, he says, "purely and simply a sentimentalist, or an apologist for one thing or another, women or dogs or land reform or the plain man in politics," but more often she writes satire, which is based on "a philosophical idealism."56 Looking back to the sentimentality so popular in Southern fiction in the 1890's, Miss Glasgow, responding to a reporter's


question of what she thought the South needed most, said, "Blood and irony." E. W. Wagenknecht explains that by "blood" she means passion, warmth, and vitality, and by "irony" a way to overcome sentimental decay.

In discussing the Virginia edition of Miss Glasgow's works, Howard Mumford Jones indicates the number and variety of her Southern women characters:

It is in her portraits of adult women that Miss Glasgow excels, and I venture to say that her gallery of female characters surpasses in richness and variety almost any group of similar portraits in American fiction. The young wife, the matron, the deserted girl, the lady of damaged repute around whom lingers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages, the female sentimentalist, the old maid, Victorian and belated—she has seen and studied these women with ironic patience and a sympathetic pen.

Sometimes love brings unhappiness and sometimes no fulfillment. Grand ladies can be cruel and selfish or proud and arrogant but they can also be loving and heroic. A common pattern is for a woman of the aristocracy to marry "a man of the people;" sometimes it is the other way about, but either way brings the new blood needed for the gentility to survive at all. The fact that Ellen Glasgow sympathizes with her women, whom she sees as "inevitably oppressed and

58 Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel, p. 269.
59 Howard Mumford Jones, "Product of the Tragic Muse," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIII (March 29, 1941), 5.
inevitably tragic," makes her able to picture them clearly, says Sara Haardt. In an interview, Miss Glasgow gave her this explanation of her feeling for Southern women:

I should have pitied them if for no other reason than that they have had to wait for so long. The Victorian era, above all, was one of waiting, as hell is an eternity of waiting. Women waiting for the first words of love from their lovers. Women waiting, with all the inherited belief in the omnipotence of love, for the birth of their sons. Women waiting, during the Civil War, for news of their sons, their husbands, from First Manassas, Gettysburg, the Wilderness. Women waiting beside the sick and dying--waiting--waiting--waiting--. As a result, I think it is almost impossible to overestimate the part that religion, in one form or another, has played in the lives of southern women. Nothing else could have kept them in their place for so many generations: it is the only power that could have made them accept with meekness the wing of the chicken and the double standard of morals.\textsuperscript{60}

The theme of her novels then is, as vividly expressed by James Branch Cabell, "The Tragedy of Everywoman, as it was lately enacted in the Southern States of America."\textsuperscript{61}

Rachel Gavin, the heroine of Ellen Glasgow's first novel, \textit{The Descendant} (1897), is a woman "tied to a single emotion," the impermanence of which almost ruins her life. She is an ambitious young painter from the South, already making a name for herself in New York. When she meets Michael Akershem, a writer for the socialist journal

\textsuperscript{60}Sara Haardt, "Ellen Glasgow and the South," \textit{Bookman}, LXIX (April 1929), 135.

Iconoclast, she is intent on her career, for which she has real talent and is reluctant to let emotion interfere. Finally however passion triumphs, and because marriage is against Michael's freethinking principles, she becomes his mistress. She gives up her career and sacrifices her reputation for love and takes pride in doing so. The irony, of course, is that it is her unconventionality that causes her to lose Michael. When he meets Anna Allard, fresh and wholesome, she seems the "womanly" woman that his "Comrade" Rachel is not. In order to achieve respectability he changes to a more moderate journal and lets Rachel, who senses his declining feeling for her, break off their relationship. For killing a fanatic fellow-socialist, Michael is imprisoned for eight years. Rachel returns to her painting and becomes quite successful.

Rachel embodies several characteristics which Miss Glasgow often portrays singly in later women characters. She is the independent new woman of the 1890's, the woman who wishes to be accepted on equal terms with man and calls herself his "comrade." She believes herself emancipated, because she is not the pattern of meekness and modesty that her great-grandmother was. That admirable lady's husband, "a gentleman of the old school, spent his evenings at a tavern where there resided a woman of ill repute and came staggering home in the early morning hours. For fifty years his wife greeted him with a kiss and, after getting
him off to bed, thanked the Lord that she had not been kept from doing her duty." Miss Glasgow says that Rachel, who has not inherited her grandmother's character, would not have endured such behavior. She is, however, only a transitional figure in a time when "men were dissatisfied with the old without having evolved the new."

Because of her love, which makes her "as helpless as a babe unborn," Rachel feels a great satisfaction in laying her art and her ambition at Michael's feet. Because he reverently calls her his "lady," she endures the social condemnation of their unconventional relationship and thinks her love worth every sacrifice. Her innocence, which is only ignorance and lack of worldly experience, causes her "to idealize Michael and to misjudge masculine fidelity in love." The double standard against which she has revolted in spite of its causing her to suffer as "a ruined woman" is still strong and helps bring about her undoing. She is penalized by society, while Michael is untouched and free to move on, not only to another position but also to another

63 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 86.
64 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 141.
65 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 46.
woman if he wishes. Ironically, the respectability which Rachel has sacrificed for him is the thing he comes to value. She no longer seems "an angel," and he tells himself that "a good woman ever sees between herself and the man she loves the inviolable shield of her own honor." 66

Now that Michael has met Anna, a strong and wholesome looking girl with the pure air of the country still clinging to her, Rachel has no place in his future: "Now he wanted more—far more—than Rachel could give. He wanted the one thing that she had not. He wanted the honor of good men and good women. He wanted a clean future, unbesmirched by any blot upon the closed pages of his past." 67 Again and again comes the thought: "A pure woman would have spurned passion for the sake of principle!" 68

Rachel's mistake, as Miss Glasgow sees it, has been in basing her life on a single emotion, for the enemy of woman is "neither God, man, nor devil, but her own heart." 69 She betrays her inner self by wasting or failing to develop her talent. It is only when she returns to art that she can rebuild her life; if she is not happy, she is at least useful and worthwhile. When Michael returns to her in the

66 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 189.
67 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 192.
68 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 192.
69 Glasgow, The Descendant, p. 83.
last stages of consumption, their affection finally finds a true consummation but by then "the blood-red seal of fate" is on his lips. According to Maxwell Geismar, in *Rebels and Ancestors*, this odd resolution to passion, in which "the body must perish in order to have the spirit triumph," marks almost all the love affairs in Glasgow's early works.

One of the few completely ideal wives in all of Miss Glasgow's fiction is Mrs. Semple, a large but charming woman with serene graciousness. She aids her husband with good counsel and is treated with affectionate respect rather than condescension. Semple, in theory impatient of all restraint, even marriage, has found marriage bonds not irksome but beneficial. He and his wife have an equitable and happy relationship which has reduced neither to an inferior status.

The merging of a new and vigorous civilization with the ruins of the old order in the South after the Civil War is at the center of *The Deliverance* (1904). In a reversal of fortunes the Blakes have lost their plantation to their former overseer, Bill Fletcher. Mr. Blake, already enfeebled, does not survive the crisis, but his wife, blind and paralyzed, lives on for twenty years. She is never aware that the family is no longer in Blake Hall but in the

overseer's cottage. Believing it would kill their mother to know the situation, the children weave a web of lies to keep her in ignorance of their poverty and make sacrifices to supply her the luxuries of her old way of life. It is her "not believing it possible"71 that makes the deception easy, for, says Frederick McDowell, she is like the South in being unable to see present reality and in idealizing the romantic past.72 The son, Christopher, Miss Glasgow explains in A Certain Measure, embodies "time in convulsion."73 He goes to work in the fields when a boy of ten and grows up like a common laboring man in spite of the aristocracy of his background. Bitterly hating Fletcher, he determines upon vengeance and accomplishes it through the old man's grandson. He estranges the two and makes of the boy a gambler and a drunkard. Ironically, he falls in love with Maria, Will's sister, and comes to regret the havoc he has wrought. When Will murders his grandfather, Christopher assumes the blame and thereby secures deliverance from his evil nature.

Several of the women characters are worth attention as belonging in Miss Glasgow's gallery of portraits. She

72 McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 71.
73 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 35.
pictures the false position of the traditional Southern lady and shows her disappearing as the middle class rises and mixes with the debilitated aristocracy. At the center, as always, is her opinion of romantic love and of marriage.

Mrs. Blake, embodying "the lost illusions of the Southern heart,"\(^74\) is the domineering woman who rules through her infirmity, though certainly not deliberately nor maliciously. She has been "a beauty, a belle, a sweetheart, a wife, and a mother" and now is "a very spoiled old woman."\(^75\) In her dress of black brocade and with her white hair piled high, she is "a stately old lady . . . sitting straight and stiff in her Elizabethan chair."\(^76\) Her conversations, comic yet tragic because of the ironic contrast between her past life and the present reality, often reveal the false values of her society. Old and ill, she still will not lean back to rest, because appearances are all-important to her: "I have never slouched in my life . . . and I do not care to fall into the habit in my old age. When my last hour comes, I hope to meet my God in the attitude becoming a lady."\(^77\)

Mrs. Blake tells again and again that she married

\(^74\)Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 35.
\(^75\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 221.
\(^76\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 39.
\(^77\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 75.
for love, adding however that her marriage was also an entirely suitable match. Yet she suggests that men, romantic love, and marriage are all over-rated. On one occasion she says: "... I think marriage should be regarded more as a duty than as a pleasure. Your Aunt Susannah always said it was like choosing a partner at a ball; for my part, I think it resembles more the selecting of a brand of flour." She recalls the proud and beautiful Aunt Susannah, of whom it was said that she never danced with a gentleman who had not fought a duel on her account, but comforts herself with the rumor that the aunt wore a larger shoe than she.

She says too that it is a pity "to magnify the passion of love when so many estimable people get along quite comfortably without it," and concludes that since love is only one of the interesting things in life, "the substance of anybody's house is a large price to pay for a single feeling."

In spite of her feeling that marriage is over-rated, Mrs. Blake wants her children to marry. Single women may sometimes be useful in the dairy or spinning room, but the bachelor is always an encumbrance. She tells Lila not to

---

78 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 151.
79 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 75.
81 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 151.
wait until she cannot live without a man before she marries him but to ascertain whether she can possibly live with him: "There is a great deal of sentiment talked in life, my dear, and very little lived, and my experience of the world has taught me that one man is likely to make quite as good a husband as another—provided he is a gentleman and you don't expect him to become a saint." 82 Although she considers her own marriage ideal and praises the devotion of her husband, she is glad he never had "to choose between me and his dinner." In justifying herself for urging marriage as a duty rather than advising it as a pleasure, she says that "a man is not half so satisfactory a domestic pet as a cat, and far less neat in his habits." 83

Mrs. Blake's acceptance of the double standard of morality is indicated by her remark about one of her husband's friends, generally admitted a rake: "Oh, the family was all right, my dear, I never heard a breath against the women." 84 When she learns that Christopher has no love affairs, she says he must be a saint or an imbecile and she does not know "which character sits worse upon a gentleman." 85

---

82 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 296.
83 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 297.
85 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 76.
Cynthia is the self-sacrificing spinster, who, like her mother, remains faithful to tradition and its false values. She exhibits the fortitude on which Miss Glasgow and many of her women characters depend, but in her it is futile. To her, life seems "something to be endured rather than enjoyed." Noble and generous, she sacrifices to keep her mother happy in her illusions and to protect the younger sister. She takes in sewing and does drudgery at home so that Lila may retain her fragile look, with her "small white hands" unsoiled by work and her face rose-coloured and beautiful. In short, Lila must be a lady. In keeping with the code of her past, Cynthia opposes Jim Weathersby as Lila's suitor, because he is a farmer, descended from farmers. Though he is independent and more prosperous than the Blakes, Cynthia still tries to hold on to the remnants of family pride. But Lila too has fortitude and rejects the refined selfishness of her forebears. In marrying Jim she brings in the new blood needed by the gentility if it is to continue in existence.

Maria Fletcher, in whom Christopher finds his deliverance, is another person through whom the strength of the former laboring class can help "with the loosening of aristocratic control in Southern society." Her nobility

---

86 Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 71.
87 McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 78.
shows the development away from poorer stock but the process was helped by a better strain on her mother's side. Then too she learns from the unhappiness of her first marriage based on nothing more enduring than passion. Her aunt's comment makes clear what a disciplining effect it has had: "You were so brave and so patient, and you stuck by him to the last, as a wife ought to do."\(^8\)\(^8\)

In her unflattering view of men and marriage, Mrs. Susan Spade, who is definitely lower-class and who is not portrayed as a lady either by birth or by inherent worth, echoes some of Mrs. Blake's sentiments. She makes a point of the fact that she does a thing because of duty, not pleasure, even to her marrying Tom Spade.\(^8\)\(^9\) She sees Molly Peterkin's blonde attractiveness as synonymous with depravity, for "thar's somethin' indecent about yaller hair." Her acceptance of the double standard is revealed by what she tells her husband about Molly:

"If thar's a p'isonous snake or lizard in this country, suh, it's that tow-head huzzy . . . , and if thar's a sex on this earth that I ain't got no patience with, it's the woman sex. A man may slip an' slide a little because he was made that way, but when it comes to a woman she's got to w'ar whalebones in her clothes when I'm aroun'."\(^9\)\(^0\)

---

\(^8\)\(^8\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 268.

\(^8\)\(^9\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 213.

\(^9\)\(^0\)Glasgow, The Deliverance, p. 214.
Of Molly one man comments, "Why, the gal sins so free an' easy you might almost fancy her a man," but another makes it clear that the men should take the blame for having made her as she is. When Christopher points out to Will Fletcher that Molly is a fool, the young man cautions, "What does a man want with brains in a woman?" Will's marriage, based on "a single emotion," is another doomed to failure.

**Virginia** (1913), which reproduces the period from 1884 to 1910, gives what Miss Glasgow says was intended to be "the candid portrait of a lady." Working in an age when the Southern lady had not entirely disappeared, she tried "to interpret the vanished lady with sympathy, though not entirely without that cutting edge of truth which we call irony." She realizes that her irony gradually yielded to compassion, and the heroine's simple goodness turned a comedy of manners into "a tragedy of human fate."

Beautiful Virginia Pendleton, who looks "as if she were cut out for happiness," is ecstatically happy when she marries Oliver Treadwell. Firm in her belief that love

---

92 Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, p. 231.
95 Glasgow, *A Certain Measure*, p. 78.
96 Ellen Glasgow, *Virginia* (Garden City, New York, 1913), p. 25.
is all for a woman and that the joy is in giving rather than in receiving, she devotes her entire attention to her husband and home. As the children come along, she is so devoted to them and the household details that she becomes unaware of her husband's needs and fails to understand his ambitions as a writer. The responsibilities of motherhood come first, and she is absorbed in her children, even to the exclusion of her sexual interest. She does not seek self-realization in any way, failing completely to see that she is not keeping pace with Oliver. Virginia's complete goodness and limited intellect become boring rather than attractive to Oliver. Eventually he finds in the actress Margaret Oldcastle the understanding and companionship he misses in his wife. When he asks for his freedom, Virginia, who has "the evasive idealism" of the past, is astounded. She can only tell herself over and over, "But I tried so hard to do what was right, and, whatever the fault was, at least I never failed in love. I never failed in love."^7

As a young girl, Virginia, with her angelic fairness and her deep soft blue eyes set in black lashes, embodies "the feminine ideal of the ages."^8 Her education, received at Miss Batte's Academy, is based upon the theory "that the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would

^7Glasgow, Virginia, p. 505.
^8Glasgow, Virginia, p. 5.
be to contend with it."\textsuperscript{99} It is firmly rooted in "such fundamental verities as the superiority of man and the aristocratic supremacy of the Episcopal Church."\textsuperscript{100} From her mother comes Virginia's belief that "for a woman life and love are interchangeable terms"—"that one emotion represented not only her sole opportunity of joy, it constituted as well her single field of activity."\textsuperscript{101} Virginia takes these teachings into her marriage, together with "the inherited ideals of self-surrender, of service, pity, loyalty, and sacrifice."\textsuperscript{102} In accordance with these ideals she slaves almost beyond her endurance and convinces Oliver that she likes to do it, as actually she does. She denies herself everything for her family. When Oliver's plays fail, she is loyal in her praise, though he is irritated by her lack of discrimination. He sees that she is giving only flattery, not intelligent understanding of his work or of his feelings about it. She fails to realize, he says, that "a man is of some use except as a husband and father,"\textsuperscript{103} and fails also to understand that his plays are as vital a matter to him as the children are to her. As a wife she is

\textsuperscript{99}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{100}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{101}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{102}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{103}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 246.
perfect, but as a mental companion she hardly exists. Always her comforting thought is that she will never fail Oliver in love, but even love surrenders its authority to duty when staying with an ill child prevents her attending opening night.

Ironically, it is her adherence to ideals and her inability to adjust to new conditions that betray Virginia. Her husband, children, and friends leave her behind. She grows old and worn and dowdy—all because of her self-sacrificing way of life—and her mind stays exactly where it was when she married. Oliver, still young and handsome and well-dressed, has developed beyond her. She has "nothing except love to offer," and love is not enough. Finally she forces herself to acknowledge Oliver's attraction to Margaret Oldcastle and goes to see her. At the crucial moment tradition triumphs over passion, and she does not mention the woman's relationship to Oliver: "She could no more have bared her soul to that other woman than she could have stripped her body naked in the marketplace."105

The tragedy of Virginia lies, as is usual in Glasgow heroines, in her depending too completely upon love and failing to develop herself as a woman, not merely as a wife

104Glasgow, Virginia, p. 286.
105Glasgow, Virginia, p. 488.
and mother. She has been trained to believe that devotion and self-sacrifice are sufficient for a wife and that intellectual interests are for men only. The tragic emptiness and bitter loneliness of Virginia's future could have been prevented had she found self-realization. Virginia represents the finest qualities of the Old South as well as its inadequacies. Her defeat by life, by her lack of intellectual understanding, and by her holding to her "inherited mould of fixed beliefs" is inevitable; yet her intrinsic goodness is nobler and more admirable than the spiritual insensitivity of the modern materialists who revolt against Southern tradition and overcome it.

Several minor characters illustrate Ellen Glasgow's ideas about the old and the new in Southern woman. Among them is Mrs. Pendleton, whose teachings help make Virginia what she is. She too depends solely on love and is as self-sacrificing as she leads Virginia to be. In Miss Glasgow's words, she is ever thankful for "the privilege of working herself to death" for her daughter and husband. Because a minister should not have to do manual labor, she does it herself but "always with the manner of a lady." Mrs. Pendleton is dedicated to "keeping up appearances" in every way. In order to clean and scrub before the neighbors are up, she is careful never to oversleep. When there is

---

106 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 39.
gossip about Oliver and Abby Grove, she urges Virginia to do something to prevent scandal, which is simply unbearable. In her opinion, "A woman—a true woman—would endure death rather than be talked about." She recalls a cousin whose husband drank, beat her, and even carried on with the colored servants, but "that was better than the disgrace of a separation."  

Mrs. Pendleton and Virginia are products of a social order whose "crowning grace and glory" they are: "Both were creatures trained to feel rather than think, whose very goodness was the result not of reason, but of emotion."  

