THREE EARLY NOVELS OF POLITICAL SATIRE AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE POST-CIVIL WAR PERIOD

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PREFACE

This study grew out of my interest in certain aspects of American and English literature. While studying the American novel under Dr. Cecil B. Williams, I became particularly interested in the 19th century novel. While studying Victorian prose under Dr. Agnes Berrigan, I became interested in the reaction of such men as Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold to the advent of an industrial society; and because my major field is American literature, I naturally became curious about the response of American writers to the industrialization which occurred in America following the Civil War. The application of this curiosity to my interest in the 19th century American novel led to this study, which deals with three 19th century novels that reflect the Gilded Age.

I am grateful to many for help with this thesis: to Professors John Ball and James Denham of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, for sharing with me their extensive bibliographic knowledge of 19th century American literature and for allowing me to use books from their private libraries; to the Miami University Library for its generous loaning of material; to my wife, Jane, for patiently typing the manuscript; to Dr. Clinton Keeler, my second reader, for his prompt and valuable comments; and especially to Dr. Cecil B. Williams, my major adviser, for his aid through all stages of the preparation and writing of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	HISTORY AND DEFINITION	1
	Social and Economic Background	1
	Literary Background	7
	Justification of Study	15
	Lives and Works	16
	Satire	26
II.	SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVELS	31
	Introduction	31
	Synopses	32
	Politics in the Service of Big Business	35
	The Lobby	39
	Politicians in Service to Themselves	43
	Speculation	48
	Morality and Ability of Politicians	51
	Hypocrisy, Pretense, and Ostentation	55
	Summary	65
III.	THE LITERARY VALUES IN THE NOVELS	66
	Introduction	66
	The Gilded Age	67
	Honest John Vane	75
	Democracy	81
IV.	EVALUATION AND SUMMARY	87
	Introduction	87
	Worth as Social History	87
	Literary Importance	91
	Conclusion: Interaction of Literature and Society	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY		94

CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND DEFINITION

Social and Economic Background

Immediately following the Civil War, the shape of modern America began to show itself in earnest. The War served as a cataclysmic transition from the agrarian, comparatively placid antebellum society to the postbellum society characterized by a rapidly expanding industrialism which produced the solid beginning of our modern capitalistic society and the abuses of widespread private and public corruption, greed, disillusionment, protest, and revolt. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner christened this generation following the Civil War the "Gilded Age." Others have given it names such as the "Tragic Era" or the "Great Barbecue."

The period referred to is roughly the twenty-five years between 1865 and 1890--the year which marks the end of the War and the year when it became apparent that realism as a literary device had become firmly established.[1] For this study the years between 1865-1878 are the most important; about 1878 is the time when throughout the nation could be seen a new political, economic, and cultural unity. It also marks the year in which recovery from the financial collapse of 1873 became nearly complete.[2] The year 1873

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[1] Russell Blankenship, American Literature As an Expression of the National Mind (Rev. ed., New York, 1949), p. 477.

[2] Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York, 1927), pp. 405-406. This book, which is the best and most widely used source of general historical information about the post-War period, has been my chief source of material for the first section of this chapter. In this section,

marks an important boundary across the period: "On the one side lies the sunshine of buoyant commercial prosperity; on the other the gloom of depression, economy and poverty....,"[3] the inevitable result of the hazardous business practices and the alarming moral tone of the day.

The period is one of the most varied and complex in our history. The machine age came upon the country, bringing with it the centralization and consolidation of business and industry, which resulted in concentration of population in cities and the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of "big business." There resulted, also, slum conditions in the cities and inhumane working conditions which were later to help cause unrest and revolt among the working people.

In the South, the vanquished were trying desperately to adjust to a new order and to salvage, as best they could, some substance from the ruins of defeat; the Negro, bewildered and dazed, was taking his first halting and insecure steps in his newly gained quasi-freedom. The frontier was disappearing. The West was filling up with settlers, and the smoke of industry was beginning to belch forth as far west as the Mississippi and beyond.

In the nation as a whole, unbelievable corruption and shocking public apathy existed within a deepening and broadening American culture.

> ...The industrial North was pressing forward with a speed which seemed to leave all old landmarks behind and which year by year wrought new social changes. ...Economically the nation of 1865--a nation which had hardly advanced to the Missouri, which used iron alone, which had a modest railway system and but one and a half billion dollars invested in manufacturing--was a world away from the nation of 1878--a nation which had pressed to the Pacific, which was producing huge quantities of steel, which had the finest railway system in the world and which had invested nearly three

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in order to avoid the overworked *ibid.*, only direct quotations from Nevins and material from other sources have been footnoted.

[3] Ibid., p. 290.

billions in manufacturing.[4]

In 1859 there were one hundred and forty thousand manufacturing establishments in the country; in 1869 there were two hundred and fifty-two thousand, "with a commensurate increase in number of employees."[5] And this increase marked expansion in both area and in kinds of goods produced. It was accompanied, too, by large scale consolidation and centralization. Small, individually managed businesses began to be replaced by larger factories and plants managed by corporate boards. Old industries began to concentrate capital and engage in wage scale standardization. New methods of production, such as produced readymade clothing, were found. Financial institutions responded to this boom by inflating credit and by founding savings banks. New financial institutions such as insurance companies, many unsound and speculative, flourished. Between 1865 and 1875, forty trust companies were born.

Although the modern steel age was born with the invention of the Bessemer process in 1856, it did not reach maturity until after the War, at which time it became of the utmost importance economically. The expansion of the railroads, while dealing a fatal blow to the commercial traffic on the Mississippi and other rivers, was a factor in increasing the growth of many other industries. Their reach into the cattle-rich plains states, along with the invention of refrigeration and the appearance of such men as Philip P. Armour, Nelson Morris, and Gustavus F. Swift, made possible the development between 1865 and 1873 of the American meat packing industry on an international scale. As a result of the development of the

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[4]Ibid., p. 31.

[5]Ibid., p. 33.

Pennsylvania oil fields, oil capital and speculation grew amazingly fast, with "...new companies springing up every hour."[6] The need to transport this oil led in 1865 to the first extensive pipeline, which was soon followed by others. The tank car came along about the same time. Refineries sprang up like mushrooms in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and other cities.

The westward expansion of industry was reflected in the census of 1870: against an 80% increase during the ten year period for the nation as a whole, industry in Indiana had doubled in size (number of establishments); it had trebled in Illinois and Missouri. In addition to the meat packing and flour milling in the Northwest, there were an important watch factory, a stockyards, and a Pullman car works in or near Chicago; a pottery works in Peoria; woolen mills in Atchison; a farm machinery factory in Moline; a foundry in Quincy; and breweries in Milwaukee and St. Louis. Meanwhile, in the East industry continued to grow and to centralize in strategic centers.

In that confused and turbulent generation, America first felt the entire social impact of the machine, with the consequence that a society mainly decentralized and agrarian gave way, with catastrophic suddenness, to one that was highly centralized, urban, industrial.[7]

Of all the striking and important social changes--and they were many and varied--brought about by this upheaval, the body of writing with which this study is concerned deals mainly with these: The imprudent speculation of the period, the personal, business, and political corruption of the period, and the close and corrupt relationship of politics and business. That such abuses should grow out of the turmoil and aggressive growth of

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[6] Ibid., p. 39.

[7] Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 3.

the period is not unnatural. In general, the basic reasons for them have to do with the War.

The heavy wartime expenditures provided a fountain of government money for speculators and jobbers, "...pushing, hardened men [who] brought to the front by the turmoil, observed a coarser lower standard of conduct."[8] The War brought about a good deal of greenback (paper-money) inflation. As a result businesses, taking leave of prudence and good sense, over-extended and ran into excesses of speculation. The nation, with its concern turned almost entirely on the War, overlooked or neglected abuses and evils committed by the businessmen and politicians who often resorted to appalling machinations in order to cover up their imprudent speculations or to escape just consequences for dealings in which they had no moral right to engage. The War, as wars have from the beginning, disturbed the social order: "Certain sections and classes lost their power and wealth [the Southern and Eastern 'Aristocracy,' for example] and others seized both."[9] The thousands of aggressive men who had rushed into speculations made possible by the War became the <u>nouveaux riches</u>.

There were also reasons connected with the national expansion, the principal one being the emergence of the West with its "unschooled, unpolished inhabitants."[10] In general, "...much of the trouble lay in the immense growth of national wealth unaccompanied by any corresponding growth in civic responsibility."

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[8]Nevins, p. 78.

[9]Ibid., p. 178.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

The story of the infamous Tweed political machine is revelatory of the time. Reformers were constantly presenting concrete evidence of the machine's abuses, but not even the best citizens responded. Some influential newspapers consistently defended Tweed and his band. One (The New York Sun) even proposed erecting a statue to Tweed. In 1870, John Jacob Astor, Moses Taylor, and Marshall O. Roberts, three of New York's leading businessmen, were hoaxed into publishing a statement that the Tweed ring was correctly administering the city's finances.[12]

The New York Tribune in 1867 published a series of articles showing that it was a rare bill that passed through the New York Legislature unaccompanied by the wholesale buying and selling of votes. Indeed, some legislators in the same body introduced bills designed to harm vested interests in order to collect blackmail money from the interests in return for killing the bill. "The looting of the Erie Railroad[13] was accomplished with the help of the easily corrupted legislators of only two states, New York and New Jersey. It was a fairly simple business."[14] The Nation stated that "...there is hardly a legislature in the country which is not suspected of corruption; there is hardly a court over which the same suspicion does not hang."[15] Of the "moguls" or the "captains of industry" or "the lords of creation" of the time--such men as Gould, Vanderbilt, Cooke, Fisk, etc.:

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[12]The three gentlemen made a six-hour examination of doctored books.

[13]Stewart H. Holbrook, The Age of the Moguls (Garden City, 1953), pp. 25 ff.

[14]Ibid., p. 49.

[15]The Nation, 6 (1868), 386.

> The best of them made business "deals," purchased immunity, and did other things which in 1860 or 1880...were considered smart by their fellow Americans, but which today would give pause to the most conscientiously dishonest promoter. ...Under present day rules, almost every [one of these men] would face a good hundred years in prison.[16]

Such was the state of society in the Gilded Age.

Literary Background

The Gilded Age was an "in-between" period in literature. On the one side was the romantic idealism of antebellum America; on the other was the realism which was to evolve after the War. The Gilded Age marked the transition.[17] In spite of this or perhaps because of this, the literature of the period was far-ranging and highly experimental: romantic, sentimental and moral, local color, realistic. The "European" type of romanticism was breathing its last. The New England poets and the Southern Hayne and Lanier held forth for a time, but if they were replaced by men like Stedman and Stoddard, they were not replaced in vigor or popularity. There was Whitman, of course, but his individualism precludes simple classification.[18] The romanticism which survived became peculiarly American and lived with a group of fiction writers called the local colorists, who in their "sketches," short stories, and novels fused romanticism with other techniques, especially with realism.

Local color literature was not altogether a phenomenon of the post-

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[16]Holbrook, Foreward, pp. ix-x.

[17]Floyd Stovall, "The Decline of Romantic Idealism, 1855-1871," _Transitions in American Literary History_, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (Durham, North Carolina, 1953), pp. 315-378, and Robert Falk, "The Rise of Realism, 1871-1891," _ibid._, pp. 381-442.

[18]G. Harrison Orians, _A Short History of American Literature_, (New York, 1940), pp. 191-239.

Civil War period; many local color elements were manifest in the work of such earlier writers as Brackenridge or Crevecoeur, but the genre enjoyed its healthiest state after the War, especially during the eighties.[19] It found early embodiment during the period in the work of humorists like David Ross Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby), Henry Wheeler Shaw (Josh Billings), and Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward), who utilized dialect, coarse native humor, and cracker barrel philosophy in their material.[20] Slightly later and somewhat more seriously, such writers as Bret Harte portrayed the color of the West. The South was pictured by George W. Cable and Joel Chandler Harris, the Midwest by James Whitcomb Riley, the Northeast by Sarah Orne Jewett.[21] The border states had James Lane Allen. Probably the most exotic of the local color writing came from the pen of Lafacadio Hearn, who introduced Japan to American readers.