Miss Priscilla Batte, of the Dinwiddie Academy for Young Ladies, is a destitute maiden lady who has turned to teaching as the only "nice and respectable" occupation open to her. She has come through the war with her innocence unshattered and is still "capable of dying for an idea but not of conceiving one." Through her position she is helping to perpetuate the tradition of innocence as preparation for life, for she is determined not to leave "a single unprotected breach in the girl's mind through which an  

107 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 313.  
108 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 313.  
110 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 12.
It is not knowledge that is important for a girl but right attitudes. Ideas of any kind are suspect to Miss Batte. She sees Virginia as more suitable to be a wife than Susan, because Susan's head is full of ideas.

Although she is unmarried herself, Miss Batte tells Oliver, "... I am sometimes tempted to believe that even an unhappy marriage is better than none at all. At least it gives you something to think about." Like her mother and grandmother before her, she believes that, "once married, a man's morality became not his own business, but his wife's." A woman is, after all, designed by Providence only for "the delight and the sanctification" of man; it is her duty to be "an influence."

Miss Willy Whitlow, never pretty and no longer young, is a poor seamstress who goes from house to house to sew or to sit with invalids. To the more fortunate it seems that she has little to live for, certainly nothing that would cause her to skip gaily along the street. Even though she looks forward only to saving for a tombstone over her grave, she accepts her situation without complaint and

---

111 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 21.
112 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 138.
113 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 139.
114 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 139.
takes pleasure in the simple joys of living. Planning dresses, sewing, and sharing in other people's lives give her satisfaction. It is her own resourcefulness rather than emotion upon which she depends and her life is neither empty nor lonely.

Although Miss Glasgow shows compassion for Virginia, it is her friend Susan Treadwell who is more nearly her ideal. She is a straight-forward girl, free from affectation or sentiment. Because her natural intelligence has overcome the defects of her education, she is described as "sensible." The clearness and precision of her thinking are revealed in her manner as well as in her appearance. Oliver thinks, "It would be the best thing that could happen to any man to marry a woman like that; she'd keep him up to the mark and never let him grow soft."

He, however, will not fall in love with her, because she is a woman of character rather than emotion.

In spite of the restraining conventions of the day, Susan "moved large, free, and simple, as though she walked already in the purer and more bracing air of the future." She is an independent girl with ideas and a mind of her own. When her father refuses to send her to college, she makes the best of the situation. As Frederick McDowell says, she

---

115Glasgow, Virginia, p. 104.
116Glasgow, Virginia, p. 104.
"achieves by force of character a vigorous, tolerant, and serene mind."\textsuperscript{117} At nearly thirty she marries the man she has waited for calmly while he is getting over Virginia. She thinks of herself as "one who did not accept destiny but commanded it."\textsuperscript{118} Susan contrasts sharply with Virginia, who is old and miserably lonely at middle age:

She was a large, young, superbly vigorous woman of forty-five, with an abundant energy which overflowed outside of her household in a dozen different directions. She loved John Henry, but she did not love him to the exclusion of other people; she loved her children but they did not absorb her. There was hardly a charity or a public movement in Dinwiddie in which she did not take a practical interest. She had kept her mind as alert as her body, and the number of books she read had always shocked Virginia a little, who felt that time for reading was obliged to be time subtracted from more important duties.\textsuperscript{119}

Susan Treadwell is one of the few completely happy married women in Ellen Glasgow's portrait gallery. She is a person as well as a wife and a mother and has built her life around many things rather than a single emotion. Susan is a "new woman" in the best sense of the term.

For \textit{They Stooped to Folly} (1924) Miss Glasgow says the ironic spirit offered her "the almost forgotten myth

\textsuperscript{117}McDowell, \textit{Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction}, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{118}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{119}Glasgow, \textit{Virginia}, p. 446.
of the 'ruined' woman."\textsuperscript{120} Each of the three lost ladies, Aunt Agatha, Mrs. Dalrymple, and Milly Burden, represents a once-popular style in American mores. But the theme of the "ruined" woman actually serves as the frame for the story of two marriages. Both of the "good and dutiful" wives, as well as the intellectual spinster, Louisa Goddard, and the neurotically religious and domineering mother, Mrs. Burden, are all quite fitting for the Glasgow portrait gallery, along with the three who "forgot themselves."

The other characters, at different stages of emancipation, show varied reactions toward the unchaste women of three generations. Personal and conventional attitudes in one person do not always agree, for sometimes heart overcomes prejudice. Aunt Agatha, seduced as a very young girl in the 1870's, had fallen like "a perfect lady." She courageously refused to reveal the name of her betrayer, but her ruin was generally attributed to Colonel Bletheram. Her profligate father, who could commit adultery more easily than he could speak of it before a lady, had nearly died of shame. The family, in an attempt to mitigate this disgrace, convinced themselves that Agatha was demented at the time. She, "condemned by the precepts of beautiful behaviour to her third-story back bedroom,"\textsuperscript{121} has mourned

\textsuperscript{120}Ellen Glasgow, \textit{A Certain Measure}, p. 224.

\textsuperscript{121}Ellen Glasgow, \textit{They Stooped to Folly} (New York, 1929), p. 6.
the loss of her virtue and remained there for forty years, except to flit down to family meals when no important guests are present, while the colonel has "lost three wives but never missed a Christmas cotillion."\(^{122}\) She always shrinks, with the gesture of a Magdalen, from the presence of chastity. It is only during the war that she has ventured out, and that is to make pajamas for the Red Cross. Now her only pleasures are sensational moving pictures and banana sundaes.

Because Aunt Agatha has repented and suffered as is suitable for a lady, her nephew Virginius is sympathetic enough to feel that the world has been hard on her. His wife, though conventional in disapproving, is charitable and expects the children to give her kindly attention each day. The young people themselves are benevolent. Nephew Marmaduke, unconventional himself, considers the persecution sanctimoniously cruel.

Mrs. Dalrymple, in the 1890's, was involved in a divorce scandal. She defied convention and went abroad to mend her ruined reputation. There she engaged in war work, in which "her renown for easy virtue had yielded . . . to a reputation for heroic exploits."\(^{123}\) Now she is back in Queensborough, a gay and attractive widow, but as a

\(^{122}\)Glasgow, They Stopped to Folly, p. 85.

\(^{123}\)Glasgow, They Stopped to Folly, p. 100.
"romantic ruin," she is not received in polite society. She is an over-ripe but voluptuous beauty resented by the "good" women because of her appearance and her gay laugh. Mrs. Burden hates her because she seems to have escaped the wages of sin and to have returned to flaunt her shame. Her sexuality still attracts the men, and she sees love as the only means of increasing her income. Yet she, who has had "more love than most women," can see nothing that it has done for her and thinks that "card sense" or even a comfortable religious faith would be worth more to her at this stage. At the very moment that she thinks, "All the same, if I had my life to live over again, I'd know better than to put my main dependence upon love," she realizes that "though she has finished with love, no wise and prudent woman . . . is ever entirely finished with lovers." Tarnished Amy Dalrymple is "a light and pretty woman whom a man might love for an hour and forget in the morning"; yet she has the power to move even Virginius Littlepage and make him forget he is middle-aged.

Milly Burden is the third of the "fallen" women. The infuriating thing about her to the other characters is that she is indifferent to inherited standards and refuses

---

124 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 102.
125 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 103.
126 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 292.
to be ruined. She has loved Martin Welding and borne his child, but shows no signs of repentance. She mourns the loss of her lover but not her virtue. To her mother's irritation, Milly refuses to acknowledge her ruin or to remain fallen.

Milly insists that her life is her own and that she has no regrets. When she tells Mr. Littlepage, "I want happiness, I have a right to be happy," he realizes how times have changed. Neither Aunt Agathanor even Amy Dalrymple had ever dared express a right to happiness. The clinging modesty of all the lost lovely Victorian ladies is gone. Milly is neither clinging nor soft; in fact, she says she wants to be hard, and, if she has given up happiness, there is still "pleasure in love." Kindly Mr. Littlepage looks at Milly and wonders whether "a woman can be noble without goodness or good without virtue." When his wife sees her, she thinks, "No really good woman could be so alive," and recalls her grandfather's observation that "Only hussies fall lightly enough to land on their feet." Miss Glasgow pictures Milly in an admirable light at the close, for she realizes the futility of her passion for Martin and rises above her desire for happiness.

---

127 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 113.
128 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 25.
129 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 235.
or mere pleasure, to want, not love but "something worth loving."\textsuperscript{130}

Marmaduke Littlepage sums up for Miss Glasgow the situation of the three who "stooped to folly." He assures Victoria Littlepage that Milly does not even suspect that in the eyes of the world she is a ruined woman:

"As far as she is concerned, the world might have been born amblyopic. Whether you realize it or not, being ruined is not a biological fact but a state of mind. It may sound paradoxical to any survivor of the nineteenth century, but Milly has proved to me that it is impossible to ruin a woman as long as she isn't aware of it. What really ruined poor Aunt Agatha--yes, and Mrs. Dalrymple, too--was not a fall from virtue but Victorian psychology. You--by that I mean public opinion in Queensborough and elsewhere--were inoculated with the Puritan virus."\textsuperscript{131}

Victoria is the thoroughly good but dull wife who develops no interests outside of her marriage and family. Her very goodness has been the cause of her husband's disenchantment with love and marriage, and ironically, she too is a victim of her good habits and her need to be "an influence." The "perfect" marriage actually is frustrating to both husband and wife, because she is busy trying to be an ideal and he must live up to it. Victoria, "endowed with every charm except the thrilling touch of human frailty,"\textsuperscript{132} has been married to Virginius Littlepage for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130}Glasgow, \textit{They Stooped to Folly}, p. 350.
\item \textsuperscript{131}Glasgow, \textit{They Stooped to Folly}, p. 212.
\item \textsuperscript{132}Glasgow, \textit{They Stooped to Folly}, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
thirty years. Her perfection has always discouraged pleasure, particularly the pleasures of love. Evidently lacking in passion, she is proud that it is proper for a "lady" to be passive. Over and over she tells herself how glad she is that Virginius does not have "that other side to his nature." She hardly admits to herself that she feels she has missed something in marriage and, in the early days, secretly regretted Virginius' lack of ardor. She is complacent in believing that she has made her husband happy. Though he has made himself proud of the "natural frigidity" of his ladylike wife, he too regrets having missed the ecstasy of love and feels drawn to "tarnished" but vital Amy Dalrymple.

Victoria considers "duty, not pleasure" the aim of living and tries always to be the "inspiring example" who reforms by inspiration alone. When Virginius tells her he owes whatever he is to her example, she recalls what his father told her on her wedding day and feels that she has lived up to expectations: "Thank God, Victoria, that my son is marrying a true woman; for pure womanhood is the only thing that stands between man and the jungle."\(^{133}\) In the months before her death, which comes at the right moment to save Virginius from actual as well as imaginary infidelity, Victoria shows the courage and fortitude that Miss

\(^{133}\)Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 81.
Glasgow admires. Yet Elizabeth Monroe sees irony in the fact that her death so softens her virtues that Virginius fits her with a halo and prepares "to perpetuate his attitude of fidelity beyond death." 134

Mary Victoria is a more determined "influence" and a less successful or admirable "good" wife than her mother. While doing war work in Europe, she looks up Martin Welding and sets out to rehabilitate him. In order to save him from the "ruined" Milly, she considers it her "duty" to marry him and use her "influence" on him. Aggressively self-righteous, she is, in her eagerness to reform the male, actually satisfying her own selfish ambitions. In her protectiveness she gets Martin a job, the kind she considers suitable, of course, and even decides what he may eat and drink as well as where they will live. Although Martin is ready to admit that she has been his "good angel," he finally feels so smothered and so crushed by trying to live up to her ideals that he runs away, not only from her but from all women. Mary Victoria quickly recovers from the blow to her egotism when she thinks of her "duty" to her still unborn child. She shows her old determination to use her "influence" by saying, "Even though I have lost love, I may still become a power for good in the life of my child." 135

135 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 350.
Mary Victoria, constantly trying to influence other people's lives, is actually in greatest need of help herself.

Mrs. Burden is one of Miss Glasgow's most unpleasant women. Like the other conventionally "good" wives, she is obsessed with "duty." A grimly religious Presbyterian, she is proud of her respectable way of life and her stern attention to duty. Therefore she simply cannot understand why she has not been able to influence her family properly. Her husband has deserted her in spite of her admonitions that it is his duty to love her. Now her daughter, Milly, has brought shame upon her and, what is worse, refuses to repent. She is so bitter over the disgrace that she has no compassion for Milly and resents sympathy for her by others. Mr. Littlepage's being willing to employ a "ruined" girl seems an affront to decency. She is completely unaware that in her unhappiness she has not wanted Milly to be happy and has by her strictness made the girl rebellious. So self-pitying and so lacking in sympathy is she that it is easy to see why Milly is determined to escape. If she does not have to live with her mother, the girl thinks she may be able to love her.

Miss Glasgow is most admiring and most sympathetic in her portrayal of the spinster Louisa Goddard. Capable and self-sufficient Louisa is friend and comforter to the Littlepage family. She is financially successful as a lecturer and manages her money well. She dresses better than
Victoria, on less money, and always makes an attractive appearance. She is the kind of woman of whom everyone says, "You ought to have married; you'd have made a good wife." Virginius so dislikes intellectual pretensions in a woman that he fails to understand how she has had various proposals through the years and refused them. Ironically he never sees that it is he whom she loves, and, in her comforting words of reassurance after Victoria's death, she helps fix in his mind such an idealized picture of the "perfect wife" that he will not turn to her even now. Though to Virginius she seems virginal and cold, she has considerable worldly wisdom and has few illusions about men and marriage. She has the same disenchanted view, says McDowell, as Amy Dalrymple, but has come to it through abstinence rather than satiety. Both however see the world as having changed for the better in rejecting the false morality of their generation.

Louisa, because she is a Southern woman of the past century, cannot run after a man even yet. Her heart has broken just as "the hearts of all perfect Southern ladies broke beneath the enamelled surface of beautiful behavior." She has the fortitude, the composure, and sense of humor that make it possible for her to remain cool

---

136 McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 183.
137 Glasgow, They Stooped to Folly, p. 331.
and composed as she watches with sympathy "the liberal manners of the new century."\textsuperscript{138}

Good women and bad, married and single, usually are disillusioned with sex and love. Only those like Louisa Goddard, and perhaps Milly Burden, who have the courage and fortitude to develop inner strength and to cultivate other interests, can work out satisfactory lives.

In \textit{Life and Gabriella} (1916) a woman at the turn of the century breaks away from Southern tradition by becoming a successful businesswoman in the North. A further indication of her break with the past is her marrying an Irishman, a vital self-made man who has no proud family background, rather than a gentle, cultured Southern lawyer, who is too ineffectual to cope with the advancing times.

Instead of being a beautiful and fragile blonde coquette, the heroine of \textit{Life and Gabriella} is a tall, dark, and slender girl with a frank intelligent face. In compensation for lack of beauty she has "a sunny temper." She is also unlike the pale languid heroine of tradition in being the incarnation of energy. Her family believe in "a sheltered life" for girls and women and think the less they know about the world the better. She can see advantages in being sheltered but decides that in her poverty she cannot afford it. Sick of being dependent, she insists, "I can

\textsuperscript{138}Glasgow, \textit{They Stooped to Folly}, p. 331.
always take care of myself, I can manage my life. . . .”

Since she is determined to support herself, the family suggest various kinds of "respectable work," ranging from making buttonholes to teaching school. They are keeping in mind that in Richmond it is even yet possible for a girl, if she comes of "good family," to do such things as plain sewing—for her relatives and at home, of course—and still reign as the belle of the ball. In spite of this family feeling, Gabriella goes outside her home to take a place in the millinery department of a store.

Shockingly independent though she has seemed, Gabriella is "womanliness" itself when George Fowler, from New York, proposes. "I want nothing but love," she says, not seeing, as Miss Glasgow ironically interpolates, "how ephemeral was its nature and its sweetness.”

She makes concessions to George and refrains from asking about stocks and bonds and incomes because a "mannish" woman is worse than poison to him, but her conscience, "the vein of iron under the bloom," can still be felt.

Gabriella starts happily off on her honeymoon, assuring herself that "nothing in the world matters when one has love in one's heart"; a month later she is dismayed to realize that "though they still made love they had ceased

---

139 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (Garden City, New York, 1916), p. 86.

140 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 98.
almost with relief to make conversation." She is concerned, too, because George's family make it clear that they expect a great deal from her "influence" on George. The marriage deteriorates and ends with George's desertion. Gabriella finds that love has not lasted and that dependence on emotion has served her no better than it did Virginia Pendleton. "Marriage . . . isn't made for love," she decides:

People had told her that love lasted forever, yet she knew that her emotion for George was so utterly dead that there was no warmth left in the ashes. It had all been so vivid once, and now it was as dull and colourless as the dust drifting after the blue and white hyacinths.

Unlike Virginia, Gabriella has intellectual capabilities and inner strength on which to draw. Back in Richmond she had said she could manage her life; now she proves she can do so. "Thanks to the vein of iron in her soul she would never--no, not if she died fighting--become one of the victims of life." She never loses her courage and optimism, and in ten years she rises from millinery

141 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 126.
142 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 239.
143 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 252.
144 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 242.
assistant to manager of Madame Dinard's. She remains a Southern lady, not only in manner but in heart also, and uses the best qualities of her genteel Southern heritage to develop a successful northern business. In much the same way her marriage to Ben O'Hara will unite the best of the aristocratic past and the democratic present. A conventional Southern girl never falls in love with a man first, but Gabriella at twenty admitted being in love with George though he had not yet proposed. Now at thirty-seven she rushes after O'Hara when she thinks she is losing him. Southern aristocracy must have the strength of a fresh new strain here just as in the case of Lila and Christopher Blake, who both marry outside their social circle.

Miss Glasgow has pictured in Gabriella a woman of courage and fortitude who refuses to accept defeat. She values the active virtues more highly than the passive ones, and McDowell calls her a "morally strenuous" woman, who discards successive illusions and substitutes an independently derived morality for the 'tradition,' 'the accepted opinions,' 'the dogmas and the ideals of the ages' which had been her inheritance."^{145} It is characteristic of her time perhaps that Gabriella never turns to religion for help with her problems. She depends upon her own courage and ability to escape defeat, for, as she says on more

^{145}McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 132.
than one occasion, "After all you can't become a victim, unless you give in." 146

Gabriella's sister, who was a fragile pink and white beauty as a girl, has already faded, and her thin aristocratic face droops sadly. "Poor Jane Gracey," as she is usually spoken of, has spent ten years trying futilely to "keep up an appearance" and conceal the fact that her marriage has not turned out well. In the beginning she tended toward "clinging sweetness," but now the sweetness has become "cloying" and the clinging has "tightened into a clutch." The more scandalous Charley's behavior, the more intense is Jane's sweetness, "the more twining her hold." 147 She is so "sweet" that her goodness has become unbearable to him. When Gabriella asks him why he can't be decent, he replies: "I could . . . if she were less so. It's her eternal virtue I can't stand, Gabriella. No man could stand it without taking to drink." 148 At Gabriella's comment that trying to make people better is Jane's mission, Charley agrees and says trying to reform him is the only thing she has really enjoyed about her marriage.