As a group the local colorists catered to the taste of Americans for knowledge of life in other sections of the nation or abroad. They exploited what was unique and colorful about the culture of their own area[22]--Cable, the Creole culture of New Orleans; Harris, the Negro folktales of the South; Harte, the rough and colorful life of the western mining camps. Provincialism was dying out after the War. The War and the advance of transportation and communication facilities made for a new unity in the nation; consequently, people were becoming interested in the culture and

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[19]Ibid., pp. 215-239.

[20]Literary History of the United States (Rev. ed. in one vol., New York, 1953), pp. 741-745. Hereafter this reference will appear as LHUS.

[21]Orians, pp. 217, ff.

[22]Ibid., p. 216.

manners of their neighbors. Local color to this day remains a part of the literary fabric of the nation.

Although some of the local color writing was shallow, much of it exhibited a depth of understanding and an insight into human nature; and although much of it was romantic in emphasis, some writers employed a great deal of realistic technique and attitude. Chief among these were Edward Eggleston, Ed Howe, and Joseph Kirkland. Eggleston's The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871) is full of realistic details of life in backwoods Indiana in 1850. Ed Howe's The Story of a Country Town (1883) is a bitter and realistic account of life in a small rural town. Kirkland's Zury (1887) gives a realistic, stern account of Illinois farm life. These men and their novels serve as pioneers in the development of 19th century realism, which is manifested principally in the many novels of William Dean Howells (1837-1920), the definer and chief proponent of American realism during the 19th century; Henry James (1843-1916); and Hamlin Garland (1860-1940).[23]

Realism was not new to our literature or to any literature. Nor is it simply an antithesis of romanticism, as is sometimes thought. It is more nearly correct to say that it evolved in writing as a means of giving romantic material verisimilitude. Romantics have used it in this way for generations; therefore, it has often been mingled with other techniques, as it was mingled with romance in American local color writings. Realism is also a relative term; its meaning may change with the writer or critic who defines it.[24] But in general terms, realism differs from local color or romance in that the realist portrays nature, life, and people objectively,

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[23] LHUS, pp. 748-1020, passim.

[24] Ibid., p. 878.

honestly, and actually for the sake of portraying life objectively and honestly. The romanticist deals with the unique, exotic, imaginative, or ideal effect. This is not to say that the realist may not picture life as it ought to be, as well as the way it actually is. He may--as long as it is apparent that life can be the way he says it is. Nor is this to say that the realist may not arrange facts and details in an affective manner in order to convey to the reader a certain impression.[25] Without this device, he would hardly be an artist.

Content as well as technique must be considered in a discussion of realism or romanticism; for technique may be determined by purpose.[26] A review of a few of the facts of the Gilded Age should demonstrate that it was fertile ground for the growth of realism, especially when compared with antebellum America. The democracy which existed in America before the Civil War was more than a system of government; it embodied within its precepts an entire way of life based on an ideal--an ideal envisioned and articulated by Lincoln and Jefferson and by antebellum men of letters like Whittier, Lowell, and Emerson. It was the stuff that romanticism is made from. But the sort of decentralized, agrarian, intellectual society that they imagined and championed could not endure the onslaughts of the machine as directed by its potent master, democratic capitalism. Blatant materialism, urban society, fluid population, easy money tolled the bell for such a way of life.[27]

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[25]William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1936), pp. 357-359.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Taylor, pp. 21-35.

Out of this clash between the pre-War and post-War worlds arose realism, both as an intellectual movement and as a literary attitude. It was not wholly a revolt against either order; it was more in the nature of a compromise between science and materialism on the one side and "the inherited ideals of the enlightenment and the traditional American faith in the individual"[28] on the other. Even so, in a small measure the rise of realism can be attributed to a revolt against romanticism. In a far greater measure, however, it can be attributed to the rise of science[29] and materialism. The industrial expansion, the movement from East to West, the waves of immigration[30]--all this changed the character and shape of the population. Public education heeded the demands of the times, which were to de-emphasize the classics and to concentrate on the social sciences and the sciences. Men connected with education, like William Holmes McGuffey, were not above inculcating materialistic principles into students of the time. The frontier contributed humor and freedom from convention to the American character. All these things, and more, favored the realistic outlook.[31]

The influence of foreign writers, with whom realism was an established literary fact, was no doubt important[32]; but to gauge this influence is both difficult and dangerous. It will, however, be mentioned in specific con-

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[28]Falk, p. 440.

[29]This is meant in the specific sense and in the sense of industrial expansion.

[30]In response to heavy demands of industry: in 1865 not quite ¼ million came in; in 1873, nearly ½ million. Nevins, p. 48. And immigration continued to rise after 1873.

[31]Stovall, pp. 376-378.

[32]Falk, p. 384.

nections in a later section. One might suppose that the War, so shocking to national sensibilities, should have had an important influence on realism. And it did in the case of De Forest and his successors--but in this case only.[33]

Other reasons can be deduced from the mass of facts about the Gilded Age. We have already seen how the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of big business interests resulted in corruption and debased social conditions. The intelligentia and the victims of the social and economic abuses began to realize that they were not the masters of the situation in which thev found themselves.[34] The advent of Darwinism and other scientific thought is no doubt related to this. The social complexities of the Gilded Age were an alien environment for the "individual."

> Romanticism was ended by science, technology, invention, in short, by the industrial revolution and the subsequent development of manufacturing and its allied interests, commerce, and finance. Industry stood for the monetary profit, material progress, and the rule of common sense and expediency; romanticism stood for high idealism and the life of the spirit.[35]

Realism, then, was the compromise. Of course, literary realism did not have an easy time of it, and did not become firmly established until about 1890.[36]

In Victorian England, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and others led a vigorous and eloquent body of protest called forth by the industrial revolution. In America, how was industrialism with all its ramifications accepted?

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[33]Stovall, pp. 376-378.

[34]Blankenship, p. 413.

[35]Ibid., p. 392.

[36]Ibid., p. 477 ff.

Naturally, most men accepted it without thinking simply because they didn't know how to think or didn't care to. As in England, some men of sensitive minds welcomed the machine, usually with certain reservations. Again as in England, some men protested.

Henry George (1839-1897) was an important early critic of the Gilded Age, who has had far-ranging though subtle influence on American economic theory.[37] George's ideas were essentially products of antebellum culture, and they found expression in the Jeffersonian concept of natural right in land. He is most famous for his eccentric single-tax proposal, but his real worth lay in his deep sense of democratic humanitarianism and in his broad grasp of socio-economic problems. Progress and Poverty (1879) is his most famous book.[38]

One of the most worthwhile men of the time was Edwin Lawrence Godkin (1831-1902). He was not only a very competent critic of what he so aptly termed the "chromo civilization" of his time, but he also brought to the age a highmindedness and "gentility" that it sorely needed. The Nation, a weekly newspaper which he founded in 1865, was probably his chief contribution. This brilliantly written, highminded, caustic journal blows through the age like a breath of sweet, fresh air.[39] Both George and Godkin had minds larger and more sensitive than most other men, and they used them to good advantage.

Two critics more important to literary history were Edward Bellamy

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[37] Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization (New York, 1949), III, 142.

[38] Taylor, pp. 43-57.

[39] Blankenship, pp. 425-427.

and Walt Whitman. Optimistic Walt Whitman in Democratic Vistas (1871) wrote one of the very earliest and sternest attacks on the Gilded Age.[40] In the Utopian Looking Backward (1888) Bellamy wrote the most popularly successful criticism of the Gilded Age. He was one who welcomed science and industry and called for more, but he insisted on reform which would bring about equal enjoyment of the wealth, as well as equal responsibility in producing wealth. His book is a very detailed account of a socialist Utopia.[41] If Bellamy was impractical, he was also "an extraordinarily gifted author and thinker, who, in many ways, gave completest voice to the American middle-class protest against plutocracy."[42]

All in all, during the seventies and eighties there were numerous protests written and panaceas proposed, which took a variety of written forms, often that of the economic treatise. This thesis is concerned with the prose fiction--the novels of the time which reflect the age in that they protest social and moral abuses of the industrial age. During the latter eighties there was a steady production of them, and during the nineties the number rose to flood level. To be sure, they constituted what may be called a well-defined literary movement.[43] This study is concerned specifically with three pioneer examples of this movement, with the earliest

[40] Orians, pp. 194-195.

[41] Taylor, pp. 184-213.

[42] Ibid., p. 210.

[43] During the latter seventies and early eighties, such novels appeared intermittently; seven appeared in 1888; eleven in 1889; fifteen in 1890; twenty-two in 1891; twenty-four in 1892; seventeen in 1893; twenty-two in 1894; seventeen in each of the years 1895, 1896, and 1897; eleven in 1898; twelve in 1899; seventeen in 1900. At least two hundred and fifty volumes of such fiction, mostly novels, were published between 1870 and 1901. Taylor, pp. 58-59.

novels of this type of any apparent merit. They are: The Gilded Age (1873) by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, Honest John Vane (1875) by J. William De Forest, and Democracy (1880) by Henry Adams.

Justification of Study

Apparently, there exists no detailed, exhaustive study of these novels as a group. Such a study is, however, suggested by broader studies concerned with the American novel and the Gilded Age. For example, Cowie says,

> The evils that /Honest John Vane/ reports were symptomatic of serious disorders that menaced the nation as a whole in the Gilded Age. Other writers were treating similar abuses in various fashions--Mark Twain in...The Gilded Age, Henry Adams.../in/ Democracy, and Edward Bellamy in... Looking Backward.[44]

Similar groupings may be found elsewhere: "/The American politician's/ career was studied by such early realists as Mark Twain in The Gilded Age, De Forest in Honest John Vane, Henry Adams in Democracy."[45] Sometimes such groupings are diluted with works which are not novels or which for other reasons do not invite classification with The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy.[46] In the light of these positive suggestions, there are certain negative statements which also aid in making such a study as this attractive. DeVoto's rather contradictory statements are a good illustration of this: First he says that "It must be remembered that the

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[44]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of The American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 518. Looking Backward is excluded from emphasis herein not only because it comes slightly later than the other three (1888), but also because being a Utopian novel, it is a novel of "romantic comparison" rather than a novel of satire and realism, as essentially are Age, Vane, and Democracy.

[45]Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, 1789-1939 (New York, 1940), p. 208.

[46]See for example: Orians, pp. 192-194.

incredible Era of Grant has, besides The Gilded Age, no other embodiment except the novel in which Henry Adams quiveringly perceives that civilization has collapsed...[47] He follows this statement with: "Alone among the novelists of the time [Twain] concerns himself with the national muck."[48] It is not rare for critics to overlook or disregard either Honest John Vane or Democracy, although others are not so pontifical as DeVoto.

At any rate, although this study came about as a result of a synthesis of interests,[49] it is certainly supported by the views of the critics of the Gilded Age. But before the novels are examined in detail, two things remain to be said: first, something of the authors' lives and their other works and, second, a few words of definition.

Lives and Works

The career of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910) is so generally known to students of American literature that to relate it in detail here would be superfluous. But there are a few facts about his life that should be kept in mind in connection with this study. For one thing, it should be remembered that he grew to manhood in antebellum society; and, more important, that these formative years were spent in Missouri on the edge of the frontier. The manner in which he acquired his education is of some importance also. Like De Forest and Howells, he lacked (or avoided) a university education. Twain's education was gained in print shops, like that of so many other 19th century writers; on the river as a pilot; and

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[47]Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1932), pp. 286-287.

[48]Ibid., p. 287.

[49]See Preface, p. iii.

in saloons and newspaper offices of western mining camps and boomtowns. Because this study is concerned with The Gilded Age and with no other of his books and with Twain's character only as reflected in this book, the great enigma of the man--his contradictory actions and his alleged compromise with the shallow age in which he lived--is not of direct importance here.

A much smaller and less interesting problem that is of importance here, however, is that of the dual authorship of The Gilded Age. The problem is that it is difficult to know how much praise or damnation the world owes to Twain's now less famous collaborator, Charles Dudley Warner.[50] Because of this difficulty, Warner's involvement with The Gilded Age is ignored as much as possible by most critics, and the novel is widely discussed and thought of as Twain's alone. Although there is some justification for this attitude, it cannot be assumed without some danger, because some chapters are known to be Warner's.