Everyone in town thinks that Jane has "behaved beautifully." She talks of the "sacredness" of marriage

146 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 242.
147 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 5.
148 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 48.
and of her determination to do her "duty." At each instance of Charley's infidelity, Jane rushes home to mother and they "send for Cousin Jimmy Wrenn" in order to have a man's advice. Then Jane always has a frightening heart attack. Next, of course, Charley has to appear so that she can be magnanimous and forgive him. It is on this ceremony of forgiving that Jane thrives. When he does eventually reform, she hardly has a purpose in life any longer: "For some incommunicable reason Jane's sweetness had become decidedly prickly. Charley's reformation had left her with the hurt and incredulous air of a missionary whose heathen have been converted under his eyes by a rival denomination. . . ." She really loves Charley for his vices and becomes, after his reform, "a martyr without martyrdom."

Mrs. Carr was in her day "the snow and roses sort." Now as a faded Southern belle, with pensive blue eyes and a look of anxious sweetness, she is a picture of feminine incompetence. She has been taught that passion is "an unholy attribute implanted by the Creator, with in-scrutable wisdom, in the nature of man, and left out of the nature of woman." While her husband was alive, she was

149 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 503.
150 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 76.
151 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 8.
in love with love rather than with him. Now that he has been safely dead for nearly twenty years and she no longer has to struggle against his "earthly nature," she clings to her "beautiful grief." She sits patiently waiting and sends for Cousin Jimmy Wrenn in every emergency. Mrs. Carr, described as "a weak person of excellent ancestry," is conscientious but so ineffectual that she can never finish anything she starts, and so dependent that she must always seek a man's advice. She is the kind of person who was "born to take two steps to every one that was necessary."

Because she was "brought up not to do anything," Mrs. Carr feels disgraced by Gabriella's "unladylike" occupation. She is even more distressed when the girl breaks her engagement, because "she belonged to a generation that regarded even a bad marriage as better for a woman than no marriage at all." This philosophy as well as her desperate need "to keep up appearances" makes her do all she can to help "poor" Jane's marriage from failing: "Oh, I couldn't bear a separation, not a legal one at any rate. . . . Of course she must come away for a time, but nobody must hear of it or it would kill me. They are one

152 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 3.
153 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 45.
154 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 58.
in the sight of God, and my dear old father had such a
horror of separations." In defense of Jane's husband,
she says that women, leading more "sheltered" lives than
men, are less subject to temptation. Also God meant women
to be lenient in judgment "when he gave us more spiritual
natures than those of men." Though she does not approve
of a husband's infidelities, she accepts the double standard
of sexual morality as inevitable. Mrs. Carr was "brought up
to believe that a divorced woman, even if she is in the
right, ought to live in a retired way and show that she
feels her position," and certainly no "pure" woman should
think of remarriage while her husband is living. Sadly
disillusioned, Mrs. Carr gradually becomes pessimistically
resigned to divorce and even to the suffrage movement,
although she once had said she would never knowingly bow
to a suffragette even if she were a relative.

Among other survivals from the South of tradition
are the Peterborough sisters, who take in sewing, not for
the money, they always say, but to have "something to do
with their hands." They too are spending their lives "in
a beautiful and futile pretence—the pretence of keeping
up an appearance." McDowell says of them somewhat sadly

---

155 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 23.
156 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 184.
157 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 221.
158 Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 13.
but ironically: "Amelia looks back upon youthful love with a jaundiced memory and Jemima looks back upon a loveless youth with a jaundiced regret." 159

Gabriella's mother-in-law, Mrs. Fowler, is a "Virginia lady" transplanted to New York. Her whole life is dedicated to striving, "not for realities but for appearances." For weeks she lives frugally in order to give a lavish dinner or party to pay off social obligations. She is proud of her furs and her modest but perfect strand of pearls but spends hours shopping for cheap underwear. "An appearance was what she strove for, and one's chemises and nightgowns, however exquisite in themselves, could not very well contribute to one's external appearance." 160

There is a difference here from Mrs. Carr, who keeps up an appearance also but keeps it up even to herself. Like Mrs. Carr, Mrs. Fowler accepts the fact that a husband is likely to be unfaithful; what she cannot accept is the idea that a wife can stop loving a husband. So far as she is concerned women do not change; they continue to love their husbands regardless of circumstances and behavior.

The shop girls in Richmond and in New York are usually favorably portrayed. The Southerners are almost always ladies of "good family" who are forced by poverty to find

---

159 McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 130.

employment. They are kind, gentle, and refined, working pleasantly together without jealousy. In the North the girls, through their personal worth, are also praiseworthy, even though they are often from the middle or even lower classes.

Miss Glasgow, in *A Certain Measure*, explains that *Barren Ground*, 1925, was to be a complete reversal of a classic situation:

For once, in Southern fiction, the betrayed woman would become the victor instead of the victim. In the end, she would triumph through that deep instinct for survival, which had ceased to be a negative quality and had strengthened into a dynamic force. She would be hardened by adversity, but hard things, as she said, are the last to decay. And she would never lose her inner fidelity, that vital affirmation of life, "I think, I feel, I am." The only thing that mattered was her triumph over circumstances.\(^\text{161}\)

The heroine, Dorinda Oakley, rises above her personal tragedy to rebuild her life and to make the barren ground of Old Farm yield. She substitutes hard work for love and pleasure, and if she does not achieve conventional happiness, she at least has the satisfaction of not being defeated by life.

Dorinda comes from "good people" rather than "good family," for she is from the "thinning stock" of pioneers. Her mother is Scotch-Irish Presbyterian and her father a taciturn "poor white" working the worn-out farm land in

\(^{161}\text{Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 160.}\)
quiet desperation. Although hardly pretty according to the standards of the nineties, Dorinda is a tall girl with glowing skin and clear burning blue eyes beneath black lashes. She, like most of the other heroines who break with Southern tradition, is large as well as dark-haired. She has also somewhat more education than is usual among the poor of the time. When she falls in love with Dr. Jason Greylock, she is blissfully happy. Yet she has a "haunting sense of impermanence" and cannot lose herself completely in emotion, for "something was left over, and this something watched as a spectator."\(^{162}\) She is not long in realizing "that only to a woman are love and happiness interchangeable terms."\(^{163}\)

Betrayed by Jason, she at first feels inescapably caught in the trap of life. Some women, she knows, can love even when they hate, but she is not like that. She knows that "the vein of iron in her nature would never bend, would never break, would never disintegrate in the furnace of emotion."\(^{164}\) Her Presbyterian heritage steels her against sentimentality, and without self-pity, she determines to meet life standing and with her eyes open. In her solitary anguish she goes to New York. Although she feels


"dried up at the core," especially after losing her unborn child, she is determined "to go on pretending I'm alive." Over and over she repeats: "I've finished with love . . . and until I find something else to fill my life, I shall be only an empty shell. . . ." When a young doctor is interested in her, she protests, "I've finished with all that sort of thing." At the inquiry about what she'll fill her life with, she thinks derisively of how little men know: "With something better than broomsedge. That's the first thing that puts out on barren soil, just broomsedge. Then that goes and pines come to stay--pines and life everlasting."

Dorinda returns to Pedlar's Mill undefeated but a realist who has learned to take things as they are. Gradually she neither loves nor hates Jason, but the thought of him lives on in some obscure part of her mind and disturbs her inner life. She endures this agony of memory but becomes hard. With the wild part of herself burned out, she is armoured now in reason. She takes over the management of the farm and, by unceasing hard work, succeeds where men have failed. She feels a glow of triumph when a neighbor from whom she buys cows looks at her as if she

165 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 222.
166 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 224.
167 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 233.
were a man. Pleased at growing hard and being delivered from the old torment of love, she thinks, "Oh, if the women who wanted love could only know the infinite relief of having love over!" 168

With the stipulation, "I couldn't stand any love-making," Dorinda enters into a marriage based upon respect and expediency as a refuge from loneliness. Telling herself that "you can't have everything," she considers herself happy but with a contentment rather than what she called happiness when she was young. She has always had a feeling of having missed something, but after seeing Jason's degeneration and finally his death, she comes to this realization: "What she mourned was not the love she had had and lost but the love she had never had." She has gained more than she has lost by working to reclaim the barren land because, as an old man once told her, "The land is the only thing that will stay by you." 169

The thing that has saved Dorinda from evil is not religion or philosophy but the vein of iron inside her, that "instinct older than herself, stronger than circumstance, deeper than the shifting surface of emotion; the instinct that had said, 'I will not be broken.'" 170

---

168 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 311.
169 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 509.
170 Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 459-460.
Through "endurance" and "fortitude" she can find, not happiness but "the serenity of mind which is above the conflict of frustrated desires."171 Dorinda exemplifies Miss Glasgow's theme that "one may learn to live, one may learn to live gallantly without delight."

Mrs. Oakley, of stern Presbyterian stock, had wanted to be a missionary. Frustrated in her plans, she still suffers occasionally from religious depression and has intense dreams of missionary endeavor in tropical lands. Dorinda finds her "morbid unselfishness" trying and her "martyrdom" unnecessary, but she works early and late, insisting always, "I like to have something to do with my hands."172 or "I don't know how to stop."173 The daughter thinks her mother has been conquered by marriage, but the older woman tells her that it is "a good thing as far as it goes." She adds, however, "Only it ain't ever going as far as most women try to make it. You'll be all right married, daughter, if you just make up your mind that whatever happens, you ain't going to let any man spoil your life."174 For her, unlike Dorinda, religion is a source of strength for bearing life: "There ain't but one thing keeps you

171Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 509.
172Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 48.
174Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 103-104.
going and keeps a farm going, and that is religion."\(^{175}\)

In spite of her long experience with masculine helplessness in her marriage to her ineffectual husband, Mrs. Oakley never loses her confidence in man as a strong prop in time of trouble. Her mother love, which makes of her younger son a moral failure, accepts as a sacrifice the results of the failure. She is a pious God-fearing Presbyterian; yet she perjures herself to save her son from punishment she knows he deserves. It is such a fearful price that nothing further makes any difference to her and dying becomes the happiest part of her life.

Just opposite to Dorinda is Geneva Ellgood, whom Dr. Greylock marries. She is a plain girl with beautiful flaxen hair and a sweet appealing smile. Always fragile, she ages early and breaks under the strain of her unhappy marriage and the hard country life. She lacks Dorinda's endurance and fortitude and is so defeated by life that, Ophelia-like, she drowns herself.

An illicit and conscience-stricken love affair, which develops along with the disturbed relations in a marriage, forms the center of *The Sheltered Life*, 1932. As always, Miss Glasgow shows the dangers of grooming girls for marriage to the extent that they are wrecked as human beings. Eva Birdsong has founded her life on the uncertain

fidelity of her husband. Although she has given up everything for his sake, she reluctantly realizes that he is not worth her devotion. Even so, she dedicates her life to keeping up the legend of herself as the beautiful belle of the nineties and the illusion of the perfect marriage.

"The code of beautiful behavior supported her as if it had been a cross," Miss Glasgow says in explanation of Eva's outward life. It prevents her admitting her knowledge of her husband's infidelities. Silently she suffers the agony of keeping up pretenses, and the strain upon her is reflected in the gradual decline of her health. At last she has an operation which she has long postponed because George cannot bear a "maimed woman." She smiles bravely, but General Archbald is aware that the smile is artificial.

"What she feared was not death, but life with its endless fatigue, its exacting pretense." To George her smile is a reminder of conscience. He regrets not having measured up: "If only she hadn't smiled all the time. I could bear it better if she would stop smiling. . . . I sometimes wish," George said desperately, "that she didn't believe in me. She expected too much. I always knew it was hopeless." He admits his unworthiness and blames himself


177Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 245.

for her unhappiness but says a man cannot become bigger
than he really is. "I know I'm not a big man, and when I
come up against anything that is too much for me, beauty,
goodness, unhappiness, I give way inside."\(^{179}\)

Jenny Blair Archbald admires the beautiful Eva, but
as she grows up in "the sheltered life," she follows her
instincts and falls in love with George. She attaches her­
self to Eva in order to be near him, and as Eva fades,
Jenny blossoms. At the very moment he becomes aware of the
young girl's attractiveness, he tells her, "I married an
angel."\(^{180}\) Weakly assenting rather than actively pursuing,
he becomes the victim of her infatuation and his vanity.
After the distraught wife sees her husband kiss Jenny, she
has an "accident" with a gun and he is killed. The two
families join forces after the "accident" in what Maxwell
Geismar calls "mutual falsehood and deception."\(^{181}\) General
Archbald says of Jenny Blair, "Remember how young she is,
and how innocent."\(^{182}\) Then comes her desperate cry, "Oh,
Grandfather, I didn't mean anything. . . . I didn't mean
anything in the world!"\(^{183}\)


\(^{180}\)Glasgow, *The Sheltered Life*, p. 65.


Alfred Kazin says that the characters in *The Sheltered Life* are an archetypal gallery of Ellen Glasgow's society. Eva Birdsong is a sacrificial victim to the ideals of her tradition. She is even more tragic than Virginia Pendleton because she has a finer perception of her situation. Her tragedy, according to Kazin, is this: "Intelligent enough to grasp the disastrous implications of her code, she was blindly committed to it." A celebrated belle in the nineties, Eva has become a legend. Romantic stories tell how her beauty delayed wedding processions and even a funeral.

Tall, slender, royal in carriage, hers was that perfect loveliness which made the hearts of old men flutter and miss a beat when she approached them. Everything about her was flowing, and everything flowed divinely. Her figure curved and melted and curved again in the queenly style of the period; her bronze hair rippled over a head so faultless that its proper setting was allegory; her eyes were so radiant in colour that they had been compared by a Victorian poet to bluebirds flying.

Now married to George Birdsong, "imperfectly faithful," she is still so radiant that nobody will ever know her regrets. "She is still," as Mrs. Archbald says, "after twelve years,

---


transfigured by joy—or pride."^{187} But if happiness has failed her she will live on her pride, "which wears better," because "keeping up an appearance" is second nature with Eva.^{188} Her very presence at her wisteria-mantled house makes everything seem fresh, dewy, and delightful, but the artificiality of her life is suggested by the fact that she seldom works in the tangled garden and that she prefers hot-house orchids and gardenias to other flowers.

In the past Eva was always the belle of the ball, and she still dreams happily of the times the dancers cleared the floor to watch her and George waltz. Now when her happiness is shattered by his disappearing into the garden with a younger girl, her friend tells her that giving way to tears does no good. "You gain nothing . . . by not saving your pride. . . . It is much wiser to pretend. . . . Even if you know, it is safer not to suspect anything."^{189} Although more charming and gracious, she resorts to the same tactics that "Poor Jane" Gracey uses. She has a "spell" which brings the contrite George to her side at once. There is "burning sweetness" and "pure radiance" in her eyes, her smile, and her flushed transfigured face, and she is able to say almost gaily, "Isn't my hair a sight?

---

^{188}Glasgow, *The Sheltered Life*, p. 25.
^{189}Glasgow, *The Sheltered Life*, p. 117.
Hadn't I better throw a scarf over my head?" The code of beautiful behavior supports her in her desire to keep up appearances; and "every chaste woman, according to the code . . . , is naturally jealous."

On the eve of her operation, Eva is concerned about George and his suffering over her. She carefully defends his past actions to General Archbald. As she recalls George's courage, the thing that attracted her to him, she suggests that it may be the only virtue with a lasting quality, because she sadly admits, "Everything else, even love, passes." The general, who considers her the last of the "queenly" women, realizes that he is looking on "a last gallant endeavor to defend an illusion."

Eva makes a special effort to be animated and spirited for George, no matter how great the strain. It is as a friend says: "He fell in love with her . . . because she was an ideal, and she has determined to remain his ideal to the end." She never realizes that this is hard on him too and that he would prefer her to be natural. Her young doctor cousin angrily remarks, "If she dies, it will be the

long pretense of her life that has killed her." The old general understands and agrees but knows, too, that it is only "part of the code."

Every woman ought to marry, Eva thinks. "If she does not, she is sure to miss happiness. . . . Not that marriage always brings happiness; but I do think that every woman ought to have the experiences of life." She knows the peril of having a reputation for beauty. "Even if you give up everything else for the sake of love as I did, you are still a slave to fear. Fear of losing love. Fear of losing the power that love won so easily. I think sometimes that nothing is so terrible for a woman," she tells Jenny Blair passionately, "as to be loved for her beauty." Revealingly she continues, "I staked all my happiness on a single chance. I gave up all the little joys for the sake of the one greatest joy. Never do that Jenny Blair."

It is, of course, this strain of living up to her reputation for beauty and the fear of losing love won by beauty that torture Eva in her debilitating illness. She is aware, too, late, of the danger of risking all her happiness on one thing. Her tragic mistake has been to depend

---

entirely on one emotion and fail to "keep something back for a rainy day." Kazin describes her as "the last and purest embodiment of ideal Southern womanhood, and her agony bespoke the ultimate agony of her tradition."[199

Jenny Blair Archbald is a tragic product of "the sheltered life," or the evasive moralism of the times, and also of her own wild nature. The general and her mother, in their attempt to shield her from suffering and evil, fail to let her have the experiences necessary to form moral perceptions. General Archbald tells her, "If your mother and I had our way, we would keep all knowledge of suffering out of your life. There is time enough to be sad. Time enough, Heaven knows, when one is old."[200 The girl is lovely in her way, "fresh, sparkling, dewy with innocence," but not queenly. Seeing her flitting along in a rose-coloured frock, he says to himself, "The poets are right. Nothing in life is so precious as innocence."[201

Somewhat rebellious even in childhood, Jenny early expresses her desire to be free: "All I want to do is live my own life."[202 She glories in the sheer joy of being

200Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 263.
alive and in her own happiness. She admires and almost adores Eva and does not want to hurt her. Yet she falls deeper and deeper in love with George and uses her friendship with his wife to get at him. He sees her hardness underneath the softness of her youth and beauty: "All that dewiness is just a film. You are like every other girl in the world. No matter what happens so long as it doesn't happen to you." 204

As Jenny becomes more corrupt, she becomes more beautiful and vital seeming. Since she truly pities Eva, there is an intense conflict of loyalties within her, but her protected life has given her no way of comprehending suffering and she selfishly gratifies her own desire. Basically she is a well-born young woman, reared "traditionally," and when she comes to face reality, she has no knowledge or training that will help her cope with it. Frederick McDowell's summation of Jenny Blair's situation is this: "A sheltered life may cause the innocent woman to expose herself to evil with no realization of what she is doing; it also prevents her from being exposed as an agent of evil, since all people around her unite to pretend that the unmentionable does not exist." 205 At the tragic outcome of

205McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction, p. 190.
Jenny's behavior, the situation has been exposed, and then by the embrace of the general and the girl there is the even deeper concealment to take place.