The collaboration and the novel grew out of a dinner party conversation between the Clemenses and the Warners, during which the ladies present complained about the state of American novels and suggested that Twain and Warner write one that would suit their tastes. The men accepted the challenge readily. Twain welcomed the joint authorship because he was not willing at that time to undertake a long work of fiction alone, and for a long time he had had the idea of writing a tale around the character of his mother's cousin, James Lampton, who became the model for Colonel Sellers.[51]

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[50]More famous than Twain in 1873.

[51]Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography (New York, 1912), I, 476-477. Before this time Twain had written only two long books, The Innocents Abroad (1869) and Roughing It (1872).

Work on the novel began immediately. According to Paine, Twain quickly wrote the first eleven chapters and Warner followed with the next twelve. Thereafter the collaborators wrote alternate chapters in miscellaneous order. Sometimes they wrote different parts of the same chapter.[52] But there is good reason to believe that they worked more closely together than Paine indicates, although the division of labor was roughly the same.[53] This point will be elaborated upon somewhat in Chapter III.

Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900), editor, essayist, and novelist, was born in Plainfield, Massachusetts, and graduated with honors from Hamilton College. He published first in the _Knickerbocker Magazine_ while he was still an undergraduate. He published his first book, which was based on a commencement oration, in 1851. For the next nine years he was a railroad surveyor in Missouri, an experience which was to prove useful when he helped write _The Gilded Age_. He spent the ensuing few years, including the War years, in newspaper work and at winning a reputation as an urbane wit with his essays. However, the three novels which he wrote after _The Gilded Age_ proved to be devoid of this earlier wit. _A Little Journey into the World_ (1889), _The Golden House_ (1895), and _The Fortune_ (1899) are stern, moral treatments of the responsibility of great wealth. Although Warner was at his best as an essayist, his novels were extremely popular with the public. He also served as editor of the popular _Library of the World's Best Literature_.[54] Despite Warner's considerable accomplish-

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[52]For a detailed account of the division of labor, see the long footnote in Paine, I, 477.

[53]Ernest E. Leisy, "Mark Twain's Part in _The Gilded Age_," _American Literature_, VIII (1937), 445-447.

[54]Kunitz and Haycraft, _American Authors, 1600-1900_ (New York, 1938), pp. 785-786.

ments, DeVoto is probably correct in his judgment that "Warner's intelligence was pleasant, shallow, conforming, and unoriginal."[55]

The consensus is, and it is corroborated by the many accounts of the division of work on The Gilded Age, that the romance of the novel comes from Warner and the satire from Twain.[56] The accounts show[57] that Twain was probably responsible for the main plot and for the main characters, Colonel Sellers and Senator Dilworthy. Warner was probably responsible for the lesser plots involving love interest and sentimental analysis and for the characters such as Ruth Bolton and Philip Sterling.[58]

This does not complicate things so very much. In fact, it lends itself rather well to the organization of this study, as will be demonstrated in later chapters. There is one major difficulty, of course, which is that Twain assumed responsibility for the defects of the novel, even if he had nothing to do with their creation, because he agreed to them.

John William De Forest (1826-1906) was born May 31, 1826, at Humphreysville (now Seymour), Connecticut. His father, a cotton merchant and manufacturer, died when De Forest was thirteen years old. It had been the family tradition to study at Yale, but because of ill health, John William broke this tradition and in 1846 went abroad to visit his brother, who ran a mission school at Beirut, Syria.[59] He returned home after two

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[55]DeVoto, p. 286.

[56]Cowie, p. 606.

[57]e.g., Paine, I, 477.

[58]Philip S. Foner, Mark Twain: Social Critic (New York, 1958), pp. 70-71.: gives a similar analysis of responsibility.

[59]Kunitz and Haycraft, p. 209.

years of traveling in the Near East and wrote his History of the Indians of Connecticut (1851), the production of which was underwritten by an historical society. The book was unique and original, and it is used to this day by ethnologists.[60]

The years 1850-1855 De Forest spent traveling in Europe. During this trip he applied himself to the perfection of languages, especially Italian and French. In Florence he translated Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables into Italian in order to improve his knowledge of that language. During these years he also cultivated a knowledge and taste for French literature--Rousseau, Voltaire, Michelet, Stendhal, Dumas, George Sand, Balzac--an interest which he pursued the rest of his life,[61] and which surely must have had something to do with his development as a writer of "advanced realism, before realism was known by name [in America]."[62] During the eighties he read Zola's novels as rapidly as they came out and Tolstoi's as rapidly as they were translated. He knew English literature thoroughly, also. He alludes to Scott, Dickens, and George Eliot in Miss Ravenel's Conversion. He especially admired Thackeray.[63]

Upon his return to America in 1856, he married Miss Harriet Stilliman Shepard, a brilliant classical scholar, and settled down in New Haven to a literary career, leaving only occasionally to visit in Charleston, where he was when the War broke out in 1861.[64]

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[60]Gordon S. Haight, Introduction to Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, by J. William De Forest (New York, 1955), p. v.

[61]Ibid.

[62]W. D. Howells, My Literary Passions (New York, 1895), p. 223.

[63]Haight, pp. v-vi.

[64]Ibid., p. vi.

De Forest's first novel, Witching Times, a story of the Salem witchcraft delusion, was published in 1856. It was a promising beginning for the novelist, primarily because of its distinguished style. Seacliff; or, The Mystery of the Westervelts came out in 1859. In this novel De Forest demonstrated for the first time his ability, unique in its time in America, to draw realistic female characters. Soon after war came, De Forest entered into it on the northern side as a captain.[65] He did not end his service until January, 1868, after serving six years. His post-War assignment was in the Bureau of Freedmen and Refugees at Greenville, South Carolina. But his army service did not altogether stop his literary production. As a soldier he contributed articles to magazines such as Harper's New Monthly Magazine, in which he described his battle experiences. Characteristic titles were "The First Time Under Fire" and "The Attack on Port Hudson." Much of this material was incorporated into Miss Ravenel's Conversion (1867),[66] a novel having the distinction of being "...the first American novel which may be called realistic in a modern sense."[67] It is, in addition, the first of the few realistic novels about the Civil War.[68] It is a novel of great scope, having to do with several aspects of the War on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, and it may very well be De Forest's highest achievement as a writer.

Shortly before the War, De Forest had published two non-fiction books--

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[65]Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction, an Historical and Critical Survey (New York, 1936), p. 167.

[66]Haight, p. vii.

[67]Van Doren, pp. 117-118.

[68]Quinn, p. 167.

Oriental Acquaintance (1856) and European Acquaintance (1858)--in which he described his trips abroad. Overland (1870-71),[69] the novel that followed Miss Ravenel, is usually overlooked or ignored by critics.[70] It is a realistic-local-color-adventure story laid in the West and Southwest about the middle of the nineteenth century. It is a remarkable work considering its birthdate, and even more remarkable considering that its author never in his life traveled west of the Mississippi. Extensive visits to the Yale Library and realistic, skillful treatment of character served him nearly as well. Next De Forest wrote Kate Beaumont (1872), the novel which Howells thought was De Forest's best. To write about a feud between two South Carolina families, De Forest drew upon his knowledge of the South, which he gained as a frequent visitor before the War and as a less welcome visitor during and after the War. It was marked by the realistic portrait of the more unpleasant side of life under the southern aristocracy system--marked to the point of foreshadowing Caldwell and Faulkner.[71]

The Wetherell Affair (1873) was a not very artistically successful murder mystery. In 1875 he published Honest John Vane, the novel of political satire with which this study is concerned. He followed it the next year with another novel of the same type, Playing with Mischief. In this work, however, he focused his satire almost entirely on corrupt lobbying in Washington and on the female lobbyist in particular. The work exhibited the virtues found in much of his other work--advanced

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[69]It was published serially.

[70]Quinn mentions it, however. P. 169.

[71]Haight, p. xx

realism, skillful character portrayal, distinguished style. Justine's Lovers (1878), the next novel, was the story of a girl's struggle in Washington against sudden poverty. It is considered a sub-standard work. In his next novel, Irene the Missionary (1879), De Forest continued his practice of writing what he knew about. Irene is set in Syria, an area he knew from his travels.[72] The Bloody Chasm (1881) is set in the South, where it explores the problems of reconstruction and reconciliation. The book's most important characteristic is its realistic treatment of the suffering in the South after the War.[73] For his last novel De Forest heeded the popularity of the historical romance and wrote a novel of the American Revolution, A Lover's Revolt (1898). In it he makes good use of his skill for describing military movements and life.[74]

During most of his career De Forest published short stories, and toward the end of his life he published some volumes of verse.

That he had a very productive literary life is apparent, and that he enjoyed almost no popular acceptance and very little critical acceptance in his own time or after is curious and melancholy. "[De Forest's] work might well be tagged exhibit A in the museum of American literature to refute the comfortable claim that all good books somehow find the readers they deserve automatically."[75] His lack of acceptance is of some importance to this study, and the reason for it and the significance

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[72]Quinn, pp. 163-172.

[73]Haight, p. xx.

[74]Quinn, p. 173.

[75]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 108.

of it will be discussed in a later chapter.

Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918) was born in Boston on February 16, 1838, the son of Charles Francis Adams, Sr., a famous diplomat; the grandson of John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States; and the great grandson of John Adams, the second President of the United States. Henry's three brothers were to distinguish themselves, two as writers, one as a statesman. Most people would consider this a fortunate heritage, indeed. Henry considered it a liability, and perhaps it was an early factor in the pessimistic attitude he was to endure all his life.[76]

As was natural for him, he went to Harvard, but his performance there was not distinguished, nor was he impressed with the place. He did publish his first writing there in the Harvard Magazine. After Harvard, he studied civil law at Berlin and Dresden, making frequent side trips to other parts of Europe. He returned to Boston in 1860 to become secretary to his then congressman father. In the same capacity he went with his father for seven years to England, where his father served as minister. Although he had already demonstrated some facility in history, he decided while in England to become a journalist; and he returned to spend two years in Washington writing free lance articles, mostly about finance. In 1870, in deference to family pressure but against his own desires, he allowed himself to be appointed assistant professor of history at Harvard. This became an important period in his life.[77]

Although characteristically unenthusiastic, he was a successful and inspiring teacher. His concept of history--that history is the operation

[76]Kunitz and Haycraft, pp. 7-8.

[77]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

of fundamental forces and energies, rather than external events--was almost unique in his time, although it is widely accepted and preached today. He took his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1876. He was also editor of the North American Review, throughout its life an important and influential magazine, while he taught at Harvard. Another important event in his life during this period was his marriage in 1872 to Marian Hooper. The marriage, however, ended in tragedy when she committed suicide in 1885.[78]

Her death was a great blow to Adams; it set him to wandering east and west about the world in a restless search for an escape from the memory of it. But before the tragedy, he had come into his own as a historian. With his brother, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., he had published Chapters of Erie and Other Essays (1871). His life of Albert Gallatin had come out in 1879; John Randolph, in 1882. It is interesting to note that he did not publicly acknowledge authorship of either of his two novels. Democracy, An American Novel (1881) was issued anonymously (Adams' authorship was revealed after his death), and he signed the name "Francis Snow Compton" to Esther; A Novel (1884). Between travels after his wife's suicide, he wrote his History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison (1885-1891). During these years he was awarded an LL.D. by Western Reserve University and served as president of the American Historical Association. Although Adams was very firmly established as an intellectual and a historian during these years, his really memorable work was yet to come.[79]

In 1878 he resigned his Harvard position and his editorship and moved

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[78]Ibid., p. 8.

[79]Ibid., pp. 7-8.

to Washington to devote his time entirely to his writing. In the years that followed he wrote his most famous works. Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, in which he articulated his concept of history and illustrated his personal dilemma, was privately printed in 1904, and published in 1913. The Education of Henry Adams was privately printed in 1907, and published in 1918. Here again were seen "...elaborate expressions of the dilemma of the genteel mind confronted by our modern industrial civilization." He was burdened, too, by a sense of failure, but

> the sense of failure that connoted Adams' life, despite his enviable inheritance and superior talent, was not so much a private as a public intuition. It is true that as an Adams, the only "success" that could have meant anything to him was in politics; but what troubled him most and lay at the roots of his defeatism was the realization that he symbolized an outmoded tradition, that the new industrial capitalism rising to ubiquitous power and authority had and would have no use for his type of sensitive mind and scrupulous conscience.[80]

This feeling will be seen to be dominant in his novel, Democracy.