Aunt Etta Archbald is a disappointed spinster gentlewoman, blighted from birth by her plainness. She has a long, bleak face, which breaks out into wine-coloured splotches when she talks about men. Frequent headaches are a torture to her but also a means of escape from life. Extremely eager for masculine attention, she is infatuated with every new man who appears. The infatuations, however, always end in disappointment, and the habit of being disappointed in love, says Mrs. Archbald, is hard to break. Etta is jealous of all women who have had love and bitter because she can't have it. Her sister-in-law assures her that women who haven't had love overestimate its importance and that it is far more important for a woman to save her pride. Unfortunately Etta is alienated from everyone, even other women, by her neuroticism as well as by her lack of charm and beauty. She goes miserably along, quarreling with life and protected from it, says Alfred Kazin.\textsuperscript{206}

Isabella Archbald is the coquettish rebel against Southern chivalry. She went out in "a buggy drawn by a sober horse but driven by a spirited young man," and both

\textsuperscript{206}Kazin, \textit{On Native Grounds}, p. 263.
"apparently lived up to their characters." They are left to avenge themselves on the piano for her broken engagement. Mrs. Archbald, concerned because Isabella's fiancé accepted her offer to release him, says, "If I'd dreamed he could behave that way, I should have advised her just to go to bed and stay there until the scandal blew over." Isabella spends considerable time with the carpenter, Joseph Crocker, but the family dismiss him with the comment, "Why, he wears overalls." Three days after the renewal of her engagement, she elopes with Joseph. The Crockers are Baptist, but since Joseph himself is not very devout, that is, Miss Glasgow remarks, "a step at least in the right direction of the Episcopal Church." Now Isabella is a handsome, robust, warm-hearted, happily married woman. Once unconventional, she is now only "nimble in mind and vivacious in conversation, a little too wide for the sheath skirt which was just going out, and not quite broad enough for the modern ideas which were just coming in." Isabella's marriage, like others already discussed, symbolizes the end of a tradition. The general, recalling that the

207 Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, pp. 16-17.
208 Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 15.
210 Glasgow, The Sheltered Life, p. 103.
Archbalds have lived down worse disgraces than overalls, decides that "new blood, new passions, and new social taboos were the only salvation of a dying social order."\textsuperscript{212} 

The general's daughter-in-law is another woman bound by tradition. She has a gift for managing people. Earnest but unscrupulous benevolence influences her every act, for she is generous and good but speaks the truth only on rare occasions when truth is more pleasant than fiction. The general admires her but sees her as she is: "Even the sanguine brightness of her smile, which seemed to him as transparent as glass, was the mirror . . . of persevering hypocrisy. A living triumph of self-discipline, of inward praise, of the confirmed habit of not wanting to be herself, she had found her reward in that quiet command over circumstances."\textsuperscript{213} 

Mrs. Archbald devotes herself to providing a sheltered life for Jenny Blair and such a comfortable one for General Archbald that he can have no great need to re-marry. After Isabella's marriage she finds the Crockers "quiet" rather than "plain" and Joseph so lacking in religious fervor that he can shift easily into the Episcopal Church. The next step is to find that he is descended from royalty. Her dissembling, because of her kindness, becomes a servant.

\textsuperscript{212}Glasgow, \textit{The Sheltered Life}, p. 102. 
\textsuperscript{213}Glasgow, \textit{The Sheltered Life}, p. 243.
of goodness. General Archbald can hardly condemn her for conferring innocent pleasure and relieving painful embar­rassment. "Even when she had stood between him and happi­ness, he had never doubted that she was ruining his old age from the noblest motives."214

Early in her career Ellen Glasgow determined to avoid the romantic delusion that the South was inhabited only by aristocrats and Negroes.215 In Vein of Iron, 1935, she depicts three generations among the descendants of Scotch-Irish settlers in the Appalachians, the kind of people her father came from. Through Ada Fincastle, her father, and her grandmother, she celebrates "that unbreakable courage and self-respect, that pitiless and unswerving judgment upon one's self and upon others"216 that came into Virginia from the Presbyterian pioneers. The force of tradition is exemplified in Grandmother Fincastle and Aunt Meggie and the break comes in Ada and her lover, Ralph. Miss Glasgow says she wished "to test the resistance of this vein of iron to outward pressure, and to measure the exact degree of its strength."217

Because Ralph drinks at a dance, Ada refuses to

---

216Quinn, American Fiction, p. 679.
associate with him despite the strong physical attraction he has for her. An indirect result of this incident is that Janet Rowan manages to get him into a "compromising" position and force him to marry her. Ada, like Dorinda Oakley, develops the fortitude to endure disappointment in love but continues to care for Ralph. When he separates from his wife, she goes away with him for a few days despite her Calvinistic conscience. She tells herself she is supremely happy, but she can never surrender completely to emotion. "If only thought would stop and she could become all emotion!" When she finds that she is to bear a child, Ada is sorry to hurt her family but is not repentant. Like Molly Burden, in *They Stooped to Folly*, she refuses to tell the father and cannot feel that she is "ruined." She seems more than usually justified in her "right" to love outside marriage and she accepts the consequences bravely. But her tragedy is learning that a person cannot suffer anything alone, not even disgrace. To Grandmother the sin is carnal and there is no hope except in repentance, "in a broken and contrite heart," and Ada suffers because the old lady does. Stern and unrelenting though the grandmother seems, when the time comes to help, she, with "a bosom as stout as oak, as sustaining as fortitude," is at Ada's side:

\[\text{Glasgow, *Vein of Iron*, p. 245.}\]
"Hold tight to me, Ada," she said, "Hold tight as you can. I won't let you go." Ada goes through the rest of her life feeling that she is responsible for her grandmother's death, which takes place soon afterward.

Ada shows her indomitable courage by enduring hardships and struggling to help support her family during the years of the war and the depression following, but unlike Dorinda, in Barren Ground, she does not become cold and hard. However, when she eventually marries Ralph, the ecstasy seems to have gone from their relationship. Reality disappoints, but the vein of iron remains to help her endure the misery of family illnesses, unemployment, poverty, and a philandering husband. Upon her return to Ironside, the town of her forefathers, Ada can feel the past generations "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."  

The "break with tradition" which Ellen Glasgow announced in her first novel was not completely accomplished until the final period of her work a quarter of a century or more later. The image of the Southern lady, who represented the purest aspirations and most restricted values of

---

221 Glasgow, Vein of Iron, p. 461.
her society, became, Maxwell Geismar says, "quite as much of a cultural as a psychological symbol of repression and censorship." Arthur H. Quinn reminds us that although no one has pictured more relentlessly "the feminine tyranny which seems in her novels to make even infidelity excusable," no one has, on the other hand, surpassed her in "the portraits of women whose life has been a generous daily sacrifice, often to the weakness of man." 

Miss Glasgow's women characters live under a code of manners and usually do not act except in conformity with other people's ideals or this inherited code. If they fail to conform, they rebel, but either way they are motivated by sensibility rather than by thought. The author has only contempt for "helpless females" who get what they want by using their femininity. She thoroughly disapproves of the education of her day, which was designed to paralyze a woman's reasoning faculties and make her, inevitably, the passive and helpless victim of the ideal of feminine self-sacrifice.

Nearly always it is the dainty blonde beauties who are overcome by life and the tall dark girls who have the courage and endurance to withstand defeat. However, Miss Glasgow, perhaps unconsciously, retains even in her

\[^{222}\text{Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors, p. 281.}\]
\[^{223}\text{Quinn, American Fiction, p. 681.}\]
descriptions of the independent modern woman some of the adjectives of tradition, such as **noble**, **queenly**, **patrician**, **majestic**, and **aristocratic**. Since, under the old order, no girl of "good family" prepared for or was expected to secure employment outside the home, marriage was the only way of life to look forward to. Then, after marriage, "holding the family together" became imperative. In order to save her pride, perhaps the only thing left, a woman bent every effort toward "keeping up appearances," with no hint of scandal or divorce.

It is neither love nor religious strength upon which a woman must depend but upon fortitude, that "vein of iron" which Ellen Glasgow shows in her most admirable women. A husband considers it desirable, but by no means necessary, for his wife to have religious faith. Although most of her women come from "good family," some of Miss Glasgow's favorite heroines are from "good people." In several instances, members of "good family" choose husbands or wives from "good people," thus getting the vitality that the gentility must have in order to continue their existence in a democratic society.

Miss Glasgow has little to say about political rights of women but much about their right to live their own lives with a certain individuality and fullness, of the necessity to find expression for their inmost souls outside the relation of sex or marriage, of their ability to profit by the
advance of modern life and thought. In fact, the theme running through all of the Glasgow novels is that women, in order to be successful as women, need something besides love and marriage to live by. By cultivating their inner resources, by finding self-realization, women, either married or single, may achieve useful and worthwhile existences. They may find useful and inspiring careers in agriculture, in business, in art, as well as in intelligent marriages. There is, however, no great hope of real happiness. But for most of Miss Glasgow's women, if happiness perishes, honor remains, and the power to endure as well as the intelligence to adjust to living undefeated lives even under the most unfavorable circumstances.

A glance back over the heroines and even the minor women characters in Ellen Glasgow's novels will confirm a statement made by James Branch Cabell, in "Two Sides of the Shielded":

You will note that almost always, after finishing any book by Ellen Glasgow, what remains in memory is the depiction of one or another woman whose life was controlled and trammeled and distorted, if not actually wrecked, by the amenities and the higher ideals of Southern civilization. The odd part of this is that it so often seems a result unplanned by the author, and more often than not, a result which by no system of logic could result from the formal "story" of the book. It is merely that, from the first, Ellen Glasgow has depicted women, and in some sort all women, as the predestined victim of male chivalry.224

224 Cabell, "Two Sides of the Shielded," p. 52.
CHAPTER IV

FICTION OF THE SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

Since World War I the South has gone through a period of rapid and dramatic changes. Sociologists, economists, and historians have all been concerned with analyzing and prescribing solutions for the problems arising from these changes in the social structure. One part of the general ferment is the increased literary activity. By the 1930's the South had produced such a distinguished body of fiction, poetry, and criticism that the modern period in Southern letters began to be called the Southern revival or even the Southern Literary Renaissance.

This literary flowering has to a considerable extent sprung from a group of regional writers, who consider themselves to be attached to the tradition of the Old South. They favor preserving the best of an agrarian culture which is being rapidly overcome by Northern industrialism. They are not sympathetic with the Southern element which is apologetic for Southern conservatism and eager for progress in a capitalistic society. Among the leaders of the modern agrarian movement have been the writers associated with the Nashville Fugitives, whose essays in I'll Take My Stand
(1930), gave their theme, the wish to preserve the best in Southern tradition. In this book the ugliness and destructiveness of "progress" and the victimization of people by a grasping capitalistic society is contrasted with the nobility and beauty of the agrarian system. There are critics of Southern traditionalism, like Percy Boynton, for example, who see it in terms of a garden where weeds spring up beneath the beautiful blossoming azaleas, camellias, and wisterias, but most of them agree that, regardless of their theses, the novels and short stories of the agrarian writers are of high artistic quality.

Recently, with the decline of the Agrarians, there has arisen the question of whether the Southern Literary Renaissance is over. A few of the early group are still producing, but some are dead and others have ceased or almost ceased to write. New names are appearing in Southern fiction, especially during the past ten or fifteen years. Among the leading younger writers there is more variety of style and subject matter than in the older group. Perhaps the greatest change is that they are less concerned with Southern regionalism, particularly with the South in its historical perspective. In the view of Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs, their work is not "Southern" in "a strong identification with a place, a participation in

---

1Percy H. Boynton, Literature and American Life (Boston, 1936), pp. 870-871.
its life, a sense of involvement in a fixed, defined society. Just as the South has changed and lost its old closely knit rural character so have the younger novelists lost their sense of involvement in a small community. Settings are often urban. With the "fixed center" gone, writers are looking for something to take its place; for many it is found in a strong and abiding religious faith in a rapidly changing world. They remain Southern in their attitude toward language, their emphasis on peculiarities and even grotesque qualities in their characters. A school of Southern Gothic writers depending upon violence and abnormal characters, physically deformed and emotionally warped, has succeeded the earlier writers of the Renaissance. The use of the grotesque has symbolic value, most particularly perhaps in works with strong religious intent.

The South, Alan Wykes notes, "with its immense potentiality as a symbol of world unrest," is being used by numerous writers. Because they lack William Faulkner's power, they work within narrower limits. Wykes mentions Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and Eudora Welty as worthy examples among the women. The Porter stories show "an intense awareness of the 'desolation of the spirit,"

---

the chill and the knowledge of death"; Carson McCullers is a specialist in studies of solitude with her characters concerned "knowingly or unknowingly with the pursuit of something too complex to be called simply unhappiness"; while Eudora Welty too specializes in "lonely and humble people whom she invests with an immense human dignity."^3

Women have, as we have already seen, long outnumbered men as readers of fiction; they continue to rival them in its production, perhaps even to outstrip them. Ford Madox Ford sees in Caroline Gordon's novel Penhally an explanation of why Southern men capable of writing have often not produced anything. Llewellyn, a Virginia aristocrat, moves to Kentucky and builds Penhally. Then he simply sits down, drinks mint juleps, and reads Virgil until he puts upon his estate the entail that is to bring its downfall. The perfection of the classics, partaken of in an air of material suavity, the author explains, makes all intellectual effort seem not only useless but contemptible. Ford considers Llewellyn the epitome of the civilization of the Old South. It has enervated men of literary ability. Consequently many of the South's most prominent writers of the imagination are women.^4

Perhaps J. Donald Adams overestimated when he said,

---


^4Ford Madox Ford, "A Stage in American Literature," Bookman, LXXIV (December 1931), 375.
in 1951, that they are now writing half of the fiction produced in the United States, but among Southern writers since World War I, a substantial number of women have won or are winning critical acclaim. In addition to Ellen Glasgow, who lived and wrote on into the period, there are numerous others who are also writing about Southerners and the South. Among the best known among the older ones are Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Caroline Gordon, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Lillian Hellman, Harriette Arnow, Anne Winslow, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Carson McCullers, some of whom are still writing. Elizabeth Spencer, Flannery O'Connor, and Shirley Ann Grau are among the recent additions.

As representatives of modern women writers we shall consider five, beginning with two who began publishing in the 1920's and coming on down to one who is only now winning recognition. The two earliest are both Kentuckians, Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Caroline Gordon, whose heroines have a feeling for the land and often are farm girls. Katherine Anne Porter, though not a native of that state, is also descended from Kentucky planters. She entered the literary world in the 1930's and is still writing, though now with a cosmopolitan instead of a Southern background. From Mississippi comes Eudora Welty, who can serve as a

---

kind of bridge between the early and late writers. Since her first collection in the early 1940's, she has continued with short stories and short novels, nearly all set in the South but departing in many instances from the traditional Southern characters and settings for the grotesque popular among the younger writers and best illustrated perhaps in Flannery O'Connor. Illustrative of those just beginning to attract critical recognition is Shirley Ann Grau, a young woman from Louisiana. Her Southern women are tragic if they attempt to follow an outmoded Southern code but even more tragic when they reject it and have nothing with which to replace it.

One of the first important women writers related to the agrarian movement of the Southern Renaissance is Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Though she was born in 1881, she did not publish her first fiction until 1926. She was born in the Blue Grass region into a stable, established, agrarian family with strong Southern sympathies. In 1900 she entered the University of Kentucky, but because of financial problems or ill health, perhaps both, she did not remain. For the next sixteen years, when her health permitted, she taught school and worked at writing poetry. In 1917, when she was thirty-six, Miss Roberts entered the freshman class at the University of Chicago. There she studied under
Robert Morss Lovett and Edith Rickerts, among others. She was associated with a group of talented student-writers, among whom were Glenway Westcott, Yvor Winters, Janet Lewis, Maurice Leseman, Monroe Wheeler, and Vincent Sheean. She seems to have been admitted, occasionally at least, to Harriet Monroe’s salon, the center of the Chicago literary world at the time. Elizabeth, or Elspeth as she often signed her name, was at one time in love with Maurice Leseman, but because he was Jewish, the romance came to nothing. Judging from their correspondence and the impressions among her friends, her friendship with Glenway Westcott later ripened into a romantic attachment.

After completing her degree, Miss Roberts returned to Springfield, Kentucky, to settle down to her writing. Although her first novel was not published until she was forty-five and she continued to be plagued by ill health, she wrote three volumes of poetry, two collections of short stories, and seven novels before her death in 1941. She felt that she herself had over and over known tragedy, isolation, and estrangement followed by re-creation from within. From her personal experience then comes what Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster consider the major motif of all her novels—"the psychic death and rebirth of all her heroines."6

The novels are set in the Pigeon River country of Kentucky, where there are no cities but only small towns and farms, and life centers around Anneville, which is Springfield in real life. In such agrarian settings, the heroines live and work close to the earth. They spend their lives in lonely farmhouses, sometimes in a small tenant cabin but sometimes in a spacious home of the landed gentry.

Miss Roberts' first novel, *The Time of Man* (1926), follows Ellen Chesser from childhood to middle age, showing her as she comes to know all life, with its constant change and the spirit behind it all. She enters the story as a young girl traveling along the road with her itinerant farmer family. Poor, uncultured, even infested with lice, Ellen is a representative of the Southern "poor-white" tenant farmer, but she gradually develops into a woman strong enough to endure all kinds of adversities. She is a tall, thin girl with clear brown eyes, smooth freckled cheeks, and a dimpled smile, and, though never really beautiful, being in love gives her an inward feeling of loveliness that delights her.

After being jilted by one man, she falls in love with Jasper Kent. The night before their marriage Ellen spends with him in the pastureland. Miss Roberts describes this experience with sympathy and without condemnation, with no suggestion that Ellen is a fallen woman. In marriage there is continued moving from farm to farm, with
family increases almost yearly. Ellen endures the hard life and the cruelty and even unfaithfulness of her husband. She waits patiently and finally gets him back, for as she tells him, "God knows, you're simple, Jasper Kent. And you yourself are wedded deep. Not even Hester Shuck could unwed you." Even in her times of trouble she never comes to agree with her disillusioned friends, who decide that "a good provider" is the only thing one should look for in a husband. One wife puts it this way: "Beyond that under their shirts they're all just alike. In the dark, you couldn't know one from the next."

When Jasper is falsely accused of barn burning, the family start out once more to find another farm and another place to live. Ellen leaves the story much as she entered it, drifting along the road looking for something better. She has, however, been able to bring harmony into her life through spiritual discipline and becomes the source of order for her family amid all their troubles. Life has not offered her the things she dreamed of and hoped for, but she transforms her hardships into strength and love.

My Heart and My Flesh (1927) has a heroine who is almost the reverse of Ellen Chesser, in The Time of Man.

---

Theodosia Bell, born into a prominent well-to-do "good family," loses everything except life itself. She is described as a strong but delicately modeled girl with reddish-brown hair. She is quick in mind and in body and her small thin fingers, flitting swiftly among the fiddle strings, seem weighted with music.

Quite early her losses begin and come in quick succession. Her sister and her mother die, but she still has her grandfather, who believes ardently in her musical talent and wishes to give her violin lessons from the best available teachers. He, however, is overtaken by debt and goes into a decline so that she must care for him instead. Never close to her father, she is further disillusioned and embittered by learning that he is the father of three mulatto children. Complete alienation from him results from his attempt to seduce her.

Still other things are stripped from Theodosia to take her farther and farther from her world. Her best friend, Catherine, moves away and she has no one to talk with. A suitor, Albert Stiles, who has promised to marry her whether she is willing or not, suddenly deserts her for another woman. Perhaps even more importantly, she learns that her slender hand is not broad enough for great violin performance, and she loses the comfort of music and her hope of becoming a violinist. She expresses her disappointment this way: "Small talents should not be allowed. Small
talents are treason. They shouldn't be."\(^9\)

Another sweetheart dies in the burning of his house. Theodosia's temporary security in her grief for him is shattered by learning that a young woman of the town is to bear his child. Next comes the death of her beloved grandfather, leaving her with no one to love and to believe in her. At this time her father departs so that she is completely alone in the great old house piled up with debts. So frantic is she and so in need of something to fill the emptiness of her life that she even seeks companionship with her mulatto kin. She fails completely and becomes seriously ill. She reaches the lowest possible state when, in her poverty and illness, she is forced to find refuge with her Aunt Doe. With this mad old woman and her household of dogs, Theodosia almost starves to death and suffers even worse illness. She is deserted by all her former acquaintances except one suitor. He eventually seduces her. She has hallucinations during which she thinks she is guilty of all kinds of crimes and feels unworthy of life. Pushed to the very end of her physical and spiritual endurance, she can only say: "Oh, God, I believe, and there's nothing to believe."\(^10\) She contemplates and prepares for suicide, all that is left.