Because of the severe intellectual qualities of much of his work, Adams acquired the reputation of being a cool, aloof person. Beneath such an exterior he was warm and sympathetic. He even hosted the "most brilliant Salon in Washington." His difficulty was that he was born into the wrong age, and few ages could have been more alien to him than the Gilded Age; for emotionally and esthetically he was a medievalist.[81]

Satire

One of the most straightforward definitions of satire belongs to Richard Garrett:

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[80] Ibid., p. 9.

[81] Ibid. See also for works not listed herein.

Satire, in its literary aspect, may be defined as the expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement or disgust excited by the ridiculous or unseemly, provided that humor is a distinctly recognizable element, and that the utterance is invested with literary form. Without humor, satire is invective; without literary form, it is mere clownish jeering.[82]

The title of this study states that the three novels under consideration are "novels of satire and disillusionment," and for this reason the title is somewhat redundant; for there cannot be satire without disillusionment because "in its most serious function, satire is a mediator between two perceptions--the unillusioned perception of man as he actually is, and the ideal perception or vision of man as he ought to be."[83] To be disillusioned is to be free from the illusion that man is what he ought to be, or even nearly what he ought to be; it is to perceive the disparity between the actual and the ideal--as Twain, De Forest, and Adams perceived in the Gilded Age that life was not as it should be.

The phrase "ideal perception" does not mean, of course, that satire is a device only for the romanticist. To the contrary, satire is a practical device; ". . .[The satirist's] art is an exercise of the intellect rather than of the imagination."[84] In the discussion of realism, it was noted that the realist is not precluded from envisioning man as he ought to be. Indeed, if he would be a satirist, as are Twain, De Forest, and Adams in the case of the three novels under consideration, the realist must perforce picture man as he ought to be, although he does it indirectly. That is, if the satirist by means of irony or other tools of satire would

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[82] "Satire," _Encyclopaedia Britannica_, 14th edition, Vol. 20.

[83] John M. Bullitt, _Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1953), p. 1.

[84] Norman Furlong, ed., _English Satire: An Anthology_ (London, 1946), p. 11.

point out what in man is abusive, what is imperfect, what is affected, then he must have some vision of man as he ought to be, that is, of what man is without abuse, imperfection, affectation. It follows, too, that in order for satire to be effective, there must be some agreement between reader and writer about what man ought to be. Satire, therefore, whether it be couched in realistic or fanciful technique, cannot escape the proposition of man as he ought to be.

To return for a moment to the seemingly contradictory subject of satire as intellectual and practical rather than imaginative and ideal: Swift, a very competent satirist, held that satire is a practical, utilitarian instrument of reform. He spoke of the "objective utility" of satire, which, "...instead of lashing, laughs men out of their follies and vices."[85] He believed in the "moral utility" of laughter, as did Meredith, who speaks of "the uses of comedy in teaching the world what ails it."[86] Satire is an intellectual exercise because the writer of satire must possess a temperament which "...is a fusion of the critical and the humorous."[87] It is the intellect which makes humor possible by perceiving keenly the disparity between the actual and the ideal. But

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[85]Bullitt, p. 7. It should be noted, perhaps, that possibly some of the thought in the preceding paragraph also owes its development to Bullitt's excellent analysis of satire. It should be noted, too, that not all commentators acknowledge the moral improvement of satire, e.g., C. E. Vulliamy, <u>The Anatomy of Satire</u> (London, 1950), pp. 11-12. It is possible, however, that Vulliamy's reasoning on this point is as frail as he says the moral improvement of satire is. The frailty lies principally in the absence of reasoning. Mainly, he says that the satirist who undertakes reform becomes a target for satire himself. But even granting this does not argue away the possibility that satire can reform.

[86]George Meredith, <u>An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit</u> (Ithaca, New York, 1956), pp. 89-90.

[87]Furlong, p. 12.

satire may be tragic as well as humorous. Indeed, it is the tragic element in satire that supplies much of the impetus to reform, and here intellect is not the important element. Aristotle, who defined so often, defined the ridiculous as "what is out of time and place, without danger." Emerson pointed out that "if there be pain and danger, it becomes tragic; if not, comic."[88] And he added that "the presence of the ideal of right and of truth in all action makes the yawning delinquencies of practice remorseful to the conscience, tragic to the interest, but droll to the intellect."[89] Horace Walpole summed up the point nicely with: "This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel."[90]

It is this combination of perception and feeling which made satire an appropriate technique for Twain, De Forest, and Adams.

Now that something has been said of the social and literary background of the period under consideration, of the lives and works of the authors under consideration, and of the literary devices involved, this study will set about to answer the following questions: How well do the three novels reflect the age in which they were written and what do they tell us about it? What is their literary worth? What, if anything, do they tell us about the interaction of literature and society?

The answers to these questions will be pursued in the following manner: Chapter II will examine the social significance of the novels.

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[88]R. W. Emerson, "The Comic," Letters and Social Aims, Works (Boston, 1917), VIII, 157.

[89]Ibid., p. 160.

[90]Letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory, 16 August 1776.

Chapter III will examine their literary values. And the final chapter will draw conclusions.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVELS

Introduction

To differentiate between the social and literary significance of the material of this thesis is a rather obvious procedure for this type of study, yet it is a fortunate procedure in that it is not altogether artificial; for the writers were using literary techniques in order to comment on social phenomena. This does not mean, however, that such separation is an easy task; it is not like isolating facts from a history book or a sociology book. Any fact which is used by a novelist in a novel assumes literary "value"; being a part of the total effect of the novel, it has some literary significance. It is, rather, the purpose of this study to see, for one thing, how one facet of an age is reflected by that age's literature. A writer must be in some measure influenced by his environment. If he is influenced to the point of placing facts, impressions, characters, and situations growing directly out of that environment into a literary work, then these elements become relevant to a study of that work. The facts, impressions, characters, and situations which Twain, Warner, De Forest, and Adams placed in the novels under examination in this thesis are to be considered in this chapter as the social significance of the novels. Let the differentiation, then, be considered one of emphasis rather than of separation or isolation.

Synopses

A brief synopsis of each novel may aid in clarifying the illustrative material in this chapter.

The Gilded Age[1] displays the broadest canvas of the three novels; it has a number of intertwined plots and sub-plots, a throng of characters, and a various and countless number of commentaries on contemporary life.

Most of the action centers either directly or indirectly around the attempt of the Hawkins family to sell a vast tract of Tennessee land, which Squire Hawkins had refused to sell when he had the chance because he speculated that the land would one day be very valuable. Senator Dilworthy decides to aid the family (and himself) by influencing the government to buy the land at a very high price. Laura Hawkins, Colonel Sellers, Washington Hawkins, and Harry Brierly go to Washington to help lobby the land bill through the Congress. They nearly accomplish the sale, but Senator Dilworthy is caught in the act of buying votes for his own re-election, and his resultant loss of prestige causes the bill to fail. But before the novel gets to the meat of this action, another important plot is completed.

This plot concerns the speculating efforts of Colonel Sellers, Philip Sterling, and Harry Brierly to make themselves rich by developing the site of a few cabins on a Missouri creek into a flourishing river port and railway terminal. Their success depends primarily on their securing an appropriation for the project from Congress. This they manage to do, but the money is absorbed by Wall Street before the speculators can get their hands on it to invest it and turn it into profit.

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[1]Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, The Gilded Age (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1873).

There is a sub-plot which deals with the romance between Laura Hawkins and Colonel Selby. Selby persuades Laura to elope with him. After he pretends to marry her and they live together for awhile, he informs her that he is already married, and then he deserts her. She meets him again while she is in Washington and takes up with him again. When he tries to desert her once more, she shoots him to death and is forced to go on trial for murder, of which she is finally acquitted on the grounds of temporary insanity.

Another sub-plot concerns the efforts of Philip Sterling to find coal on land he has speculated in, and his somewhat related efforts to win and save from ruin Ruth Bolton, a medical student, whose father has failed financially by reason of his imprudent speculative schemes.

Honest John Vane[2] is the story of John Vane of Slowburgh--petty politician, manufacturer of refrigerators, widower father of two children, self-made man. John falls in love with Olympia Smiles, the daughter of his landlady. Olympia refuses his proposal of marriage because she perceives that he is common in mind, speech, and manners; encumbered with two children; and not nearly as sophisticated and flattering as her university swains. Olympia is of a "good" family fallen to low circumstances, and she considers John very unworthy of her attention.

But John is recognized by a local speculator and lobbyist as a potentially manageable member of the U. S. Congress, and is touted for the job after the incumbent is caught accepting graft. Olympia's regard for John increases as his chance for election grows, for she recognizes

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[2]J. William De Forest, Honest John Vane (New Haven: Richmond and Patten, 1875).

that she can do no better in Slowburgh than to be the wife of a member of Congress. After John is elected, she leads him into matrimony,

John is known as Honest John, a sobriquet of which he is vainly proud. In Washington he is driven by the extravagance of his wife, by the pressure of the lobby, and by his own shallowness into becoming Dishonest John. He accepts a bribe in return for his aid on some special legislation. When his corruption is found out, he manages to escape the consequences by a false show of sincerity. This leads to his re-election and to his being proclaimed again Honest John Vane.

Democracy[3] relates a pilgrim's progress--to disillusionment rather than to grace. The pilgrim is Mrs. Lightfoot Lee, an intelligent, well bred, well educated widow, who has tired of Eastern and European society and of philosophic and philanthropic pursuits and who decides to pass the winter in Washington. Her rather half-formed intention in doing so is to gain enough power to bring about some practical reform in politics.

She soon meets and is impressed by Senator Radcliffe, "the prairie giant," whose acquaintance she cultivates because she believes that he can teach her about practical politics, in that he is a very practical and successful politician. Senator Radcliffe is charmed by Mrs. Lee; and having certain instincts for refinement, he sets about to win her for his wife. Mrs. Lee's friends and Senator Radcliffe's enemies observe that Mrs. Lee is impressed with the Senator's power and political ability, and they are shocked by the possibility that she might become the wife of such a man. They try to impress her with his lack of morals, his ignorance, and his lack of refinement. Radcliffe successfully counters their efforts

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[3]Henry Adams, Democracy (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1880).

until a friend of Mrs. Lee breaks a confidence to reveal to her an instance of Radcliffe's corruption that he cannot convincingly refute.

Consequently, Mrs. Lee rejects the Senator and leaves Washington completely disillusioned about political conduct and about the fact that "the bitterest part of all this horrid story is that nine out of ten of our countrymen would say that I had made a mistake [in rejecting Radcliffe.]"[4]

Politics in the Service of Big Business

Make capital your friend.

Taylor notes that

> if the economic novelists failed to grasp the increasing corporateness of business, they did not fail to grasp the close relationship of economics and politics; they did not fail to expose the frequent perversion of democratic government in the service of big business.[5]

In an early scene in The Gilded Age a businessman dinner guest of the Bolton family answers the traditional question directed at businessmen by lamenting that "the price is raised so high on United States Senator now, that it affects the whole market; you can't get any public improvement through on reasonable terms. Simony is what I call it, Simony."[6] He goes on to bore the diners with a detailed exposition of the intimate connection between railroads and politics. A major part of the plot of The Gilded Age is concerned with the efforts of the Hawkins family, with the good services of Colonel Sellers and Laura as lobbyists and of Senator Dilworthy as the mover in the Senate, to sell off the family's East Tennessee "Knobs"

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[4]P. 374.

[5]Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942), pp. 68-69.

[6]P. 143.

land holdings to the government as a site for the "Knobs Industrial University," an institution for the practical education of the Negro. The scheme was, of course, an intentional swindle, designed to benefit all concerned except the Negro and the United States Treasury. This serves to illustrate how nearly anyone employing a modicum of shrewdness, the meanest of resources, and political influence could utilize special legislation to further business ends. Far more powerful and efficient, however, were the conventional, organized capitalists, such as the railroads.