Then comes a vision of "Tomorrow" to draw her back


\(^{10}\)Roberts, *My Heart and My Flesh*, p. 247.
to life. She escapes from the mad aunt, gradually regains her health, and makes a new life. When the farmer Caleb Burns wants to marry her, she recognizes his goodness and integrity underneath his rough exterior and accepts him. It is as if she has come from death back into life. The Bell family, which has degenerated, needs the new bloodline to bring new life to it too. The farmer will furnish the strength and vitality which the Bells have lost.

In interpreting Theodosia's experiences as a search for a soul, culminating in her spiritual rebirth as evidence that the soul exists and has been found, Campbell and Foster say: "Theodosia, a Job-like figure, searching for evidence of the soul, divided in her sensibility, withdraws from life, undergoes an arid death of the spirit, then returns to the world, spiritually reborn, knowing that the spirit recreates itself over and over from within." 11

Philly Blair, the central character in the greater part of A Buried Treasure (1931), is a middle-aged woman, who is tough and vital, yet extremely sensitive. Like earlier Roberts heroines, Philly, whose name is derived from Philadelphia, with its meaning of brotherly love, looks deeply into herself to see what values she has as well as what she lacks. She and her husband, Andy, find a pot of gold and two pearls on their farm. At first they are eager

11 Campbell and Foster, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, p. 160.
to share the news of their treasure with the entire community, but fear of thieves makes them change and withdraw unto themselves.

Philly, who has a strong maternal feeling, somewhat bitterly compares herself with her sister, the mother of six. The value of the buried treasure is enhanced for her by her thoughts of what she can do for Imogene, a cousin's daughter. Seeing in Imogene the daughter she does not have, she wants to make it possible for the girl to marry, to have the pleasure of a lover, and to bear children. When Andy takes the pearls from the treasure pot and secretes them, she is glad for him to have them for his own; yet when she searches for a key for him, she also hunts for the pearls. Her search leads her to identify Andy's holding back of the pearls with her not having borne any children:

She was weary and warm from the search, having been up and down stairs and ladders, bending and searching and feeling, and she thought here of Andy as having been too stingy to give her any children, as having held back a part of what he should have given her, as taking what he wanted and holding back some little final thing.12

Then when she finds the little bag containing the jewels tied around his body, she thinks of them as being his compensation for what he thinks is lacking in himself. Later

---

he lends them to a widow well known for being able to "get the best that any man had."\footnote{Roberts, \textit{A Buried Treasure}, p. 242.} Philly thinks that if he had given them to some young girl or even a pretty town wanton she would not have cared; she would even have felt some pride in his doing "what a man naturally does."\footnote{Roberts, \textit{A Buried Treasure}, p. 243.} It is only Hester of whom she is jealous because of her pride in "being able to get from any man all that he had."\footnote{Roberts, \textit{A Buried Treasure}, p. 243.}

To Philly the real significance of the treasure is that it is something in which she and Andy share; it is like the love that they built up together. In thinking of the disappearance of the pearls, she realizes what their ownership in common means:

\begin{quote}
It was a knowledge of herself as being lovely both without and within, as having inside herself a warm flow of blood and of little tremors of delight. Delight was beautiful and she had a fine measure of it inside herself somewhere and everywhere. Andy was near her to make her know how lovely she was. He wanted her in his house. He had but little to say; there was not much to tell. It was something they had all kept together, it was in all equally.\footnote{Roberts, \textit{A Buried Treasure}, pp. 260-261.}
\end{quote}

Without the sharing, the treasure is of no value to the woman. Even if Andy takes no more than his legal share, she can see no pleasure in what is left for her alone: "She
saw life spread before her in desolation, the farm empty of life, sunk under the hard, sterile rock of the earth."17 The loveliness and delight she feels within her depend upon love and upon the sharing with Andy. When she thinks she has lost these things, she feels "ugly and old and withered and done for,"18 but the pearls are returned and the kettle of coins is safe so that Philly can draw upon them for loveliness, delight, and pride of life. The buried treasure is more than just the money, of course; through it the Blairs learn how to enjoy fellowship with other people, as at the party they give to announce their find. Philly wishes she had been giving parties all along because she sees her guests as people "making sufficient happiness for one another."19 When they decide to spend their treasure but also to share with the church, the Blairs lose their fear of thieves and become happily associated with community life once more.

Miss Roberts' last book is Black Is My Truelove's Hair, 1938. Again there is the pattern of death and rebirth into life, through the heroine's two love affairs, one unsuccessful and the other successful. The story begins with the return of Dena Janes from a disillusioning

18 Roberts, A Buried Treasure, p. 265.
elope with Bill Langtry. She is, after a six-day epi-
isode, a "ruined woman." Not only has Langtry refused to
marry Dena, but also he has come to represent both physical
and spiritual death to her. He has threatened to kill her
if she loves another man.

Very painfully Dena sets out to rebuild her life.
Gradually she wins her own respect and that of the community.
She is determined to lead a sensible life, but she is not
like the Ellen Glasgow heroines, who can, and usually do,
immediately stop loving the men who betray them. Dena hates
Langtry but still loves the man she first thought he was.
When her love finally dies, fear remains. Mr. Journeyman,
in whose orchard she carried on her courtship, sees her
misstep, not as sin but as over-abundance of love. Just as
the boughs of his fruit trees break from their over-abundant
yield, she has a nature too rich in emotion: "She hath ... loved too much is all is the matter."²⁰ It is Journeyman
who prescribes for her cure. Physical welfare comes through
work and good rich food, and gradually her spiritual re-
birth through prayer, the changing seasons, the soothing
passage of time, and her bathing in the sun. She does not
become beautiful, but is a tall thin girl whom Journeyman
describes as having a neat chin and "the right kind of a
mouth for a woman to have." He says, "Flexible, but not that

²⁰Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Black Is My Truelove's
wicked, selfish too-flexible mouth a spoiled beauty always has. Beauty enough though. But not so much, neither. There are flaws. You expect a dimple where no dimple is."  

Dena walks a "straight and narrow" path and works hard on her sister's farm while waiting to be re-admitted into the life of the community. At first the young people ignore her or relegate her to the older married set, and some even deliberately remind her that she is outside the pale. Men in the community spy on her as she lies naked in the sun and talk among themselves about her. Her sister's hired man makes advances to her because he thinks her tarnished reputation gives him privileges he would not have aspired to in ordinary circumstances.  

After a year, Cam Elliot, described as being "drunk" with life, falls in love with Dena and wishes to marry her. Before the wedding Dena re-examines her disastrous love affair and comes face to face with her first lover, who tries to shoot her. Langtry, representing death to Dena, then wishes to shake hands at parting, but she refuses, saying, "No, I will not do so. I will not take his hand. Maybe a long while from now, if he comes, I will shake his hand and speak to him so."  

By overcoming her love and her fear, she is ready for a new life and for marriage.

---

She knows she will always have to follow a "narrow" path:

She went evenly forward, up the small rise and around the faint curve where the way gave slightly toward the right but veered back and rejected the curve thenceforth, as if none had been. The lane closed about the sound of her feet and muffled this to one step and a step, that went as a solitary tread along the narrow roadway.23

Through her stoicism and fortitude Dena rises above disaster and ruin. She wins back her integrity and sees a good life and even happiness ahead on the small Kentucky farm.

Mark Van Doren finds all the Roberts heroines similar in their lack of directness of attack in their encounters with men. Ellen Chesser, Theodosia Bell, and Philly Blair, for example, all merely stand back and watch when other, more worldly women catch or attempt to catch their husbands and lovers. They flatter their rivals by thinking they have superior powers. They themselves take no action but only wait and hope that their men will return. Hoping sometimes brings them back; sometimes it does not. The women simply accept the results of chance without attempting to understand or to change the outcome.24

Since the greatest activity of the human spirit is love, Miss Roberts has her heroines find their most gratifying experiences in marriage and family life based on love.


Their strong maternal feelings cause them to welcome each new baby, even when life is hard and poverty-stricken, and to give love and tender care along with discipline. They live simple lives with their happiness coming from within rather than from the externals of life, no matter whether they are plain and unpretentious or elaborate and complex. This happiness is based on their spiritual faith. Because they rely upon the power of the spirit to overcome the evils of civilization, they find regeneration and satisfaction in the agrarian life of the Kentucky mountain region. The girls are pretty and sweet rather than beautiful. In the world of made-over, thrice-turned dresses in which most of them live, a blue or pink ribbon to wear at their throat or in their hair and a new flower-sprigged cotton dress give them great pleasure. Patiently enduring trials and hardships, they quickly grow old and soon lose the prettiness of their youth, but they develop an inner strength and fortitude that enables them to accept their fate and to be content even if not wildly happy. Life does not defeat them; it does not even make them bitter.

II

Another contemporary Kentucky writer is Caroline Gordon, who is descended from Virginia and Kentucky tobacco planters. In 1924 she married the poet and critic, Allen Tate, one of the leaders in the Agrarian group. It is in
the region surrounding her farm in Clarksville, Tennessee, and in similar areas in Kentucky that most of her stories and novels are set. Nearly all of her writing is concerned with the past of the South, symbolized by "the forest" of her title for her collection of short stories, The Forest of the South. Besides short stories, Miss Gordon has written several novels, among the best known being Penhally; Aleck Maury, Sportsman; None Shall Look Back; The Garden of Adonis; The Women on the Porch; and The Strange Children.

Miss Gordon's subject matter, essentially uncomplicated, is treated in grave simplicity of style. In writing about the relationships of men and women, she indicates that ideally a woman should commit herself to a man completely and unquestioningly and that he should never betray her faith. Her theme, as stated by Andrew Lytle, is "what Life, the sly deceiver, does to womankind but particularly to the woman of great passion and sensibility." Men also have sorrows and disappointments but Life, represented in the hierarchy of institutional and organized society, has a masculine determination. Seldom are the male characters able to measure up to the requirements of what the heroine thinks a man should be, and the few who achieve any measure of greatness have principles similar to and nearly equal to those of the heroines. In the Gordon novels woman is the

true antagonist, with manhood shown at its best in the tensions between the sexes. Against a background of the disruption of Southern history Miss Gordon tells of the sweet joys of love but shows that they are likely to end in bitter suffering.

The title story of The Forest of the South shows the conquest of the South as the destruction of a formal Christian society where there had been the right relationships between the sexes. Lieutenant Munford, quartered in a Southern manor, is concerned about the crazed mistress and her strange daughter, who stay on in the overseer's room. The pale-faced girl, always dressed in black, attracts his attention when he sees "slim ankles swinging out from under a ragged petticoat and the thought had come to him that she might be a lady." Eugénie Mazereau, strange and overly-grateful to the enemy, seems the most attractive woman he has ever seen:

Her eyes—unusually large, luminous eyes—were the color of chestnuts that used to fall from the great tree in his grandfather's yard. The lids were heavy, so heavy that they dimmed the brilliance of her glance. And the lids themselves had a peculiar pallor. Wax-white, like the petals of the magnolia blossom. When he had first come into this country he had gathered one of those creamy blossoms only to see it turn brown in his grasp.27


The suggestion is the magnolias are not the symbol of sweetness and purity, but the metaphoric foreshadowing of the conqueror's defeat by his falling in love with what he has destroyed. He has mistaken the response of madness in Eugénie for love. In the end his betrothed turns brown in his grasp, and the stain spreads to his own hands as well. Eugénie's madness is the madness of the destruction of the South.

In "Hear the Nightingales Sing" the conqueror also is destroyed by the conquered, a woman. The Yankee soldier, singing a nostalgic love song and expressing regret for having to take food and the mule, almost reaches the girl's heart, but when her mule kills him, she is the conqueror. In "Tom Rivers" Lew Allard tells of his meeting his fellow-Kentuckian in Texas and of their adventures and reminiscences. Back in Kentucky Tom's girl, Barbara, had made an impossible demand upon him, and to escape surrendering to her he has gone to Texas, where he can keep his integrity and independence. Because he had gone to a Sunday School picnic drunk, Barbara wanted him to promise never to drink again. He feels that conforming to such a request, actually giving up his sovereignty, would be not only wrong for him but destructive as well. He considers her unworthy because she represents a code of manners which would destroy him.

"Brilliant Leaves" is perhaps the best example in
The Forest of the South of the theme of man's inadequacy to woman. The story, delicately symbolic throughout, tells of a young boy setting out for an innocent meeting with his girl in the woods. As he leaves, he overhears his mother and some other women on the porch gossiping, ghostlike and apart from love. They recall the story of an old maid, Sally Mainwaring, who, as a young girl, had tried to elope but, because her lover failed her, became dead to the world. The gossipers live in little white houses, staid and permanent and secure, and gather to talk of the past. Their lives, like Sally's, are dead.

The young couple meet, and the boy immediately senses but refuses to accept the fact that the intensity of their love is lost. The girl, seeing him as somewhat dull and mediocre, puzzles him by her shift from love to friendship. When they come to a waterfall, the girl insists that they attempt to climb behind it. Against his better judgment, Jimmy agrees, because he is trying to recover their lost relationship. The girl starts to descend the ladder of rocks, but her foot slips and she falls backward. When the boy reaches her, she looks at him with unseeing eyes, and her screams seem to tell us that she feels herself bitterly betrayed. Her fate, foreshadowed by the experience of her aunt Sally Mainwaring, is that she finds her human lover inadequate. Both girls demand intensity of devotion, purity
of love, and self denial. The tragedy is that both choose men who cannot or simply do not live up to their responsibility as lovers. As Sally goes down a ladder to elope, she sees her lover running away from her father, who is leaning from a window with a gun in his hand. When she enters the front door, she dies to the world. The young niece falls from the precipice to her actual death. In her case the young man's failure is two-fold. He does not live up to her romantic image of a lover, but even worse, he does not assume his responsibilities as a man and refuse to let her endanger her life for a mere whim. "Bright Leaves" shows the two ways open to any woman defeated in her attempts to find fulfillment in love. She may fall over the precipice or she may become a woman on the gallery.

Penhally, 1931, is the story of the house Penhally and of its generations of inhabitants. Nicholas Llewellyn's father emigrated in the early nineteenth century from Virginia to Kentucky. He built Penhally in the wilderness and from then on sat under the shade trees, read Greek, and drank mint juleps, until his plantation was laden with the debts that were eventually to bring the old mansion to the humiliation of becoming a country club for Northern millionaires. The final betrayal comes in the twentieth century when an elder son inherits and sells Penhally, only to be murdered by his outraged younger brother. The betrayal of
lovers, though occurring throughout the book, is shown most clearly in John Llewellyn. When he and his cousin Alice Blair are caught out in a storm, she risks her life by riding back with him through a flooded river. She glories in the experience because it is her opportunity to surrender to her trust of the man she loves. John does not, however, seize the moment to speak his feelings, for he thinks she is meant for his cousin Charles. Alice chooses Charles though it is John she feels drawn toward. After Charles is killed in war, John wishes to marry her, but because old Nicholas opposes the match, he loses her again. It is at this moment that he lets her be swept from him toward the precipice. Symbolically she is lost in a stream she cannot cross without help. She depends upon John now as she did in crossing the flooded river, but he does not prove worthy of her trust.

When Lucy is no longer an heiress, her fiancé does not pursue his courtship, and she feels bitter that she has not been loved for herself. She marries John but eventually turns against him and becomes "one of the women on the gallery." Her husband sees her withdrawal as pride, "as the desire to be desired," but he fails to see that it is Lucy's last resort in an effort to protect herself from the anguish of further vulnerability. There is for her no personal fulfillment in the marriage. The final blow for her comes when
her son is found sleeping with a young cousin. This girl is loved, at great risk, for herself alone as Lucy has not been. But more than this, Lucy suffers the shame of her son's behavior which leads to the downfall of the family and its traditions. Penhally, the symbol of stability and security, is lost.

The Garden of Adonis (1937) has a double plot, one concerned with the remnants of plantation aristocracy and the other with the shiftless "poor whites" who are dependent on the plantation owner. The motif of woman's betrayal in love is shown through Idelle Sheeler, daughter of a tenant farmer, as well as through Letty Allard, the descendant of once-prosperous tobacco planters. The dissolution of the social pattern represented by the failure of the plantation system sets adrift the girls in both social levels.

Letty, with black-lashed large gray eyes and golden hair, falls in love with Jim Carter, a married man. Charming but morally weak, Carter symbolizes the decline of Southern courage by his marriage to the daughter of a Northern industrialist who has moved South to use cheap labor. The girl, Sara Camp, is small, dark, and slight but with broad shoulders. Jim is particularly aware of her enormous dark gray eyes under their heavy brows and thinks her small slender hands and feet the prettiest he has ever seen. In a moment of hurt pride Sara turns from Jim. He has been involved with various women before and after marriage. When
Sara strikes back by having an affair, he tries to think the matter over from her viewpoint but always comes to the same conclusion: "Infidelity in a man was not the same thing it was in a woman." ^28

It is this man with whom Letty falls in love. She plans to marry a young law student, but she cannot see why Jim should not have an affair with her first. He can trust her, she assures him, "to take it exactly as he would." ^29

She is "a lady," thinks Jim, but her attitude toward life is exactly like that of Babe Worsham, a promiscuous girl who has accepted his attention and scorned pay but who felt hurt when he married someone else. Thinking only of their sensual pleasure, Letty and Jim eventually take flight from family and responsibility. Letty is betrayed by herself as much as by Jim, though his record shows numerous others whom he has hurt along the way.

Ote Mortimer, the son of a share-cropper, is devoted to the land, but drought and other frustrations of farming defeat him. He falls in love with Idelle, daughter of the shiftless Sheelers. She is a thin girl "with yellow hair and light on her feet" ^30 and is as fragile looking as any

---

^30 Gordon, The Garden of Adonis, p. 64.
lady. Though she has slender wrists that look as if they would break under any weight, she has to work in the tobacco fields. She is deeply tanned from exposure; Ote can see, however, that if she were not sunburned, she would have "the whitest skin he had ever seen on a woman." Because her skin is "delicate," she tans easily, and her gray eyes, fringed with long golden brown lashes, look blue in comparison with her brown skin. When Idelle becomes pregnant, she is afraid her father will turn her out "on the road" as he did her sister. Ote tries desperately to get money so that he can marry her, and when he fails she marries a bootlegger, who has cash in his pocket. Idelle prefers security to the uncertainty of love, which she feels has betrayed her.

In a larger sense perhaps it is the South, "the garden of Adonis," that has betrayed them all, for the mortgaged plantation, beset by drought, shiftless workers, and crop failure, cannot sustain the Allards or the Mortimers or the Sheelers any more than it could Jim Carter.