Also in The Gilded Age a speculator in need of capital to launch the Tunkhannock, Rattlesnake and Youngwomanstown Railroad approaches a capitalist, Mr. Bolton, with this proposition: "All we want...is a few thousand dollars to start the surveys, and arrange things in the legislature. There is [sic] some parties will have to be seen..."[7]

"It will take a good deal of money to start the enterprise," remarked Mr. Bolton, who knew very well what 'seeing' a Pennsylvania legislator meant..."[8] It would seem that in the Gilded Age, buying off the legislature was as basic an expense as was buying the right of way. There were "...so many poor in the legislature to be looked after."[9]

When Henry Brierly goes East in behalf of Colonel Sellers' interests in the combined projects of the Salt Lick extension of the Union Pacific Railroad, the new city at Stone's Landing, and the Goose Run Navigation scheme, he knows he has to influence both Wall Streeters and congressmen in order to bring about consummation of these schemes. Sellers had

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[7]P. 141.

[8]Ibid.

[9]P. 143.

instructed him that "a lot a piece in the suburbs of the Landing ought to do the brokers."[10] Harry knows that failure with either group would mean the failure of the schemes. Indeed, he could have hardly expected to interest the brokers unless he could get an appropriation from Congress, for, "An appropriation was a tangible thing, if you could get hold of it, and it made little difference what it was appropriated for, so long as you got hold of it."[11]

The protagonist of Honest John Vane, newly arrived in Washington, gets the following advice from the Honorable Simon Sharp, an old hand in the Congress:

Special legislation--or, as some people prefer to call it, finance--is the sum and substance of congressional business in our day. It is the great field, and it pays for the working. ...Get your name associated with a navigation scheme, or a railroad scheme, to advance commerce, you understand, or to move the crops. ...My very blood curdles when I think of the power and majesty of capital. This whole land, sir, this whole gigantic Republic, with its population of forty millions, its incomparably productive and energetic industry, and its vast network of continental communications, is the servant, and I almost said the creature, of capital. ...Make capital your friend.[12]

Despite the parasitic-like dependence of business on politics, it was really the business interests which had the upper hand during the Gilded Age. John Vane learns this after a term in Congress. He explains their power to a colleague:

If we should so much as whisper revenue tariff, all the monopolies, all the vested interests, would be after us. You don't know, perhaps, how sharp-eyed and prompt and powerful those fellows are. They are always on hand with their cash, and if you don't want that you do want re-election. They are greedy, and I don't know but they are as strong as the relief and subsidy chaps. It's a mean thing to own up to, but Congress daren't fight

[10]P. 204.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Pp. 83-84.

'em. This country...this great Republic which brags so of its freedom, is tyrannized over by a few thousand capitalists and jobbers.[13]

In Democracy it is this conspiracy of politics and business which gives rise to the downfall of Senator Radcliffe in the eyes of Mrs. Lee. Mrs. Lee's friends, desperate to persuade her not to marry the senator, reveal to her by letter the following circumstances:

Just eight years ago, the great "Inter-Oceanic Mail Steamship Company" wished to extend its service around the world, and, in order to do so, it applied to Congress for a heavy subsidy. The management of this affair was put into the hands of Mr. Baker [a lobbyist.] ...The bill was carried successfully through the House, and, on reaching the Senate, was referred to the appropriate committee. Its ultimate passage was very doubtful; the end of the session was close at hand; the Senate was very evenly divided, and the Chairman of the Committee [Radcliffe] was decidedly hostile.

At last Mr. Baker wrote that Senator Radcliffe had put the bill in his pocket, and unless some means could be found of overcoming his opposition, there would be no report, and the bill would never come to a vote. All ordinary kinds of argument and influence had been employed upon him, and were exhausted. In this exigency Baker suggested that the Company should give him authority to see what money would do, but he added that it would be worse than useless to deal with small sums. Unless at least one hundred thousand dollars could be employed, it was better to leave the thing alone.

The next mail authorized him to use any required amount of money not exceeding one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Two days later he wrote that the bill was reported, and would pass the Senate within forty-eight hours; and he congratulated the Company on the fact that he used only one hundred thousand dollars out of its last credit... .[14]

Although Radcliffe's honesty could not withstand one hundred thousand dollars, it was about ninety-nine times stronger than the honesty of poor John Vane, but then Radcliffe was infinitely richer than "Weathercock" John. At any rate, it appears that during the Gilded Age business and politics scratched each other's backs regularly.

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[13]P. 143.

[14]Pp. 329-331. Radcliffe tries to justify his action to Mrs. Lee on the grounds that the action was taken "for the good of the party," a desperate excuse which Mrs. Lee rightly does not accept.

The Lobby

> Indeed, it sometimes seemed to John Vane that the lobby was a cleverer and more formidable assemblage than either of those two chambers which nominally gave laws to the nation.[15]

The catalytic agents of this compound of corruption--the alliance of business and politics--were the insidious and generally efficient members of the lobby, for it was they who served as the go-betweens and who saw to it that their clients' interests were served in the national and state legislatures. As can be judged from the Radcliffe affair, they did not want for means to their ends. Nevins illustrates the lavish distribution of lobby money by pointing out that by 1868 the Union Pacific Railroad alone had disbursed through its lobby a half million dollars.[16] Nor did the lobbyist neglect his own interests: "...the Washington lobbyist is not seldom more fortunate than the Washington claimant."[17] The members appear in the novels a variegated fraternity--the satanic Darius Dorman who labored in behalf of the "Great Subfluvial Tunnel Road" and seduced the prideful honor of John Vane; the matter-of-fact, efficient Mr. Baker who improved Senator Radcliffe's circumstances by a hundred thousand dollars in government coupons; the charming, attractive, but ruthless Laura Hawkins who labored in behalf of her own interests and kin; and, of course, the genial, exuberant, quixotic, and harmless Colonel Eschol Sellers who, when not perfecting eyewash for dusty-eyed Arabs, argued

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[15]Pp. 105-145.

[16]Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York, 1927), p. 187.

[17]The Gilded Age, p. 431.

the benevolence of the "Knobs Industrial University" plan.

In The Gilded Age Laura Hawkins' lobby techniques are revealed well by her conquest of two votes for the Knobs University Bill. To achieve her conquest of the Honorable Mr. Buckstone, the Chairman of the House Committee on Benevolent Appropriations, the committee before which the University Bill is pending, she has only to resort to coquetry. After one evening's flirtation Laura can conclude:

He is fairly hooked, poor thing. I can play him at my leisure and land him when I choose. He was all ready to get caught, days and days ago--I saw that, very well. He will vote for our bill--no fear about that; and moreover he will work for it, too, before I am through with him.[18]

To keep him in line,

Laura pursued her usual course: she encouraged Mr. Buckstone by turns, and by turns she harrassed him; she exalted him to the clouds at one time, and at another she dragged him down again. She constituted him chief champion of the Knobs University Bill, and he accepted the position, at first reluctantly, but later as a valued means of serving her--he even came to look upon it as a piece of great good fortune, since it brought him into such frequent contact with her.[19]

But if the Buckstone campaign was brief and easy, the Trollop campaign was not; for the Honorable Mr. Trollop was a bitter enemy of the bill, and coquetry and feminine charm would not answer Laura's purposes. No form of logrolling would sway the seemingly implacable and dangerous enemy. But Laura has an instinct for individual weakness, and Mr. Trollop's great weakness is a craving to make "great" speeches. Laura learns that Trollop yearns greatly to make one of his deathless speeches in support of a favorite pension bill of his but, for some mysterious reason, he cannot do as he wishes. Laura soon discovers that Trollop's "mysterious" inability

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[18]Pp. 338-339.

[19]Pp. 372-373.

to make his speech arises from the fact that he cannot write speeches and that he was having difficulty finding someone to "ghost" his pension speech. Very soon such a speech from the pen of an unknown "ghost" is delivered into Mr. Trollop's hands. He is suspicious, but he cannot forbear delivering it to his congressional colleagues. Later Laura summons Trollop and tries to blackmail him into voting for the University Bill with information of his past corruption, which she has had her agents ferret out. But although Mr. Trollop will not immediately succumb to blackmail, he does succumb when Laura shows him a portion of his pension speech, reveals to him that she wrote it, and threatens to let the public know that she is his clandestine amanuensis. Mr. Trollop does not particularly fear public knowledge that he is a crook, but he cannot bear to have the public learn that he does not write his own immortal prose. Therefore, after being granted some bonus lucre, he agrees to work for the bill:

> Make [my indigent brother-in-law] one of those poor hard working unsalaried corporators [of the University] and let him do every body good with those millions--and go hungry himself! I will try to exert a little influence in favor of the bill.[20]

Darius Dorman of Honest John Vane is a long range planner; he spots John Vane as a very petty politician and recognizes John's potential as a useful and corruptible member of Congress. After he is instrumental in gaining John's nomination, Dorman urges John to polish his reputation as Honest John Vane, for that reputation is the thing which gives John's vote for the Subfluvial Tunnel Road particular value. Dorman is patient as well as shrewd. He allows John time to learn that his notions are quixotic and naive. Before approaching him seriously, Dorman allows Vane

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[20] P. 387.

ample time to be driven into debt by his wife. When John is ripe for the picking, Dorman offers to buy his support for the Tunnel Road, and poor John, because of his poverty and vanity, is an easy victim of the lobby. Dorman's carefully laid out, patient, long range plan pays off.

Democracy gives a general and revealing portrait of the lobby's activities by means of a conversation between Mrs. Madeleine Lee and Mrs. Baker, a retired lobbyist and the widow of the man who bribed Senator Radcliffe:

> Madeleine asked whether this was not dull work.
>
> "Oh, dear, no! ...It was quite amusing, I assure you."
>
> Mrs. Lee then boldly said she had got...an idea that Mrs. Baker was a very skilled diplomatist.
>
> "Well! It was as much that as anything, but there's not many diplomatists' wives in this city ever did as much work as I used to do. Why, I knew half the members of Congress intimately, and all of them by sight. I knew where they came from and what they liked best. I could get round the great part of them, sooner or later."
>
> Mrs. Lee asked what she did with all this knowledge.
>
> "...If you had seen Washington in war-times and for a few years afterwards, you wouldn't ask that. We had more congressional business than all the other agents put together. Every one came to us then, to get his bill through, or his appropriation watched. We were hard at work all the time. You see, one can't keep the run of three hundred without some trouble. My husband used to make lists of them in books with a history of each man and all he could learn about him, but I carried it all in my head."
>
> "Do you mean that you could get them all to vote as you pleased?" asked Madeleine.
>
> "Well, we got our bills through..."
>
> "But how did you do it? Did they take bribes?"
>
> "Some of them did. Some of them liked suppers and cards and theaters and all sorts of things. Some of them could be led, and some had to be driven like Paddy's pig who thought he was going the other way. Some of them had wives who could talk to them, and some--hadn't," said Mrs. Baker, with a queer intonation in her abrupt ending.
>
> "But surely," said Mrs. Lee, "many of them must have been above--I mean they must have had nothing to get hold of, so that you could manage them. ...I can't understand how you did it..."
>
> "...You see, what we generally wanted was all right enough. We had to know where our bills were, and jog people's elbows to get them reported in time. Sometimes we had to convince them that our bill was a proper one, and they ought to vote for it. Only now and then, when there was a great deal of money and the vote was close, we had to find out what votes

were worth..."[21]

As for the lobbyist herself:

The woman was showy, handsome in a coarse style, and perfectly presentable. Mrs. Lee had seen Duchesses as vulgar. She knew more about the practical working of government than Mrs. Lee could ever expect or hope to know.[22]

This phenomenon of women lobbyists, as personified by Mrs. Baker and Laura Hawkins, has sound historical corroboration.[23] Nevins remarks that in Washington during this time "the woman lobbyist was seen everywhere, making the streets and hotels disreputably gay..."[24]

Politicians in Service to Themselves

...they serve only themselves.

The "representatives of the people," the lobbyist, and others connected with politics (all loosely termed politicians) did not neglect themselves in their service to vested interests. In fact, they served themselves by serving the vested interests.

Colonel Sellers of The Gilded Age admiringly observes of Senator Dilworthy: "He's only been in Congress a few years, and he must be worth a million."[25] Indeed, the Senator served himself very well. Just how he served himself can be seen by examining some of his activities as a statesman. It has already been shown in the case of Senator Radcliffe's bribe

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[21]Pp. 208-210.