In The Women on the Porch, 1944, Caroline Gordon again uses the theme of masculine failures and women's frustrations. Catherine Chapman, a Southern girl, is married to a Midwesterner teaching in a New York college. When she learns of her husband's infidelity, she is faced with the two alternatives that we have seen in most Gordon

31 Gordon, The Garden of Adonis, p. 73.
heroines—"the cliff or the gallery." She flees from New York, thinking she will reach the death-dealing waters of the Mississippi and the Gulf, but unconsciously she is drawn instead to Swan Quarter, her family home in Tennessee. It is her nostalgia for the past as well as the uncertainty of the present and the fear of the future that leads her to find her way back through the forest to face her grandmother, aunt, and cousin, "the women on the porch." Jim Chapman is a man without roots, for he is one of the Midwesterners, who, it is said, are always on their way somewhere else. Belatedly, Catherine Chapman, born in the Agrarian South when values were still fixed and stable, realizes that love cannot grow to maturity unless the lovers possess a common heritage. Catherine has the opportunity to divorce Jim, marry her Southern cousin, and become the mistress of the land she loves. The rootless intellectual life of New York and the tradition-bound life of Swan Quarter are thus brought into conflict with each other. In the prospect of marrying her cousin she sees the possibility of a life of fertility and meaning, but she soon decides that neither her affair with him nor the women on the porch can work any miracle for her. Catherine turns her back on the land and goes with her husband.

If she is the embodiment of the struggle between two forces, her decision represents the disintegration of the
traditional, stable mode of Southern life under the pressure of the new utilitarianism. The rather inconclusive way that Catherine turns to Jim at the end suggests that she perceives, perhaps unconsciously, the sacredness of marriage and realizes that they have committed themselves for eternity. Both see that neither their adultery nor even physical violence can destroy their ties. By her humbling of pride in not turning away completely, Catherine is saved from joining "the women on the gallery."

In her search for love, Catherine, like the other heroines, has great pride and also a feeling of man's incapacity to satisfy the female need for love and for loyal, courageous, forthright action. Through her heroine Miss Gordon asks of the male understanding, courage, and tenacity, more perhaps than most people possess.

The women on the porch, who have no inner life of adventure and joy, are almost ghosts. Having turned aside from life, they sit there in despair and fear but also courage. Cousin Daphne, deserted on her wedding night, is a pathetic figure, much like the helpless, protected spinsters or the "ruined" genteel women in Ellen Glasgow's novels, but she does have a purpose in life—the study of mushrooms. Aunt Willy, who manages the farm and breeds horses, endures with the same admirable fortitude of Glasgow's women. Her endurance is simply for the sake of enduring and she cannot
enter life. When a neighboring farmer proposes marriage, Willy barely hesitates in her refusal. The habit of self-sacrifice governs her. These women all live without delight.

Mrs. Manigault, with gray or cleverly platinumed hair, is an attractive woman of indeterminate age. In her hands is the power given by wealth and vast possessions. Restlessly she uses her power; she breeds fine horses, builds a beautiful modern house to replace the old plantation home, and manages the lives of people around her. But in her Miss Gordon shows a triumph that is defeat. Hers is the sterile energy that brings destruction, even to her only son. She realizes too late that feminine dominance is not a proper substitute for the old masculine dominance that had more humanity and humility. In the past if women committed adultery, the adultery at least had meaning; now nothing that she can do has any real significance.

Miss Gordon's 1951 novel entitled *The Strange Children* concerns a group of intellectuals who have gathered in Tennessee at Ben folly, the galleried old Southern home that Steve and Sarah Lewis have inherited. Through the eyes of nine-year-old Lucy we see this impromptu reunion with the old friends reminiscing of college days and travel in Europe, drinking far too many cocktails, discussing their faith or lack of faith, and attending the revival meeting of the Holy Rollers in their brush arbor. The book contrasts the effects
of religious experience, Catholic and evangelical, and the
effects of a lack of any such experience, agnostic and
rational. It is the agnostics who are the "strange chil-
dren" of the title and who come to realize that any faith
is better than none.

Sarah Lewis, still known in the community as Miss
Sally Fayerlie's granddaughter, is far from the Southern
lady of tradition that her grandmother was. She is an in-
tellectual whose career is art, though she paints, rather
desultorily, it is true, only when she is not managing Ben-
folly and struggling to take care of the house guests, ap-
ppearing unannounced at most inopportune moments. Sarah and
her guests seem to spend most of their time either drinking
or recovering from hangovers. Instead of presiding over a
ceremonious way of life, she entertains somewhat hap-
hazardly, dressed as often as not in her blue jeans, after
having prepared the meals herself. Yet there comes a time
when she almost automatically reverts to the leisurely
charming manner of the traditional lady who expects help
and gets it because she is who she is. Over the telephone
she becomes "Miss Sally Fayerlie's granddaughter" sweetly
inquiring about every member of the family and promising a
visit soon, before she asks the doctor and sheriff to come
at once. Her charming but helpless femininity in time of
need brings gallant rescuers who have for the moment lost
sight of her as an intellectual career woman clad in blue jeans and sneakers.

Lucy, like her mother, represents a break with tradition. Far from being "sheltered" and kept in a state of ignorance, she is in the very center of the house party with its alcoholism and sexual intrigues. Always she responds with a kind of instinctive knowledge of good and evil which accompanies her state of youthful innocence. Miss Gordon seems to have proved in another way the uselessness of striving for "the sheltered life" derided earlier by Ellen Glasgow.

In The Strange Children the characters are pictured in the beginning as being as rootless as the Westerner, Jim Chapman, in The Women on the Porch. Because the hierarchy of caste and grace in the Old South has vanished, these inhabitants of a New South must look elsewhere for a sense of order and control. Miss Gordon presents Catholicism and its idea of grace as providing a substitute, actually a more durable scheme than the traditions of old.

The heroines in Miss Gordon's works are searching for love and stability in the chaotic world which has replaced the Old South. They seldom find happiness because love is uncertain and because men do not measure up to their specifications, which are perhaps too demanding and would be destructive of their manhood. Women, failing to find
fulfillment in love and marriage, have two choices—to withdraw from life to join the women on the porch or to fall from a precipice into complete destruction. Like the Glasgow heroines, these women usually have such courage and fortitude that they endure, but it is endurance without joy. In the most recent of her books Miss Gordon sees hope for Southern women, and for all the South, in the framework of the Catholic church, which offers order, harmony, and beauty surpassing even that of the hierarchy of the old agrarian culture. 32

III

The next woman under consideration has used her memories of her early life in Texas and Louisiana and her recollections of her Southern family history as background for short stories rather than novels. Katherine Anne Porter,

whose family had migrated from Kentucky, was born near San Antonio in 1894. She was educated in small Southern convent schools. Although she showed little regard for formal education, early in life she became interested in writing. She has lived and worked in Mexico, France, and Germany as well as in various parts of the United States. Of herself and her work, she once wrote: "As for aesthetic bias my one aim is to tell a straight story and to give true testimony. My personal life has been the jumbled and apparently irrelevant mass of experiences which can only happen, I think, to a woman who goes with her mind permanently absent from the place where she is."33 She says that since she has little sense of time, direction, or distance, she has seen much of the world by getting lost and roaming about to find her bearings.

From her experience and her travel Miss Porter has collected a great deal of material certainly not irrelevant when used in her stories and novelettes. Keen observation and accurate recollection of things from Texas to Louisiana to Mexico and on to Europe all go into her revivification of the past as well as her portrayal of the present. Since she composes slowly, her output is relatively small, but she is widely praised as a flawless prose writer, who has

created, as Arthur H. Quinn describes it, "an instrument of marvelous precision to register highly sensitive and intense awareness of life, both of people and of background." Her stories have been collected in three books, Flowering Judas and Other Stories, 1930; Pale Horse, Pale Rider, 1939; and The Leaning Tower and Other Stories, 1944. A collection of essays, The Days Before, was published in 1952 and her long novel, Ship of Fools, in 1962.

Miss Porter has reacted against authoritarianism and totalitarianism in any form. Although she does not reject religion itself, Lodwick Hartley, in his article "The Lady and the Temple," says she has given up the Catholic faith of her youthful training as well as "the Southern brand of conservatism of her social milieu or the survival of puritanism that still determines the moral climate." Neither religion nor human relationships offer essential and permanent satisfaction, and she sees most people living in lovelessness. Harry John Mooney, Jr., divides her stories into two groups, one of which deals with "the failure of love or hope or fortitude," reflecting not only the contemporary but also the ageless dilemmas. The other is composed of stories "set in an older world of known and stable values, a world


where a certain right to egotism may nearly be taken for granted." He is referring in this last to the first six stories in The Leaning Tower. They are about the childhood of Miranda, a young girl growing up in an atmosphere of innocence and protected by the safe, happy, sound enough values of the last of the Southern pioneer aristocrats.

But in "Old Mortality" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," two novelettes in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Miranda comes to maturity and disillusionment through knowledge of her family, of war, and of disappointment in love. The breakup of the family symbolizes the dissolution of the old way of life and the loss of values which had been achieved by it.

Particularly suitable for this study are these eight pieces that deal with Southern women living in the South, old and new. They seem to be directly based on Miss Porter's memories and experiences. The central character in the six sketches in The Leaning Tower is not Miranda but the Grandmother, who gradually emerges as the representative of the past that had the order and stability that her children and grandchildren do not have. She has taken over her widower son and his three children, of whom Miranda is the youngest. They live under her "matriarchial tyranny," which they sometimes resent, but when she dies, there is nothing to replace

---

36 Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh, 1957), p. 5.
her stabilizing influence.

The first story, "The Source," gives us a portrait of the indomitable Grandmother on one of her regular seasonal visits to the farm to bring order out of the disorder that has arisen during her absence. She sets everything to rights, the house and farm and the children as well:

They loved their Grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge, since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely: just the same they felt that Grandmother was tyrant, and they wished to be free of her. . . .37

The young welcome the certainties of the assured tradition embodied in the Grandmother and yet chafe under the rule it imposes.

In "The Old Order" Grandmother and her one-time slave talk constantly about the past. Just as ceaselessly they sew scraps of old finery into useless but ornamental patchwork articles to enshrine the past, even to covering a rolling pin hewed out by some pioneer ancestor. This handiwork and the attitudes it symbolizes are embarrassing to the children, of course. Out of the reminiscing emerges the picture of the Grandmother, brave and strong but also narrow and inflexible. She is a Kentucky belle who gaily marries at seventeen and soon sees in her husband "lack of

aim, failure to act at crises, a philosophic detachment from practical affairs." Gradually she develops "a character truly portentous under the discipline of trying to change the characters of others" so that even her husband dislikes her willfullness, her certainty in her own rightness, and her belief in the importance of her own feelings. Her feeling of "superiority in judgment" makes her hard to manage, and in her quiet way she is able to hold her ground. By chance she learns the joy she has missed in letting another woman feed her children. From then on she nurses her babies herself, "translating her natural physical relief into something holy, God-sent, amends from heaven for what she had suffered in childbirth . . . and for what she missed in the marriage bed, for there also something had failed."

In middle age, with her husband dead, her property gone, her children to care for alone, she finds herself "with all the responsibilities of a man but none of the privileges." She at last is able to live an honest life. She finds that she despises men but she is always ruled by

---

38 Katherine Anne Porter, "The Old Order," The Leaning Tower, p. 46.
40 Porter, "The Old Order," p. 47.
41 Porter, "The Old Order," p. 49.
them. Although she is sure she could have managed better, she watches without protest as her husband loses her dowry and gambles away her property; "it was the business of a man to make all decisions and dispose of all financial matters." Then after she has the reins in her own hands, she lets her sons persuade her, against her judgment, to make all sorts of unwise investments. She spoils her children, provides them all a start in life, and gives them advice they do not want, but when she is gone, the hardy stock of the past begins to weaken. The other stories develop more fully the sense of the family greatness which lies in the past and is destined to disappear with the Grandmother. As the last of the waning pioneer stock, Grandmother had been full of courage, because she had known the failure of love and hope. She represented strength and fortitude and passed them on to Miranda, who is also "a moral aristocrat."

Two of the first group of stories concern Miranda as she begins to grow up. In "The Circus" she goes on a joyous family outing but becomes terror-stricken at the sights and has to be taken home. The others paint gay pictures of the circus performers and try to persuade her that she is foolish to be afraid. She refuses to deceive herself and holds on to her image of horror. In the very

---

42 Porter, "The Old Order," p. 52.
midst of gaiety she has seen frightening things of which no one else is aware. She has peered through appearances into the reality beyond. She has envisioned the evil awaiting her in the adult world she will enter when she leaves her safe and sheltered childhood, the romantic world of the past.

"The Grave" tells of how Miranda and her brother explore an abandoned cemetery and find souvenirs. Graves are commonplace to them and death has no special meaning. When Paul kills a rabbit that is nearly ready to bear her young, Miranda begins to have some understanding of life—of life and death—though full realization does not come until twenty years later.

The novelette "Old Mortality" has three sections, dated 1885-1902, 1904, and 1912, but forward action begins in 1902, when Miranda is eight. Miss Porter tells the legends from the past which shape Miranda's childhood and then shows how they affect her as she comes to maturity. From eight to eighteen she gradually forms her own conclusions from widely varying versions of the past. Aunt Amy, whose portrait represents beauty superior to that of any other member of the family, had lived a gay, romantic and beautifully tragic life. Though doomed to early death by tuberculosis, she had been the epitome of the Southern belle. According to the family tales, she had been the
gayest and most beautiful girl at every ball. She was strangely fascinating and flirted so outrageously that she almost caused a duel. After tormenting Uncle Gabriel for five years by her flirtations, she finally married him, but without love, "in time to be in New Orleans for Mardi Gras." Six weeks later she was dead. Miranda is willing to accept the legend of Amy, and yet she cannot help seeing discrepancies in the stories and differences between the romantic traditions and the commonplace actualities of life. In the second part of the story real cracks begin to appear in the legend. While at a convent school in New Orleans, Miranda and her sister attend the races, where they meet Uncle Gabriel. Instead of being a dashing romantic figure, he is a drunken race-track follower. He is now married to "Miss Honey," a woman bitterly frustrated by the Amy legend and by the uncertain, poverty-stricken life she leads. The legend fails Miranda in the presence of cold realities. In the third part, Miranda, now eighteen, breaks completely with the past. On her way home to attend Gabriel's funeral, she meets Cousin Eva, the chinless, intellectually inclined feminist who has been the symbol of ugliness in the family. Eva, whose girlhood had been made miserable by family comparison to the beautiful Amy, gives the other side of the

---

legend. To her, Amy was a mischief-maker with a shaky reputation. Even her marriage and death were not romantic, for, in Eva's opinion, something strange brought the sudden marriage, and death was to escape some exposure. At first Miranda, in revulsion, dismisses Eva's defining of the legend in terms of vicious competition among the belles and mere sublimated sex. She thinks this version just as false as the other.

At home Eva and Miranda's father, the two sides of the legend, join forces in the past, a world they can share. Miranda is cut off. She, whose elopement from school is not considered romantic, suddenly decides to run away from all "bonds that smothered her in love and hatred"—to run away from her marriage and anyone or anything that keeps her from making her own discoveries. She rejects the old order that supplies her with ready-made truths and determines not to have false hopes or to be romantic about herself: "At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance."44 If Miranda finds truth, she is determined to come to it through her own experience; she will not accept blindly what others hand down to her. Actually she is already putting together the two competing myths that she has rejected, or thinks

44 Porter, "Old Mortality," p. 89.
she has rejected. Though she does not know it, the combina-
tion of two phases of the past form the basis of her idea
of truth.

Miranda of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," 1918, is no longer
ignorant as she was when she set out to seek truth in 1912.
She is a poorly paid newspaper employee in a Southwestern
city near a large army camp. Recently she has met a sol-
dier, Adam, who is on his last leave before going overseas.
Almost against her will, she is beginning to fall in love
with him, though she can see no happy outcome for their
love. The story tells of their activities against the
backgrounds of war hysteria and the raging flu epidemic.
When Miranda becomes ill, Adam cares for her until she is
finally taken to the hospital. In her dreams and her de-
lirium, fantasy and reality mingle and she has premonitions
of the doom of her love. The "pale horse, pale rider" of
the old song rides beside her, but she tells him, "I'm not
going with you this time--ride on!" The pale, greenish
stranger does ride on, and she gradually returns to life
during the celebration of the armistice, only to discover
that she does not want life. Her final disillusionment is
the news that Adam has died of influenza.

Miranda, like Grandmother, will lead a "joyless

---

45 Katherine Anne Porter, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider,"
Pale Horse, Pale Rider, p. 181.
life," she will feel threatened and insecure, armed only with her fortitude to face the emptiness of a life which she has fought heroically to regain. Both women, living in a world falling to pieces, are crushed by the impersonal forces of their times, not by an innate lack of character. Miss Porter constantly emphasizes the fact that it is from the stability of the past, however much Miranda may reject it, that the two get their firm moral values and instinctive feelings of right. They are the singers that Death in the song "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" always leaves to mourn.

Katherine Anne Porter is like Ellen Glasgow in showing that women can rise above their tragic destinies and become better women for it. If they cannot be happy, they can at least endure. Her characters differ from Miss Glasgow's in that they get their strength from the stable ordered world of the past rather than from the present.

IV

From among the large number of writers coming from Mississippi in the twentieth century, Eudora Welty holds a high place. Born in Jackson in 1909, she has spent the greater part of her life in that region and has found there most of the material for her work. She published her first story in 1936, and since then there have appeared her first collection of stories, A Curtain of Green, 1941; a novella,
The Robber Bridegroom; another collection of short stories, The Wide Net; a novel, Delta Wedding; a collection of related stories, The Golden Apples; and The Ponder Heart. Most of these are set close to the Natchez Trace or in the Delta but with extraordinary variety of subject matter. Miss Welty writes about Negroes, poor whites, decayed aristocrats, and middle-class women of small Southern towns.

It is true, as several reviewers have mentioned, that Miss Welty often deals with the demented, the deformed, and the queer, but the meaning of the stories never seems to be in the violence, nor is the abnormality of the characters their important quality. The squalid settings and violent happenings are important to her only for the effect on the human beings in her stories. Often it is the women who are the warped personalities, most often perhaps because they are victims of the decadence of the Old South or the violence of the reality of the New.

In many of her stories Eudora Welty deals with people who are cut off, alienated, isolated from the world. In "Why I Live at the P. O." the old-maid narrator is isolated from her family by her arrogance, meanness, and sense of persecution. She is jealous of her sister, who has

---
46Granville Hicks, "Eudora Welty," College English, XIV (November 1952), 71.
married and who has now come home with a child. She is angry with the rest of the family because they seem to prefer Stella Rondo to her. She takes all her belongings and moves to the tiny Mississippi post office where she is postmistress. She defies her family to attempt to see her and retreats into her loneliness and madness. The feebleminded Lily Daw, in "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," plans to marry, to try to be like other people, to keep from being isolated. The interfering middle-class "good ladies" fear for her "virtue" and arrange to send her to a home for girls. When she is convinced that she will have companionship, she agrees to go. Almost too late, the busybodies find that there actually is a man who wants to marry her, and they rush the wedding arrangements along. Lily is so thoroughly confused by the decisions and indecisions of the meddling women that she can no longer act for herself.