[22]P. 211.

[23]Although a female lobbyist does not appear in Honest John Vane, De Forest devoted an entire later novel to the adventures of one: Playing with Mischief (1876).

[24]P. 96.

[25]P. 184.

acceptance how a statesman may serve himself financially. Senator Dilworthy was not above the same service to himself, but his career may be used to demonstrate how he and his colleagues could use the proceeds of their financial service to themselves in order to augment and secure their political positions, thus putting themselves into position for further financial service to themselves--a process akin to the business practice of re-investing profits in order to gain continued and perhaps larger profit, which also involves sharing the wealth with one's own kind, thereby achieving philanthropic ends, a noble achievement. Unfortunately for Dilworthy, however, the man with whom he chose to invest, a Mr. Noble, did not grasp the nobility of the act.

Senator Abner Dilworthy's term in the Senate of the United States had expired. Only the opposition of one man, the Honorable Mr. Noble, in Dilworthy's State Legislature, stood to block his re-election. (Senators were elected by the state legislatures at that time.) The following newspaper report from The Gilded Age recounts Dilworthy's remedy:

> Tremendous Sensation! Startling news from Saint's Rest /Dilworthy's home state capitol/! On first ballot for U. S. Senator, when voting was about to begin, Mr. Noble rose in his place and drew forth a package, walked forward and laid it on the Speaker's desk, saying, "This contains $7,000 in bank bills and was given me by Senator Dilworthy in his bed-chamber at midnight last night to buy my vote for him--I wish the Speaker to count the money and retain it to pay the expense of prosecuting this infamous traitor for bribery." The whole legislature was stricken speechless with dismay and astonishment. Noble further said that there were fifty members present with money in their pockets, placed there by Dilworthy to buy their votes. Amidst unparalleled excitement the ballot was now taken, and J. W. Smith elected U. S. Senator; Dilworthy receiving not one vote! Noble promises damaging exposures concerning Dilworthy and certain measures of his now pending in Congress.[26]

This intriguing drama is carried to an anti-climax when Senator

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[26]Pp. 518-519.

Dilworthy demands an investigation. This investigation provides a refreshing example of the magnanimity and loyalty of Dilworthy's senatorial colleagues who, forsaking for a time their service to themselves, steadfastly see to it that Dilworthy's rights and dignity as a U. S. Senator are protected. In actuality, it shows another facet of the politicians' service to themselves; it shows, in effect, how birds of a feather flock together.

The following are some remarks from the floor during the "investigation": "the presence in the Capital [sic] of such a creature as this man Noble, to testify against a brother member of their body, was a [sic] insult to the Senate."[27] "Let the investigation go on; and let it make an example of this man Noble; let it teach him and men like him that they could [sic] not attack the reputation of a United States Senator with impunity."[28] The author of the first remark had been accused by the newspapers of selling his chances of re-election to his opponent for $50,000. The investigation did go on, the verdict being this: " 'Not proven that a bribe had been offered and accepted.' This in a manner exonerated *Noble* and let him escape."[29]

The "Hen Persuader" episode in *Honest John Vane* illustrates another ingenious way in which Gilded Age politicians could contrive to serve themselves. As conceived by the speculators, the great Subfluvial Tunnel Road was to run under the Mississippi from Lake Superior to New Orleans, uniting the Great Lakes with the Gulf of Mexico. Dorman explains to John Vane,

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[27]P. 532.

[28]Ibid.

[29]P. 540. Italics mine.

The subscription is to be started by the government,... That is, the government will loan the capital necessary to build the tunnel, and then secure itself by a mortgage on the same.[30]

This, of course, leaves no risk for the capitalists because they get the first issue of cheap stock and won't be called upon to pay in much. As Dorman explains it:

With a government loan to start on, the stock is sure to be floated and the thing finished; and after that is done, why, it will go on pretty much as railroads do,--gradually increase its business, and in the end pay well, like railroads.[31]

However, Dorman at this point oversimplifies the transaction; he fails to explain the "Hen Persuader." As Vane learns later, to his profit, the Hen Persuader is the corporation within the Subfluvial Corporation.

Its ostensible object was the construction of the Subfluvial, but its real object was the division of the capital into profits. For instance, it built a mile of tunnel at a cost of, say ten thousand dollars, and then delivered the same to the outside company [the Subfluvial Tunnel Road] for say fifty thousand dollars, *then shared the difference of forty thousand dollars among its own stockholders*. Of course, this was a better bargain for the inside company than for the outside one; but all chance of quarreling between the two was evaded by a very effective device; they had the same men for directors, or the same men's partners.

O, it was a beautiful business idea,--this Floating Credit, or Syndicate, or whatever its inventors christened it. It reminds one of that ingenious machine called the Hen Persuader, which was so constructed that when placed under a hen's nest, it would withdraw every egg the moment it was laid, whereupon biddy would infer that her sensations had deceived her with regard to the fact of laying, and would immediately deposit another egg, and so continue to do until she died of exhaustion.[32]

The politicians serve themselves with this scheme by being paid off in Hen Persuader stock, often with the cost of the stock waived or to be paid by dividends. Therefore, by assuring with legislative acts that the

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[30]P. 87.

[31]P. 88.

[32]Pp. 247-248. Italics mine. The reader is correct in recognizing this as a clear satire on the infamous Credit Mobilier scheme. The similarity will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Treasury keeps money flowing into the Subfluvial Corporation and by seeing that the Treasury does not call for payment of interest on its loans, the politicians keep their tainted stock healthy, and, technically, they are free from the accusation that they own stock in schemes which they promote in Congress.

Once John Vane learns from his experience with the Hen Persuader how to serve himself, he lets the lobby know that he is "approachable," and reconciles himself to the knowledge that

> The real business of...legislators is running party politics, clearing scores with your fuglemen, protecting vested interests which can pay for it, voting relief bills for a percentage on the relief, and subsidizing great schemes for a share of the subsidy.[33]

Once he has done all this, he begins to engage in earnest in the standard political self-service schemes.

> He selected the congenial case of a deceased horse, who had been killed by our troops in Western New York during the War of 1812, and who had already drawn his ghostly claim for damages through five Congresses, the amount thereof quadrupling with every successive journey, so that it had risen from $125 to $32,000.
>
> ...Some dozen or other similar swindles, our member took under his legislative protection, proposing to put them through as such little jokers usually are put through; that is, by tacking them on to appropriation bills at the very end of the session. As for remuneration, he was fair minded enough to be content with ten per cent on each successful claim, whereas some unscrupulous statesmen extorted as much as fifteen or twenty.[34]

As the earlier discussion of the Senator Radcliffe's bribe acceptance demonstrates, Democracy conveys a similar impression of the politician in service to himself. But instead of repeating that incident or similar ones, this discussion concludes with the following words from Democracy:

Of all titles ever assumed by prince or potentate, the proudest is that

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[33] P. 97. Italics mine.

[34] P. 185.

of the Roman pontiffs: "Servus servorum Dei"--"Servant of the servants of God." In former days it was not admitted that the devil's servants could by right have any share in government. ...The devil has no servants now; only the people have servants.

Whether the new President and his chief rival, Mr. Silas P. Radcliffe, were or were not servants of the servants of God, is not material here. Servants they were to someone. No doubt many of those who call themselves servants of the people are no better then wolves in sheep's clothing, or asses in lions' skins. ...A wiser generation will employ them in manual labor; as it is they serve only themselves.[35]

Speculation

Speculation--my! the whole atmosphere's full of money.[36]

The speculative spirit of post-Civil War America nourished the allegiance of business and politics, the greed, and the corruption. Americans had a "Midas complex" and the imagination and optimism to match it. If the fact that they often lacked prudence and a sense of values (other than dollar values) does not make the picture of this speculative spirit very pleasant, it does make it interesting.

Of the three novels being studied, The Gilded Age illustrates the speculative spirit most fully. Colonel Sellers is the most speculative of all the characters in the novel and also the least materially successful, but the fruition of his schemes interests the Colonel not so much as the schemes themselves; he is happy as long as he has an "operation" about which he can talk impressively to anybody who will listen.

Early in the novel he tells Washington Hawkins about some "tentative" operations:

Now there's an operation in corn that looks well. Some New York men are trying to get me to go into it--buy up all the growing crops and just boss

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[35]P. 182.

[36]The Gilded Age, p. 110.

the market when they mature--ah I tell you it's a great thing. And it only costs a trifle; two millions or two and a half will do it. I haven't exactly promised yet--there's no hurry--the more indifferent I seem, you know, the more anxious those fellows will get. And then there is the hog speculation--that's bigger still. We've got quiet men at work, (he was very impressive here,) mousing around, to get propositions out of all the farmers in the whole west and northwest for the hog crop, and other agents quietly getting propositions and terms out of all the manufacturers--and don't you see, if we can get all the hogs and all the slaughter houses into our hands on the dead quiet--whew! it would take three ships to carry the money. ...I've got my mind made up that if the thing can be done on a capital of six millions, that's the horse to put up money on![37]

While Washington stays with the Colonel and his family, hearing of these and other tremendous speculations, including a scheme to buy up the banks and corner the greenback market, he is warmed by the appearance of heat achieved by placing a candle into a stove with a transparent window in its door, he sleeps in a cold carpetless room, and he partakes at meal-times of turnips. But the Colonel is not one to be bothered with trifles; he can warm the atmosphere with talk and by suggestion turn a meal of turnips and water into an oriental feast.

In the novel Colonel Sellers gets genuinely involved with only two speculative schemes. He enters into the complex Salt Lick Pacific Extension scheme in the company of two young speculators, Harry Brierly and Philip Sterling. However, the Wall Street capitalists get all the gravy and leave the speculators with only debts to show for their efforts. The point is that this does not dull the Colonel's enthusiasm and optimism one whit. He jumps into the Knobs University scheme with his characteristic exuberance and optimism. He is certain that the Knobs Bill is going to pass, making his own efforts exemplary to his associates, elevating the Negro, and rendering the Hawkins family everlastingly and conspicuously

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[37]Pp. 84-85.

rich. The free rein of this optimism can be seen in the following conversation between Washington Hawkins and Sellers, which takes place just before the bill is up for final vote in the Senate. The Colonel is telling Washington how he was Mr. Sellers when he came to the capitol. When the Knobs Bill was introduced he became Major or Captain Sellers. When the bill passed the House he was Colonel Sellers. He became Old Sellers when the Senate adjourned without acting on the bill:

[Sellers:] ...I'll be hanged if I warn't Old Sellers from that day till our bill passed the House again last week. Now I'm Colonel Sellers again... [Washington:] Well, I do wonder what you will be to-morrow, Colonel, after the President signs the bill?

General, sir!--General, without a doubt. Yes, sir, to-morrow it will be General, let me congratulate you, sir; General, you've done a great work, sir;--you've done a great work for the niggro; Gentlemen, allow me the honor to introduce my friend General Sellers, the humane friend of the niggro. Lord bless me, you'll see the newspapers say, General Sellers and servants arrived in the city last night and is stopping at the Fifth Avenue; and General Sellers has accepted a reception and banquet by the Cosmopolitan Club; you'll see the General's opinions quoted, too...

And I want to be the first to shake your faithful old hand and salute you with your new honors, and I want to do it now--General, said Washington...

The Colonel was touched; he was pleased and proud, too; his face answered for that.[38]

The bill failed to pass the Senate.

Harry Brierly is a younger and more sophisticated Eschol Sellers; he never questions the speculative spirit. He is one who has unqualified admiration for a speculator who can state: "I wasn't worth a cent two years ago, and now I owe two millions of dollars."[39] Philip Sterling is of a somewhat different stripe. He is a speculator, but he could almost not help being so, as the following passage about speculation shows:

It was not altogether Philip's fault, let us own, that he was in this position. There are many young men like him in American society, of his age, opportunities, education, and abilities, who have really been educated

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[38]Pp. 515-516.

[39]P. 243.

> for nothing and have let themselves drift, in the hope that they will find somehow, and by some sudden turn of good luck, the golden road to fortune, He was not idle or lazy; he had energy and a disposition to carve his own way. But he was born into a time when all young men of his age caught the fever of speculation, and expected to get on in the world by the omission of the regular processes which have been appointed from of old. And examples were not wanting to encourage him. He saw people, all around him, poor yesterday, rich today, who had come into sudden opulence by some means which they could not have classified among any of the regular occupations of life.[40]

What sets Philip apart from his contemporary Brierly is the fact that Philip is not as certain about the virtue of speculation. He often questions his own actions: "Am I a visionary? I must be a visionary; everybody is these days; everybody chases butterflies; everybody seeks sudden fortune and will not lay one up by slow toil."[41] But though he vows to quit speculation and live by a regular means, he never does.

The results of such speculation are apparent in both Honest John Vane and in Democracy, but the actual anatomy of the spirit is not shown so well as in The Gilded Age.

Morality and Ability of Politicians

> ...Why should politicians be expected to love you literary gentlemen who write history. Other criminal classes are not expected to love their judges.
> No, but they have sense enough to fear them.[42]

Much of the previous discussion has revealed through specific instances the morality, or lack of morality, of the Gilded Age politicians. But some summary and abstract statements from the novels in this regard might help

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[40] Pp. 455, 456.

[41] P. 561.

[42] Democracy, p. 198.

fill in the portrait of the Gilded Age politician as drawn by the authors of The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy. For the same reason, the general and intellectual abilities of the politician are here discussed, for which Honest John Vane and Democracy are the best sources.

The Gilded Age is, as is well known, profuse with satiric illustrations of political corruption, and it is clear that the novel means to convey the impression that such corruption was the rule rather than the exception. For example, Mr. Noble is the only member of the Missouri Legislature to expose Dilworthy's attempt to bribe him, although there are at least fifty other bribed members. During the ensuing investigation only one member of the Senate deigns to speak out against the whitewashing of the affair, and he is described as a "...senator of worn-out and obsolete pattern; a man still lingering among the cobwebs of the past, and behind the spirit of the age."[43]

The corruption of public officials is such an established fact that even Colonel Sellers cannot deny:

Well--hesitated the Colonel--I am afraid some of them do buy their seats--yes, I am afraid they do--but as Senator Dilworthy himself said to me, it is sinful,--it is very wrong--it is shameful; Heaven protect me from such a charge. That is what Dilworthy said. And yet when you come to look at it you cannot deny that we would have to go without the services of some of our ablest men, sir, if the country were opposed to--to--bribery. It is a harsh term. I do not like to use it.[44]

The Colonel's partner in this conversation is no less harsh than the Colonel:

That is true, Colonel. To be sure you can buy now and then a Senator or a Representative; but they do not know it is wrong, and so they are not ashamed of it. They are gentle, confiding, and childlike, and in my

[43] P. 540. Italics mine.

[44] P. 328.

opinion these are qualities that ennoble them far more than any amount of sinful sagacity could. I quite agree with you, Colonel Sellers.[45]

The morality and abilities of the hero of Honest John Vane are not very impressive. The inspirational phrases he uses in his campaign speeches are found "in the papers."

In the whole superficies of our civil affairs he saw but one error which needed serious and instant attention, namely, the franking privilege. ...He had never heard that our civil institutions were not exclusively our own invention, but germinated naturally from the colonial charters granted by "tyrannical Britain." He believed that, because Queen Victoria cost England half as much annually as Boss Tweed cost the single city of New York, therefore England ought to be and must be on the verge of a revolution. ...As for political economy, he had never seen a line of Adam Smith, Mill...or any of their fellows; they not being quoted in "the papers" which furnished his sole instruction in statesmanship, and almost his sole literary entertainment. ...All that he knew of political economy was that Henry C. Cary had written some dull letters about it to the Tribune, and that the Pennsylvania iron-men considered him "an authority to tie to."[46]

The list of what John Vane did not know when he went into Congress could go on for pages, but let this stand in conclusion:

He was too ignorant to be a professor in the State University, or even a teacher in one of the city schools; but it was presumed that he would answer well enough as a law-giver for a complicated Republic containing forty millions of people.[47]

As for his morality: he stays honest only until he has a good reason not to be honest. Dorman, who knows Congressmen well from years of helping corrupt them, says of them:

As long as there is special legislation, there will be money to be made by it, and legislators will take their share. ...The only thing I wonder at is, that Congressmen are content with so little. Most of 'em ain't bold and hearty at all. They are pusillanimously half honest.[48]

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[45]Ibid.

[46]Pp. 39-52.

[47]P. 46. This quotation suggests that De Forest had only a slightly higher opinion of school teachers than of politicians.

[48]P. 98.

Of Vane he says:

> John has no character of his own. He has neither the born twist nor the education to give him one. He is a chameleon. He takes the color of the people about him. If his constituents ever find him out, they won't call him Honest John Vane, but Weathercock John. He went straight in Slowburgh, because most folks in Slowburgh go straight. After he has been long enough in Congress he will be like the mass of Congressmen.[49]

The attitude of Democracy toward the morality of politics is pretty well summed up by Mrs. Lee's statement: "I have got so far as to lose the distinction between right and wrong. Isn't that the first step in politics?"[50] By the time she has penetrated the deepest recesses of politics she has learned "...how easily the mere possession of power could convert the shadow of a hobby-horse existing only in the brain of a foolish country farmer, into a lurid nightmare that convulsed the sleep of nations."[51] Senator Radcliffe teaches her this lesson, and, indeed, his power might convulse the sleep of nations; for he is a far greater and more powerful figure than John Vane or even Senator Dilworthy of The Gilded Age. He becomes Secretary of the Treasury, which is not an unimportant post.

Radcliffe is not only a more powerful figure than Vane; he is also in a sense more honest; to Mrs. Lee he "had always openly enough avowed that he knew no code of morals in politics; that if virtue did not answer his purpose he used vice."[52] Indeed, it is the Senator's "blind ignorance of morals" which the friends of Mrs. Lee hope will lead to his failure to win Mrs. Lee. It is seen too in the novel that, despite his political

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[49] P. 100.

[50] P. 199.

[51] P. 341.

[52] P. 335.

acumen, Radcliffe is ignorant "of common literature, art, and history." The scene at Mt. Vernon especially shows him as being in many ways unperceptive and ignorant.

In general, the novels reveal the politicians to be politically and commercially shrewd but not intelligent or cultured, to be pretentious but not honest. This matter of pretension is to be considered next.

Hypocrisy, Pretense, and Ostentation

> He has the grave and thoughtful manner of expectoration of a public man, for one thing...[53]

Because the holders of the public trust served the vested interests and themselves before anything else, hypocrisy in their conduct was inevitable; and because men possessed of little more than ambition and a tough conscience could achieve nearly any political or financial high station, pretense and ostentation were in the same manner inevitable. These characteristics of the age, along with the relationship of big business and politics, the public and private corruption, and the speculative spirit, are amply illustrated by the three novels under consideration.

Colonel Sellers of *The Gilded Age* is essentially a pretender rather than a hypocrite. He never tires of telling of his "plantation," of his southern aristocratic origins, of his well stocked wine cellar, of his familiarity with gifted and great men, of his great financial operations, of his legal abilities and so on *ad infinitum*. He is not a hypocrite because he comes very close to believing for awhile whatever dream he happens to be spinning. A good example of the boldness of his pretense is

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[53]*The Gilded Age*, p. 224.

the raw turnips episode.

Washington Hawkins, enticed by the Colonel's description of the feast-like meals served in his household, calls unexpectedly at the Colonel's home for dinner and finds the impoverished Sellers family about to seat themselves at a table upon which rests only an abundance of clear, fresh water and a basin of raw turnips. Upon seeing Washington, the Colonel is a bit uncomfortable for a moment, but he quickly recovers and invites his guest to dine. Into a long dinner table conversation about high finance the Colonel interjects now and then the following comments:

Have anything from the casters? No? Well, you're right, you're right. Some people like mustard with turnips, but--now there was Baron Poniatowski--Lord, but that man did know how to live!--true Russian you know, Russian to the backbone; I say to my wife, give me a Russian every time, for a table comrade. The Baron used to say, "Take mustard, Sellers, try the mustard," but I always said, "No, Baron, I'm a plain man, and I want my food plain--none of your embellishments for Eschol Sellers--no made dishes for me!" And it's the best way--high living kills more than it cures in this world, you can rest assured on that. ...How does the fruit strike you?

I thought you'd like them. Examine them--examine them--they'll bear it. See how perfectly firm and juicy they are--they can't start any like them in this part of the country, I can tell you. These are from New Jersey--imported them myself. They cost like sin, too; but Lord bless me, I go in for having the best of a thing... These are Early Malcolm--it's a turnip that can't be produced except in just one orchard, and the supply never is up to the demand. Take some more water, Washington--you can't drink too much water with fruit--all the doctors say that. The plague can't come where this article is, my boy!

...What plague, indeed? Why the Asiatic plague that nearly depopulated London a couple of centuries ago.

...Sh! I've let it out! Well, never mind--just keep it to yourself. Perhaps I oughtn't said anything, but it's <u>bound</u> to come out sooner or later, so what is the odds.

...You see, it's booming right along in our direction--follows the Gulf Stream, you know, just as all those epidemics do. ...Well you can't cure it, you know, but you can prevent it. How? Turnips![54]

Senator Dilworthy, on the other hand, is a hypocrite; he pretends to virtue and piety while possessing neither. In a speech to the people

[54]Pp. 110-112.

of Hawkeye he can touch

...reverently upon the institutions of religion, and upon the necessity of private purity, if we were to have any public morality. "I trust," he said, "that there are children within the sound of my voice," and after some remarks to them, the Senator closed with an apostrophe to "the genius of American Liberty, walking with the Sunday School in one hand and Temperance in the other up the glorified steps of the National Capitol."[55]

When Harry Brierly observed that the Senator should have a portion of the Columbus River appropriation in return for seeing it through Congress, the Senator immediately "refuses" the bribe.

"You will offend me by repeating such an observation," he said. "Whatever I do will be for the public interest. It will require a portion of the appropriation for necessary expenses, and I am sorry to say that there are members who will have to be seen. But you can reckon upon my humble services."[56]

In honesty, he might have added that they could also reckon on his keeping that portion of the appropriation which stuck to his fingers.

The Senator is also the special friend of the Negro. It is the Senator who proposes to sell the Hawkins' Tennessee land to the government as a site for the Knobs Industrial University for the Negro. As Harry writes to Colonel Sellers:

I don't care, you know..., so much for the neggroes [sic]. But if the government will buy this land, it will set up the Hawkins family--make Laura an heiress--and I shouldn't wonder if Eschol Sellers would set up his carriage again. Dilworthy looks at it different, of course. He's all for philanthropy, for benefiting the colored race. There's old Balaam, was in the Interior--used to be Rev. Orson Balaam of Iowa--he's made the riffle on the Injun; great Injun pacificator and land dealer. Balaam's got the Injun to himself, and I suppose that Senator Dilworthy feels that there is nothing left him but the colored man. I do reckon he is the best friend the colored man has got in Washington.[57]

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[55]P. 189.

[56]P. 191.

[57]Pp. 278-279.

Temperance, the Indian, the Negro--all were good gilt, but religion was the shiniest gilt of all. A Wall Streeter accounting to Harry Brierly for the disappearance of the Columbus River Slack-Water Navigation appropriation explains:

Perhaps the biggest thing we've done in the advertising line was to get an officer of the U. S. Government, of perfectly Himalayan official altitude, to write up our little internal improvement for a religious paper of enormous circulation--I tell you that makes our bonds go handsomely among the pious poor. Your religious paper is by far the best vehicle for a thing of this kind, because they'll "lead" your article and put it right in the midst of the reading matter; and if it's got a few Scripture quotations in it, and some temperance platitudes and a bit of gush here and there about Sunday Schools, and a sentimental snuffle now and then about "God's precious ones, the honest hard-handed poor," it works the nation like a charm, my dear sir, and never a man suspects that it is an advertisement; but your secular paper sticks you right into the advertising columns and you don't take a trick. Give me a religious paper to advertise in, every time: and if you'll just look at their advertising pages, you'll observe that other people think a good deal as I do--especially people who have got little financial schemes to make everybody rich with. Of course I mean your great big metropolitan religious papers that know how to serve God and make money at the same time--that's your sort, sir, that's your sort, sir, that's your sort--a religious paper that isn't run to make money is no use to <u>us</u>, sir, as an advertising medium--no use to anybody in our line of business.[58]

<u>The Gilded Age</u> portrays Washington society as shot through with ostentation.