In "Clytie" Miss Welty shows a decadent Southern family living in a run-down mansion, from which most of the furnishings have been sold. The father is paralyzed, one brother has committed suicide, the other is an alcoholic, and the sister is a cursing, screaming insane woman. The old spinster Clytie is the mainstay of the family, preparing meals, shopping, and looking after the others. We see her as she runs about the small town, oblivious to the traffic and more and more careless about her appearance.
Gradually she comes to mumble the same curses that her sister screams at the family and the neighbors. Finding no love and no companionship anywhere, Clytie, like the others in her family, locks out the world and retreats more and more into her isolated existence. One crucial morning when she feels more "cut off" than ever she looks into the rain barrel, sees her own reflection, and stoops down to merge with it: "When Old Lethy found her, she had fallen forward into the barrel, with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs."47

Miss Welty's "Petrified Man" is a perfect picture of complete vulgarity in its women characters drawn from the lower middle class. Through the vicious beauty-parlor conversations emerge vulgar domineering women, beauty operators and customers alike. Leota, the beautician, has learned through her friend and tenant, Mrs. Pike, that her customer, Mrs. Fletcher, is pregnant, and most of the conversation stems from that. Mrs. Fletcher, bitter about her pregnancy, is horrified about its being known, and Leota glories in seeing the other's unhappiness and in being able to torture her with horrifying accounts of other women's experiences. The complete lack of sensitivity and of gentility is indicated by the crudity and frankness of the

---

conversation.

William M. Jones, in an explication of the story, calls attention to the many disparaging remarks about men in general, the women's husbands in particular. He interprets the women's criticizing and belittling of men, their bossing of their husbands, their keeping them waiting and doing nothing, as well as their showing disgust with pregnancy, as their denial of the values of what is psychologically natural to them. By their domination of men they almost seem "to be trying to be something other than real women."48

Finally Leota tells of Mrs. Pike's recognition of the "petrified" man in a sideshow as the man wanted for the rape of four women. Mrs. Pike, despite the protests of her husband, is determined to turn Mr. Petrie over to the police. The one man still capable of some act, even such a thing as rape, is not like the husbands who have surrendered completely to the domination of the women. But the irony is that the women eventually triumph over him too through the sharp eyes of Mrs. Pike. Jones considers even the names of two of the women, Pike and Fletcher, significant in that both are names also of weapons of a kind. He reaches this conclusion: "Here are women who will conquer with whatever

weapons they have at their disposal any recalcitrant male who will not submit to their seemingly inevitable control."

Jennie, in "At the Landing," is like Clytie in that she is caught by tradition. She is living with her grandfather in a house of culture and pride and also of death. After he dies, there is a flood that further upsets her life. The wild but free Floyd, a man to whom Jennie is strangely drawn, takes her away, violates her, and then deserts her after the flood. When Jennie follows him, she encounters many horrors that her sheltered life has not prepared her for. Even though she finds violence and contamination, she has at least moved out of the past, out of the house of death. She has escaped the sterility of tradition.

Dicey Hastings was born in Mississippi but now lives in the North. When she returns on a visit, in "Kin," she seems to be making a journey into the past, for she sees the ruins of a plantation and of a family. One aunt, Kate's mother, is now an invalid, but she preserves the "feel" of the past, keeps up its traditions, and has complete knowledge of all the vast number of relatives. Kind and thoughtful, she tries to think of everyone and be sure no feelings are hurt. Dicey and Kate ride out to visit an ailing old great uncle. There they find an old-maid relative, Sister

---

Anne, presiding over the family homestead. In her loneliness and her eagerness to get a free portrait, she relegates Uncle Felix to a junk room, lends the parlor to an itinerant photographer, and enjoys a day of excitement when the house fills with the crowds who come for pictures. She rejects the family and its past in her effort to live in the present. Her life, with none of the grace, charm, and beauty of the old way, typifies the crudity of the New South.

When *Delta Wedding* was published in 1946 John Crowe Ransom wondered whether it would not be one of the last novels in the tradition of the Old South. In it there is the atmosphere of the Mississippi Delta in September, 1923, with the excitement and commotion at Shellmound when the Fairchilds prepare for a wedding. Dabney, the second of the Fairchild daughters, is marrying Troy Flavin, the son of her father's overseer. He is a poor man from the hill country and is twice her age, but is solid and dependable. Seventeen-year-old Dabney is the vivacious Southern belle, who winds her father around her finger, even getting him to agree to an elaborate wedding before the harvesting is done and, more than that, to a man he does not want as a son-in-law. She delights in beautiful clothes and in gay

---

parties. Even during the wedding festivities she dashes away to dance with Dickie Boy Featherstone, leaving the patient Troy waiting at home because he does not dance.

An outsider like Troy is Robbie, the wife of George Fairchild, the family favorite. At the time of the story Robbie has left George because she is alienated by a feat of pointless heroism. He has needlessly endangered his life in rescuing a feeble-minded niece on the railroad bridge. The other Fairchilds accept George's act without question, simply as a Fairchild reaction, but over and over Robbie says, "But he didn't do it for me!"

Ellen, though she is the mother of six Fairchild children, is still in some ways an outsider in the family, for she is from far-away Virginia. She is the sweet, long-suffering, and efficient plantation wife and mother. Though she has no retinue of slaves to direct, she is in charge of running a complex household and of caring for and pleasing a rather demanding family. Robbie and Ellen remain outsiders because they both are women who want identities of their own, separate from the closeness of the Southern family into which they have married. Each wants a self apart, even from the lover. Neither can be completely happy in a marriage relationship that blocks the independence of the wife.

Numerous aunts and great-aunts, most of them widows or spinsters, live at Shellmound or nearby, all pursuing
such lady-like hobbies as flower growing and knitting or sewing, and all helping to pamper the Fairchild men and children. They perfectly embody the qualities of the aristocratic Southern lady, born and reared to grace a household and to please the men of the family by expecting to be protected.

Edna Earle Ponder, a gentle old maid of Clay, Mississippi, is the narrator in *The Ponder Heart*. The name Edna Earle probably was suggested by that of the heroine of Augusta Evans Wilson's *St. Elmo*, a sentimental novel of nearly a century ago, and gives some insight into Miss Ponder and the entire family. This virtuous and pious heroine had the repulsively squeamish propriety which appeals to people who wish to deny that man has any natural instincts mentionable in polite society. It is almost certainly deliberate irony that Miss Welty's Edna Earle is, despite several proposals, still unmarried and that she, unlike the erudite heroine of *St. Elmo*, is completely lacking in intellectual interests, even disapproving of very much reading for fear it will damage one's eyesight.

For years Edna Earle runs interference between her uncle and her grandfather and keeps peace in the family. When Uncle Daniel, eccentric and feeble-minded but quite wealthy, becomes the last of the Ponder men, she protects him, come what may. Suddenly he enters into a "trial
marriage" with Bonnie Dee Peacock, a seventeen-year-old
ten-cent-store clerk from the "poor whites." When Edna
Earle sees the fragile young girl in her wrinkled home-made
voile dress, she describes her in this way:

Baby yellow hair, downy—like one of those dandelion
puff-balls you can blow and tell the time by. And not
a grain beneath. Now, Uncle Daniel may not have a whole
lot of brains, but what's there is Ponder, and no mis­
take about it. But poor little old Bonnie Dee! There's
a world of difference. . . . I could tell by her
little coon eyes, she was shallow as they come.51

Edna Earle says the Peacocks are the kind of people
who keep a mirror and the washing machine on the front
porch and plant red verbena in a flower bed made by an
automobile tire. Yet she does not object to the marriage,
for as she tells the judge: "People get married beneath
them every day, and I don't see any sign of the world
coming to an end."52 Simple-minded Bonnie Dee, however,
does not have the mental, physical, or moral strength needed
by the decayed gentility represented by the Ponders. She
never becomes a Southern lady in any sense of the word.
Edna Earle, although she is almost as addle-pated as Daniel,
occupies a position of some importance, simply because she
is a Ponder. Even after she becomes the manager of the

51 Eudora Welty, The Ponder Heart (New York, 1954),
p. 35.
52 Welty, The Ponder Heart, p. 37.
Beulah hotel, she is considered to be among the élite of Clay. She is bent on upholding family honor and protecting sweet and generous Daniel. He is charged with murdering Bonnie Dee. Because the truth seems incredible, Edna swears a lie and gets him acquitted. Somewhat like Emily Grierson in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," Edna Earle makes use of people's respect for and belief in the Southern lady. She simply awes them into accepting her story. After all, how can the community doubt the sincerity of a woman who calmly watches Daniel walk about the courtroom and give away a fortune which would belong to her if she stops him? Garrulous hotel manager she may be, but she is also still a Ponder.

Miss Welty's heroines do not fit any set pattern. Many of those who cling to the past are frustrated misfits, who live in unhappy isolation or are driven to madness or violence. Yet many who reject the past and try to make themselves a part of the present are crude, unfeeling, even ridiculous. Most unpleasant of all are the vulgar middle-class, such as the gossipy women in "The Petrified Man" and the meddlers in "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies." Southern "ladies" are pictured sympathetically, particularly in Delta Wedding, but are rather obviously outmoded. Two Fairchild wives, Robbie, who comes from Southern poor whites, and Ellen, who is a Virginia aristocrat, have in common
their attempt to maintain a certain separateness and indepen-
dence in an old-fashioned, man-centered family in the Mississippi Delta.

V

It is only natural to find the greatest change in Southern heroines in the most recent fiction. With the passing of a century since the feminine 1850's, we find that the pure Southern girl has disappeared from the novels and short stories of the young women writing in the 1950's and 1960's.

A New Orleans woman, Shirley Ann Grau, born in 1929, is one of the youngest of the younger Southern writers. She has published three books during the past six years: The Black Prince and Other Stories, 1955; The Hard Blue Sky, 1958; and The House on Coliseum Street, 1961. "Southerner though she is, she has no truck with Southern Gothic, and neither in the stories nor in the novel [The Hard Blue Sky] does one find echoes of William Faulkner or Eudora Welty or any other of the distinguished writers of the Southern revival," said Granville Hicks in 1958, but he sees in her regionalism some resemblance to that in George Washington Cable's stories.53

53 Granville Hicks, "A Shining Young Talent," Saturday Review, XLI (June 28, 1958), 12.
The Hard Blue Sky is a regional novel about a community of fishing people of French and Spanish blood, living on Isle aux Chiens in the Gulf of Mexico. Life goes on much the same way it has for two hundred years, with fishing expeditions, Saturday night dancing and drinking, Mass every fourth Sunday.

A sloop puts in at the island, and the owners return to New Orleans, leaving Inky D'Alfonso to look after it. He has an affair with sixteen-year-old Annie Landry, who has only recently returned from Catholic school in New Orleans. Now that she is at home she is restless as well as somewhat uneasy and rebellious because of her father's remarriage. Her family as well as others on the island are aware of the love affair but do nothing about it. The general love of independence makes everyone respect the independence of others, and no one interferes in what is considered Annie's business. When Inky is ready to leave, he offers to take Annie with him and to marry her. She is somewhat attracted to him and agrees to go, but she actually wants to be persuaded to stay. She tells him he does not have to marry her, though she thinks she loves him and there isn't anybody else. Young as she is, she has no illusions:

Maybe, she found herself saying silently, she loved him because there wasn't anybody else. Yet.

...
She wasn't happy. But she certainly wasn't sad either.

She was waiting, waiting for things to happen to her. Things that could be handled and changed. And things that could just be handled. She felt herself grow great and passive in her waiting.

Yes, she thought. It's Inky now. We'll go to New Orleans, and we'll get married. I can get him to do that. He wants to do that. He wants to now, but even if he doesn't...

It's Inky now. And maybe it will go on being Inky. But maybe it won't. And if I believed in cards or palms I'd say I could tell.

Maybe it will stay. And maybe, she thought, calmly, it won't.54

Most of the stories in the collection The Black Prince have Negro characters, but "The Girl with the Flaxen Hair" gives an account of a mother and daughter whose tragedy grows out of their clinging to the past of tradition. Mrs. Ramond cannot accept reality for herself or her daughter, Rose, but tries to keep up the appearances of the life she once led as the daughter of Senator Winslow, ignoring the fact that he had almost been indicted for bribery. She fills her house with potted ferns on the pretense that they make it cool, though actually it is to hide the lack of furniture. Because her husband is just a barber, she is contemptuous of him. When he leaves her, she and Rose do not seem to miss him. She glamorizes the situation by

saying he has gone to France to study music.

Mrs. Ramond recalls with great pleasure that yellow-haired Rose was once described as having "a face like a Botticelli angel." The little girl is as fragile and lovely as an angel except for her braids of hair, which seem too heavy and make her look old, and her blue eyes, which are too pale. In most ways she has beautiful manners; she tends however to monopolize conversations with one topic, romantic tales about her grandfather. The child dreams of looking like her grandmother in a pale yellow wedding dress ornamented with a diamond brooch and of being married in Trinity Church, filled with flowers of all shades of yellow. Instead, Rose becomes the victim of the romantic past. In her foolish desire to hide their poverty and to keep up appearances, Mrs. Ramond sends Rose to the railroad yard to steal coal. She is struck and killed by a train.

The House on Coliseum Street is set in a lovely old mansion in a magnolia-scented, once-wealthy section of Old New Orleans. Despite the moonlight and magnolias, there are no pure Southern ladies to grace the scene. The book is rather a grim account of three contemporary Southern women. They no longer live by the outworn code of Southern tradition; in fact, they are sophisticated characters who

have no code whatever. The novel describes the effects of an abortion on a young woman and on her capacity for happiness and shows her gradual shift from bewilderment into silence and hatred.

The central character is a twenty-year-old girl, Joan Mitchell, who lives with her mother, Aurelie, and a younger sister, Doris. Aurelie has had five husbands and a daughter by each, but the younger ones are away. The current husband, who lives apart from her in a third-floor apartment, is drinking himself to death. Both Aurelie and Joan have money from settlements made on them by Joan's father.

Selfish, practical, still handsome Aurelie presides over the Coliseum Street household, which Doris calls "a houseful of bitches." Doris herself, with no interest in what anyone may think, devotes her time to tennis, dancing, alcohol, and sex. The persistence of her pursuit of pleasure suggests that she is not so happy as she pretends. Joan, just as self-centered as Doris, is moody and self-pitying. Aurelie still has some respect for appearances. She is so busy, however, leading her own life and finding pleasures where she can that she has little concern for the daughters and their love affairs except to inquire occasionally whether they are being "careful." She expresses no worry about their drinking and their late hours aside from the effect on their appearances. When Joan finally reveals
her pregnancy, Aurelie's reaction is dismay that she was not "careful" and fear that she has waited too long to remedy the situation. Quickly and efficiently she arranges for a "visit" to the Gulf Coast for an abortion, and there her interest and her feeling of responsibility end. So far as she is concerned the matter is settled.

Joan's pregnancy is the result of a casual and unexpected but not "careful" meeting with a college instructor, one of Doris' many beaux. It is she who is the aggressor. After the abortion she broods over the child she might have had and becomes more and more lost in herself and more determined than ever on destroying herself. She deliberately tries to become pregnant again, this time by her steady lawyer friend, who is still eager to marry her even though he has guessed the cause of her Gulf Coast visit. Joan is a grim example of the "desperate, purposeless" young women of the twentieth century. She, like her mother and her sister, is living an empty life. She has never had any system of values, and now at twenty she is existing in a kind of hell from which Miss Grau holds out no hope of redemption.

Joan does not have the family and social condemnation of the "ruined gentlewoman" described sympathetically even if somewhat ironically by Ellen Glasgow in her novels of the old tradition. Yet she is far more tragic in that
she has no standards to violate and therefore no reason to repent and thereby regain something which she has lost. Neither does she have any sense of satisfaction that can come from rebelling against false values, as has Milly Burden, in *They Stooped to Folly*, for example. She simply is without values and without purpose; therein lies her tragedy.

VI

Fiction, being concerned in large part with human relationships, attracts women, perhaps because they, more than men, are interested in people as people. James Donald Adams thinks that because women identify more deeply with the object of their love, they are more likely to reveal their fuller emotional involvement and less likely than men to see the opposite sex as it is. Though the docile but passionate dream-girl heroines have continued to dominate the novels by men, many women writers, from the time of Mary Johnston and Ellen Glasgow on down to the present, have been giving realistic portraits of women. Because it is still difficult for men to see women except as contributors to their comfort, pleasure, and convenience, female writers are the ones who are beginning to see them as human beings and to see love as a relation of one human being to

another rather than of man to woman.

Modern Southern fiction presents such a wide variety of Southern heroines that there can be no rather vague but generalized portrait that will suggest all of the different individuals. They have changed drastically in appearance and dress as well as in conduct since the time when the sweet and vivacious Southern belle and the gracious and efficient Southern lady, both equally pure, appeared in every Southern novel.

A more independent and consequently more masculine heroine has appeared in contemporary fiction. She is quite likely to be poor and may come from the middle or even the lower class. She may be pretty but she is seldom beautiful. Her being blonde or golden-haired with white skin is no indication of virtue. In fact, the heroine is more often than not a tall slender brunette, larger and stronger and healthier than the ladies of a century ago. In describing their women characters, the authors do not devote much attention to clothes or to jewelry. The twentieth-century girl usually dresses simply, depending upon such things as her pleasing personality and manner, her conversational skill, and her participation in sports, jobs, and various other activities for attracting and holding attention.

Though they openly reject the past and its traditions, modern heroines are often influenced by them and depend upon
them more than they realize. For example, Miranda, in Katherine Anne Porter's stories, is a girl who endures because she gets her values from her Southern grandmother. Caroline Gordon's heroines go back to the agrarian life of the South for strength when they are disappointed in love. Elizabeth Madox Roberts' women characters learn fortitude from living on the land and they get spiritual regeneration from the simple agrarian life. Eudora Welty's most admirable women are the ladies of the Old South or the descendants of Southern aristocracy still able to live in close-knit family groups. When the life on the land and the social hierarchy of the past are not available or do not suffice, the fictional women in rootless environments tend to turn to religion, especially to the framework of the Catholic Church.

In the last two decades particularly, the Southern girl is sometimes crude, violent, or amoral and disillusioned, but seldom docile. She is, in most cases, a career girl. She may want marriage and family as much as the old-fashioned heroine, but she rebels against the monotony of the daily round of housekeeping with no opportunity for self-realization. In her determination to be independent she has sometimes gone to extremes in casting off the traditional role and the characteristics associated with it. As she gains the position she is seeking, she may again
have feminine charm and sensitivity but retain along with these admirable qualities a sense of humor, of honor, and of morality.

Portraits of leading ladies by contemporary Southern women writers emphasize, says Nona Balakian, modern woman's "darker, negative qualities: loss of innocence, of selfhood, of sensibility, loss of the very capacity to love." In an article in New Republic in 1956 Francis Hackett calls the Deep South a land of lost causes, with chastity "the lostest." Though women writers do not necessarily approve of their modern heroines, they are facing reality and are searching for answers to the problems of today. Miss Balakian's feeling is that if they can bring men fully to accept women as persons, writers will be helping in the spiritual liberation of women.

---

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: FROM THE MADONNA TO THE MAGDALEN

In the fiction of the South before the 1850's when this study of the representation of Southern womanhood begins, the heroine is a traditional lady. Under the plantation system the great estate was the social ideal. At the center of that society, which was governed by an elaborate system of codes and conventions, was the fair Southern lady--pure, beautiful, generous, gentle, and gracious. She was what Mary Louise McGlothlin calls the very "epitome of the nobility of helplessness."¹ She was the ideal of a feudal society where women were the queens of the earth; a society intending to create, as William E. Dodd says, the "womanly women whom men would adore, and knightly men to whom women would cling like vines to sturdy oaks."²

The Southerner set up a kind of chivalric ideal for the woman he was to cherish, support, and protect, and she


conformed to his expectations of her. First among his re-
quirements was absolute chastity, described by Francis P.
Gaines as "spotlessness of thought and act." The South so
prided itself upon its "pure" women that the men almost
invariably spoke of them as "angels" and boasted of their
"angelic" qualities that made them the superiors of "wicked"
man. The Southern woman was not only pure but also modest,
even to the point of prudishness as is evidenced by her
conversation as well as her behavior. In fact, the old-
fashioned idea was to bring girls up in a certain kind of
shy ignorance so that they did not know what wickedness
actually meant.

Since the lordly gentleman wanted to guard his lady
from all harm, she was physically frail, small, and pale;
she had to seem helpless enough to require protection and
to need his strength and courage. Because she was clinging
and helpless, she could not endure shocks or disappoint-
ments without fainting, she might suffer illness or even
die from a broken heart, and she must never perform physi-
cal labor, which might coarsen her or detract from her
beauty. In fictional accounts, she is always beautifully
dressed and adorned with sparkling jewels. Laces, ruffles,
and bows suggest her complete femininity; hoop skirts are
favorite costumes though dress fabrics vary from sprigged

Francis P. Gaines, The Southern Plantation (New
York, 1924), p. 176.
muslin to rustling taffeta or gleaming satin.

The Southerner's ideal woman was required to be charming and refined, and trained in the social graces so that she could be an entertaining hostess, but she must not be too clever. Certainly she should not be an intellectual. The young girl—beautiful, sparkling, lavishly dressed, and carefree—was the pride of the plantation. Romance began early for the Southern belle, and she married young, often in her early teens. Matrimony changed the gay pleasure-loving girl into a serious and efficient mistress of a plantation. She presided over the hospitable household, pictured in fiction as the scene of almost endless house parties, dances, and dinners. Though provided with slaves, she had to manage and care for them just as for members of her family. Francis Gaines reminds us that tradition speaks only of domestic efficiency and inexhaustible generosity and not of the weariness brought by providing for and indulging the desires of an entire plantation.4 "Till death us do part" was taken literally in the old régime, and Walter Hines Page tells us that men were proud that there were no cases of marital infidelity that the public became aware of and that divorce was a thing unknown.5 In the

4Gaines, The Southern Plantation, p. 177.

opinion of W. J. Cash, it was because they wanted to avoid a sense of guilt regarding their relations with the Negro women on the plantation and to answer Yankee cries about their "lechery" that Southerners escaped into fiction. They set up the convention that the evil did not exist, tried to compensate the woman by glorifying her, and answered the Yankee by proclaiming the superiority of Southern virtue. Francis Gaines reaches this conclusion about the matter: "The whole generalization of woman's character is glittering but it is thin; behind it are the shadows of deep grief that give cause for wonder."^7

Though doubtless he greatly exaggerates, Cash, in The Mind of the South, sums up the situation:

The upshot, in this land of spreading notions of chivalry, was downright gyneolatry. She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid of Astolat and the hunting goddess of the Boeotian hill. And—she was the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. There was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with the clashing of shields and the flourishing of swords for her glory. At the last, I verily believe, the ranks of the Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her that they fought.


^7Gaines, The Southern Plantation, p. 181.
"Woman!!! The center and circumference, diameter, and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all our affections!" Such was the toast which brought twenty great cheers from the audience at the celebration of Georgia's one-hundredth anniversary. . . .

The qualifications for this traditional aristocratic heroine are, first of all, purity, and then idleness, beauty, and dependence. Her fragile beauty and lovely clothes make clear immediately that she leads the idle and pampered existence suitable for the position of wealth and social prominence occupied by her plantation-owner husband or father upon whose will she is dependent. Her duties are to grace the household and to use her power for good, not only by being the softening, gentling influence upon the men in her family but also by being an example for the entire society which looks to her for guidance.

The literary tradition of the glamorous but virtuous Southern heroine was fully developed in the ante-bellum days, was revitalized and often exaggerated by numerous writers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and has continued even into the twentieth century. By the 1850's, however, a realistic attitude was bringing into literature a "democratic" woman, usually accepted as a "lady," though in a new sense of the word. She attained her status, not by birth and wealth but by her inner

---

qualities. The change has continued until often in contemporary fiction there seems to be a decided reaction against the idealized picture, even a complete reversal of the traditional image of the lady. Francis P. Gaines comments that now "on the pages of much of our literature 'the Magdalen has eclipsed the Madonna.'"  

From the Civil War on, the aristocratic society of Southern plantation days has been gradually disappearing. The arrival of new people and the rise of new wealth that accompanied the change from an agrarian culture to an industrial civilization made people aware of the danger of basing social position upon birth or riches. In times of rapidly shifting fortunes the inherent qualities of mind and heart take on greater significance in determining the best in womanhood. During the war and the poverty-filled years following, women exhibited admirable self-reliance and fortitude, showed managerial ability, and even began doing physical labor. They were no longer merely ornamental. Women of excellent character and gentle manners could work with no loss of dignity or prestige.

When education became available to them, women secured training in the useful arts as well as the decorative ones. They were able to go outside their homes for employment, satisfying their desire for creativeness and

---

Gaines, _The Southern Plantation_, p. 176.
benefiting society along with supporting themselves. Gradually they took jobs in industry and entered most of the professions. Employment for pay made many incidental changes in women's lives. They were more nearly equal to and more independent of men than ever before; yet the new freedom and independence brought responsibilities and problems. Though conduct everywhere was becoming freer, women who lived and worked in equality with men, particularly those living alone, had to establish and maintain high standards of behavior in order to be accepted and treated as ladies. Greater freedom for women demanded greater restraint in some ways. They found it advisable to be unobtrusive in conduct and in dress and to remain feminine in manner and in appearance. The working woman needed to show the same good taste in clothes as the traditional lady but with less richness and greater simplicity for a less leisurely and more active way of life. Details such as spotless gloves, a snowy linen handkerchief, and carefully polished shoes, for example, became the mark of the successful woman in business just as of the gracious lady of fashionable social circles.

Increased reading, attending lectures, and traveling opened the way to culture to all intelligent women. So standardized have become their appearance and their behavior that foreigners have had to inquire how one can distinguish between shop girls and debutantes. The
continued spreading of evangelical religious sects also helped remove class distinctions; their appeal was emotional and therefore democratic rather than aristocratic.

Girls who lacked the prestige of birth or wealth were eager to take advantage of the educational and cultural opportunities and to prepare for salaried positions. Thus, ability rather than helplessness came to be admired and respected. Gradually came the realization that women had value for society and should be given a chance to develop their full potentialities. The highest compliment for a woman was not to be called "a lady" but "a real lady" or "a Christian lady" by reason of her abilities and the use she made of them.

In the tradition of idleness for ladies there was particular emphasis on fragility, with great pride in small slender hands and feet as a distinguishing characteristic of aristocracy. A pale complexion of magnolia-like purity suggested not only the innocence but also the helplessness of the Southern heroine. With the change in status comes a corresponding change in the appearance of the ideal. A working woman needs health and physical stamina. The sickly sufferings of the sentimental heroines who have headaches, fainting spells, and long romantic illnesses no longer seem admirable. Broken hearts are not fatal. Girls are larger and stronger but no less attractive.
Descriptions shift to the sweet, natural look that accompanies health; the heroine with pink cheeks and red lips replaces the pallid invalid. Gradually the heroine leaves off her sunbonnet and becomes tanned or freckled. Before the middle of the twentieth century she even indulges in sunbathing.

Women have gained equality with men in some ways. Their relation to men in sex and marriage is still, however, of great concern, with open questioning of the old attitude toward the ideal of feminine chastity and the ambiguous treatment of the male and female adventurers in passion. The protest against the double standard continues, with the desire to achieve for women spiritual and intellectual as well as economic and political equality. Fiction attempts to show that in marriage there should be no dependence but that the best relation results when neither husband nor wife is reduced to an inferior state. Writers try to show men and women equally guilty in deviations from chastity. Both sexes try to convince themselves and the readers that adultery or promiscuity is no worse for the female than for the male characters. Divorce, once rarely encountered in fiction, has become a common subject. The divorcee may have to set strict standards of conduct in order to maintain a good reputation, but she no longer is a "ruined" woman. Even when "lovely woman stoops to folly," she can
still make something worthwhile of her life; she is not, simply as a matter of course, subjected to social ostracism, restricted to an attic bedroom, and expected to do penance the rest of her days.

Southern mothers and grandmothers, remembering their own careers as reigning belles, are usually eager to promote the popularity of their daughters and granddaughters. Even so, "conventional morality" is probably still a much more generally accepted standard in the South than elsewhere in the United States. Regardless of the changes in Southern women, the old ideal of the superior beauty and purity of the Southern girl has become a legend, and legends do not easily die. Carl Carmer, in describing one of the rituals enacted at dances given by members of the Key-Ice fraternity at the University of Alabama, shows how the traditional chivalric code of the Southern gentleman and the legend of the purity of Southern womanhood live on, in theory at least:

During an intermission the lights are turned out and these young men march in carrying flaming brands. At the end of the procession four acolytes attend a long cake of ice. Wheeled in on a cart it glimmers in the torches' flare. Then the leader, mounted on a table in the center of the big gymnasium, lifts a glass cup of water and begins a toast that runs: 'To Woman, lovely woman of the Southland, as pure and chaste as this sparkling water, as cold as this gleaming ice, we lift this cup, and we pledge our hearts and our lives to the protection of her virtue and her chastity.'

---

The fraternity men, probably slightly inebriated during the ceremony, may very well be among the better known seducers on the campus, observes Carmer, but they are enthusiastic in their pledge to preserve virtue and chastity.\textsuperscript{11}

The modern ideal in the South, vital and useful, has accepted new responsibilities but has retained many of the highest qualities of the old tradition. The woman who realizes her potentialities enriches her own life and, directly or indirectly, that of the society of which she is a part. When "lady" is used now, it refers to the woman who is a lady of worth or merit rather than merely a lady by birth.\textsuperscript{12}

The democratic heroine first appears along with the traditional lady in the works of the sentimental novelists. Because many of them were poor and therefore forced to support themselves, these women writers often picture a heroine who becomes a lady because of right feelings and sufficient will power. Since she can rise through making the most of her inherent capacities, she may be from the middle or poorer class of people instead of from the plantation aristocracy. She is from "good people" rather than from

\textsuperscript{11}Carmer, Stars Fell on Alabama, p. 15.

"good family." The democratic woman wants to be of service to her family and to her society. In order to do this, she needs education. She works, usually as a teacher or a writer, and gradually becomes financially independent. Consequently she no longer qualifies as a traditional lady whose status depends upon helplessness and idleness. The romantic writers of the domestic novels give us a pure and beautiful sentimental heroine, regardless of whether she is an aristocratic heiress or a poor orphan. For either the heiress or the orphan there is, almost without exception, eventual happiness with a wealthy husband. Often the girl tearfully but patiently suffers great heartbreak before she reforms him, but through her influence he finally lives a good and usually a Christian life. Thus there begins the establishment of female superiority at the expense of the unworthy male whom the wife dominates by influencing him. Since the only real hope for happiness lies in marriage, any marriage is better than none. There is almost no place for a single woman, and divorce is unthinkable. Though there are a few variations, the favorite sentimental heroine is a slender blonde, with golden ringlets, a pale complexion, large brilliant eyes fringed with jet lashes. For the innocent young girl the costume is white muslin-worn with pearls or, more often, fresh flowers as her only ornaments. As she grows older, her dress is richer and more elaborate,
and sparkling jewels enhance her loveliness.

The local colorists also picture a fragile and delicate Southern girl of absolute purity. She is often poor, illiterate, disillusioned, and even unhappy. The girl from the mountains is shy, proud, and beautiful, somewhat like a wild flower, and faithful always to the man she loves or to his memory. She has a touch of independence in her make-up. When her youthful beauty fades, she can look forward only to becoming an ugly, shrewish crone like her mother and grandmother. In Louisiana there are the pretty and vivacious but equally chaste Acadian and Creole heroines. They consider marriage and motherhood the only possible way of life for a woman. Though the blonde with blue or gray eyes is still the preferred heroine, there are occasional brunette beauties. Pretty clothes and gay balls are very important to these Louisiana belles and also to the older women, who remain charming and attractive regardless of age.

In realistic fiction Ellen Glasgow's ideal is dominant: the useful woman who does not depend upon emotion alone but who develops her inner resources and can live independently of man. The realistic heroines complete the break with tradition which was suggested by the humble orphan girls in sentimental fiction and carried further in the poor and disillusioned heroines described by local color writers. Women in realistic fiction often come from merely "good people." If they are from "good family," they
may marry beneath them to find the vitality lacking in the gentility. The ideal of the helpless, fragile, pale blonde beauty is replaced by a tall brunette heroine, strong and healthy and pretty but not usually beautiful. The sweet and innocent golden-haired blonde is the ineffectual girl who in trying to live by the traditional code of beautiful behavior is defeated by life. It is neither love nor religion but fortitude upon which a woman must depend. Since marriage does not provide the lasting happiness once expected of it, realistic novelists find a place for single women and divorcees, able to live worthwhile lives and to contribute to society. The most successful heroines are those who become self-supporting and who find something besides love and marriage to live by. Their lives are no longer tied to one emotion. They develop their capabilities and cultivate self-reliance so that they can lead useful lives either in marriage or in careers. The best that women can hope for is to live honorable and undefeated lives, to live gallantly but without delight.

The heroines in the works of women writers of the past thirty or forty years are unusually varied. Many more of them are from the middle and lower classes socially and economically than in the earlier fiction. A wholesome appearance, and prettiness perhaps, rather than beauty is a requirement for the modern heroine. As for clothes, the
"simple linen dress" is mentioned far more often than gay and colorful silks and satins with laces, ribbons, and ruffles. Getting an education and having a profession or working at some job outside the home are commonplaces. In a world of changing values Southern women depend upon themselves rather than upon a traditional code of manners; yet it is the past, in part at least, that often helps them find the strength to stand the disappointments of their lives. Though the single woman has become firmly established in modern fiction, most women—look to marriage for their greatest hope for fulfillment. They do not see it as a promise of eternal bliss, however. The double standard for sexual morality has not disappeared, but purity of the heroine is not so important as it was in the nineteenth century. Even so, deviations from the code of chastity often bring unhappiness, bitterness, and frustration. Modern heroines are courageous and able to endure so that they are seldom actually defeated by life; they are just as seldom really happy.

During the past century the Southern heroine has changed from a girl who comes from a wealthy aristocratic background or attains wealth and position through marriage to a woman who is from any class, even the poverty-stricken lower group. She establishes herself through inner worth instead of through wealth and background. She is now very
often self-supporting and therefore less dependent upon her husband than the ante-bellum lady. Since economic and social pressures do not make it imperative that she marry, some of the heroines are single women. The greatest hope for happiness is in love and marriage, but women no longer depend upon it from either. Writers have gradually put less and less emphasis upon beauty and elaborate dress. Heroines are attractive, usually pretty, but seldom truly beautiful. They dress simply. The fragile, sickly blonde who has golden curls, blue eyes, pure white complexion, and dainty hands and feet has given way to a strong healthy young woman more often brunette than blonde. The "innocence and purity" symbolized by the white and gold heroine dressed in pure white has lost significance.

Through the entire period Southern women have felt great dissatisfaction with the double standard of sexual morality. By the end of the nineteenth century they are speaking out against it. Only in the very youngest writers, however, are there women who follow the same code as the men. Violating the ideal of chastity shows the spirit of independence in modern women but does not apparently bring them happiness and satisfaction; it merely increases their problems and their frustrations.

The qualifications of purity, idleness, fragility, beauty, wealth, aristocracy, dependence, happiness, pride, and religious faith for Southern heroines have all declined
in importance in the period between the 1850's and the 1950's. There seems to be no invariable quality unless it is the patience, endurance, or fortitude, which Ellen Glasgow has aptly designated "the vein of iron." It does not bring happiness or success in any particular sense; it merely prevents a woman's defeat by life.

In *A Certain Measure* Ellen Glasgow very neatly sums up the changing literary attitude toward the Southern woman in relation to two preeminent myths which she thinks have had a peculiarly strong influence over the novel. The myth of woman as an inspiration dominated fiction from Samuel Richardson to John Galsworthy. This picture, Miss Glasgow indicates, is actually more a reflection of man's sentimentality than an analysis of woman's nature, but it gave us the idealized figure known as the traditional Southern lady. Then in the post-war years it was overthrown by the modern myth of woman as an impediment. The cult of an inspiration, once supreme, was damaged by time and change but lingered on until the end of World War I. Then, according to the same writer, "the inferior myth of woman as an impediment was born of an irregular union between democracy and disenchantment."

---


In discussing the disappearance of exalted illusions in the years following World War I, Miss Glasgow says that "male disillusionment with virtue, which had thickened like dust, invaded the whole flattened area of modern prose fiction. By some ironic reversal of the situation, women, for so long the ideal of man, became, in a literary sense, the obstacle to all his higher activities." Men writers, she goes on to say, have established the idea in modern fiction that only men have had the disillusioning experience of pursuing the infinite and attaining the finite; thus they arrive at the axiom that "while man desires more than woman, woman desires only more of man." Their theory is so firmly held that no man and few woman writers have disputed it, though she herself considers the capacity to yearn for what is not "a privilege, or an infirmity, that is independent of sex. If man has dreamed of Helen and embraced Penelope, woman, condemned to a more prosaic lot, has sighed for fleet-footed Achilles while she was embraced by Odysseus. . . ."\footnote{Glasgow, \textit{A Certain Measure}, pp. 232-233.} \footnote{Glasgow, \textit{A Certain Measure}, p. 234.} \footnote{Glasgow, \textit{A Certain Measure}, p. 234.}
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


Chopin, Kate O'Flaherty. At Fault. St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1890.


274


Holmes, Mrs. Mary Jane. 'Lena Rivers. New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1875.

Tempest and Sunshine. New York: G. W. Dillingham, Publisher, 1886.


Virginia Life in Fiction. Dallas: Privately Published, 1922.


——. Segments of Southern Thought. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1938.


**B. PERIODICALS**


Hicks, Granville. "Eudora Welty," College English, XIV (November 1952), 69-76.


"Some 'Lady Novelists' and Their Works: As Seen from a Public Library," The Literary World, XIII (June 3, 1882), 184-186.


C. ESSAYS AND ARTICLES IN COLLECTIONS


D. UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS


VITA

Marie Fletcher received a B.A. degree from Northwestern State College, Natchitoches, and an M.A. degree in English from Louisiana State University. Before returning to the university to work toward a doctorate in English, she attended several summer sessions at Mississippi State University, where she took courses in English and history. She has taught in the public schools of Louisiana, first at Verda High School and then at Lake Charles High School. In 1948 she became a member of the first faculty of Francis T. Nicholls Junior College of Louisiana State University, Thibodaux. At present she is an associate professor of English at the college, now named Francis T. Nicholls State College.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate:  Marie Fletcher

Major Field:  English

Title of Thesis:  The Southern Heroine in the Fiction of Representative Southern Women Writers, 1850-1960

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

November 20, 1962