Laura soon discovered that there were three distinct aristocracies in Washington. One of these, (nicknamed the Antiques,) consisted of cultivated, high-bred old families who looked back with pride upon an ancestry that had been always great in the nation's councils and its wars from the birth of the republic downward. Into this select circle it was difficult to gain admission. No. 2 was the aristocracy of the middle ground... No. 3 lay beyond... We will call it the Aristocracy of the Parvenus--as, indeed, the general public did. Official position, no matter how obtained, entitled a man to a place in it, and carried his family with him, no matter whence they sprang. Great wealth gave a man a still higher and noble place in it than did official position. If this wealth had been acquired by conspicuous ingenuity, with just a pleasant little spice of illegality about it, all the better. This aristocracy was "fast," and not averse to ostentation.[59]

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[58]Pp. 256-257.

[59]P. 295.

Laura finds that she must learn such "society" customs as turning down calling card corners in order to denote "Condolence" or "Congratulation" or other words and phrases of etiquette. She learns that there are prescribed ways to make visits and receive visitors. "It is very necessary to get the corners right, else one may unintentionally condole with a friend on a wedding or congratulate her upon a funeral."[60]

She learns, too, that society conversation must be carried on in an inane and prescribed manner. The following is a snatch of conversation which occurs among Laura and the wife and daughter of Major-General Fulke-Fulkerson (Antiques):

..."do you like winter, Miss Hawkins?" She said "like" as if she had an idea that its dictionary meaning was "approve of."

"Not as well as summer--though I think all seasons have their charms."

"It is a very just remark. The general held similar views. He considered snow in winter proper; sultriness in summer legitimate; frosts in autumn the same, and rains in spring not so objectionable. He was not an exacting man. And I call to mind now that he always admired thunder. You remember, child, your father always admired thunder?"

"He adored it."

"No doubt it reminded him of battle," said Laura.

"Yes, I think perhaps it did. He had a great respect for Nature. He often said there was something striking about the ocean... And hurricanes. He took a great interest in hurricanes."[61]

The "Parvenus" society consists of such people as the Honorable Patrique Oreillé, "a wealthy Frenchman from Cork," who made his fortune and gained his political position in the employ of "the great and good Wm. M. Weed" of New York City. Mrs. Oreillé does not care much for Washington:

[Mrs. Oreillé:] I'm afraid you'll despise the weather, Miss Hawkins. It's perfectly awful. It always is. I tell Mr. Oreillé I can't and I won't put up with any such climate. If we were obliged to do it, I wouldn't

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[60]P. 297.

[61]P. 298.

mind it; but we are not obliged to, and so I don't see the use of it. Sometimes it's real pitiful the way the children pine for Parry--don't look so sad, Bridget [pronounced Breezhay], ma chère--poor child, she can't hear Parry mentioned without getting the blues."
[Mrs. Gashly:] Well I should think so, Mrs. Oreillé. A body lives in Paris, but a body only stays here. I dote on Paris; I'd druther scrimp along on ten thousand dollars a year there, than suffer and worry here on a real decent income.
[Miss Gashly:] Well then I wish you'd take us back, mother; I'm sure I hate this stoopid country enough, even if it is our dear native land.[62]

Nearly two chapters of The Gilded Age are devoted to the manners of the "Parvenus." One of the chief characteristics of Colonel Sellers is his pretentious boasting, and the hypocritical nature of the Gilded Age politics is given constant attention in the novel.

In Honest John Vane the protagonist is recognizable as a hypocrite simply because he bears the title "Honest." He becomes, indeed, a hypocrite by taking pride in the title, when the ease with which he assumed it is considered. While he was a member of the state legislature he had refused a small one hundred dollar bribe from a lobbyist, and then had publicly denounced the briber, much in the manner of Mr. Noble of another novel.

That this inexpensive outburst of probity should secure him widespread and permanent fame does not, to be sure, shed a very pleasing light over the character which is borne by our law-givers. ... We will simply call the attention of Sunday School pupils and Young Men's Christian Associations to the cheering fact that, at a prime cost of one hundred dollars, our townsman was able to arise and shine upon a people noted for its political purity as "Honest John Vane!" Only one hundred in greenbacks (about ninety in gold)[63] out of pocket, and the days of Washington come again! I should suppose that, for say twice the figure, a legislator of the period might get the title of "Father of his Country."[64]

The hypocrisy in the conduct of Olympia Smiles Vane is made clear in the novel by the rapid change in her romantic regard for John. Before he

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[62] P. 305.

[63] An allusion to greenback inflation.

[64] P. 45.

is considered as a candidate for Congress, she firmly holds him to be beneath her attention. However, her regard for him grows as his chances of election grow, and as soon as he is elected to Congress she sets about leading him into matrimony. John's character and personality were in no way changed by his election, and, therefore, Olympia's basic objections to him could not change. It is certainly true, however, that her outward attitude toward him changed, which labels her as a hypocrite.

In a sense it is pretense and ostentation that lead to John's moral downfall in the form of his bribe acceptance. He gets into debt because his wife insists upon putting up a "front" in Washington, because she insists upon appearing to be what she cannot afford to be. She cannot bear to live in rented rooms. She must have a house with nice furniture. She must have an establishment in which she can give impressive dinners and receptions. She is ashamed to live as they can afford to live. In short, she does not wish her husband and herself to appear to Washington society as they actually are. Moreover, one of the principal reasons for John's not accepting a bribe earlier than he does is that he is proud of being known as Honest John; it pleases him to see the newspapers refer to him as such. The impression the title gives to other people makes it valuable to him, not the virtue implied. John Vane

> did not prize virtue for its own sake, but because the name brought him honor. In truth, his far-famed honesty had thus far stood on a basis of decent egotism and respectable vanity. When this self-conceit was sapped by debt and by the sense of legislative failure, the superstructure sagged, leaned, gaped in rifts, and was ready to sink under the first deluge of temptation.[65]

For this reason it is much easier for him to accept the bribe when he reasons

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[65]P. 158.

that his constituents and the newspaper need not necessarily know that he no longer qualifies for the title.

Not only does hypocrisy in part cause John Vane to involve himself in the Great Subfluvial scheme, but it is also hypocrisy that saves him from ruin after the scheme is publicly exposed for the swindle it is. When he learns that there is to be a full scale investigation of the matter, John contrives to get himself recommended as a member of the investigating committee. His partners in crime are extremely willing to have John on the committee, for they see that his reputation with the public as Honest John Vane will aid greatly in helping them make a whitewash of the investigation. That John should want to be on the committee is hypocrisy enough, but his actions when his name is read in the House as a member of the committee constitute the ultimate in hypocrisy.

...When his name was read as a member of the committee, he rose and requested to be excused from serving.

"My reason is simply this," he said, calmly turning his honest face and dignified abdomen towards every quarter of the house; "I own stock--to the amount of one thousand dollars--in the corporation in question. I will offer no explanation here and now as to my motives in taking it, because those motives will doubtless be demanded of me by the committee of investigation. I shall be happy to appear before it, but I cannot conscientiously be a member of it..."[66]

Of course, John had been careful after the scandal broke to get from Dorman a receipt of payment for his stock. Dorman was glad to give it to him (without payment) in return for John's service on the committee of investigation. Needless to say, Dorman and the other stockholders in the Hen Persuader are shocked by John's actions and retaliate by testifying against him "to the full extent of their naughty knowledge." But John produces his receipt of payment for the stock and lets it speak for itself.

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[66]Pp. 247-248.

And when asked by the committee whether he was aware at the time of purchase that the Hen Persuader was a branch of the Great Subfluvial Corporation, John replies that he had not inquired as closely as he should have on that point and adds that, after all, he did know that the two companies were acting under separate charters. "It seemed fair to infer that investing in one was not the same as investing in the other."[67] It may have been a fair inference, but John knew full well that they were in effect the same company and that by aiding the Great Subfluvial in Congress he was lining his own pockets. Still he does not lie completely and the committee is jubilant.

The committee-men were ready to rise and salute his escape with benevolent cheers. How in the name of political human nature could they want to find guilty their brother lawgiver, brother worker in the party traces, and, perhaps, brother sinner in special legislation.[68]

The most important thing to John, though, is the fact that the next morning "he was newspapered all over as 'Honest John Vane,' " who had had the courage and honesty to admit a mistake in judgment. John and hypocrisy are firm friends.

And no less a stranger to hypocrisy is Senator Radcliffe of Democracy. A good example of their kinship is the way in which Radcliffe passes one instance of his corruption as "hard measures" to save the country from disunion. Radcliffe is forced by Mrs. Lee's friends to recount the incident in order, they hope, to aid her in finding reasons to reject his attentions. He tells her of it in this way:

In the worst days of the war there was almost a certainty that my State would be carried by the peace party, by fraud, as we thought, although,

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[67]P. 250.

[68]Ibid.

fraud or not, we were bound to save it. Had Illinois been lost then, we should certainly have lost the Presidential election, and with it probably the Union. At any rate, I believed the fate of the war to depend on the result. I was then Governor, and upon me the responsibility rested. We had entire control of the northern counties and of their returns. We ordered the returning officers in a certain number of counties to make no returns until they heard from us, and when we had received the votes of all the southern counties and learned the precise number of votes we needed to give us a majority, we telegraphed to our northern returning officers to make the vote of their districts such and such, thereby overbalancing the adverse returns and giving the State to us. This was done, and as I am now senator I have a right to suppose that what I did was approved. I am not proud of the transaction, but I would do it again, and worse than that, if I thought it would save this country from disunion.[69]

By patriotic pretense and, like John Vane, by half truth, he is able to come off rather well. But if he is able to convince Mrs. Lee in this case of his purity, he does not continue to do so; for later she rejects his sort of hypocrisy when she remarks that "I am not willing...to be put in a position where I am perpetually obliged to maintain that immorality is a virtue."[70]

Although Radcliffe is cynically honest enough to admit privately that if virtue does not answer his purpose he does not hesitate to use corruption, he does not let this dull his pretension.

He always attended morning service--at the Methodist Episcopal Church--not wholly on the ground of religious conviction, but because a large number of his constituents were church-going people and he would not willingly shock their principles so long as he needed their votes.[71]

Another telling illustration of pretense and ostentation arises in the novel in connection with the visit to Washington of the Grand-Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Baden-Hombourg.

The newspapers hastened to inform their readers that the Grand-Duchess was

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[69] Pp. 106-107.

[70] P. 361.

[71] Pp. 153-154.

> a royal princess of England, and...every one who had any sense of what was due to his or her own dignity, hastened to show this august couple the respect which all republicans who have a large income derived from business, feel for English royalty. New York gave a dinner, at which the most insignificant person present was worth at least a million dollars, and where the gentlemen who sat by the Princess entertained her for an hour or two by a calculation of the aggregate capital represented.[72]

In _Democracy_, as in the other two novels, hypocrisy, pretension, and ostentation are important and significant materials.

Summary

In these novels many more social institutions, manners, and characteristics are taken to task--the jury system, education, the Negro, newspapers, to name just a few. But not all are common to all three novels, and none are given the prominence and emphasis given the characteristics of the age which are examined in this chapter--the alliance of big business and politics; the lobby; the service of politicians to themselves; the speculation; the want of morality and ability in politicians; and the hypocrisy, pretension, and ostentation--all of which are common and important and significant in the novels under consideration.

The following chapter will examine the literary significance of _The Gilded Age_, _Honest John Vane_, and _Democracy_.

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[72]Pp. 279-280.

CHAPTER III

The Literary Values in the Novels

Introduction

> Men read imaginative literature for individual objects, not social; they read for psychological fulfillment, not for the acquiring of ideas about the state or the machine. They read that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.[1]

For example, men read Mark Twain because

> He offers them, abundantly and intensely, the heightened sense of life they crave. They continue to read him because he offers that heightened sense of life not merely as a temporary excitement, but as an enduring nourishment for a thousand deepseated capacities for experience which, amid the monotony of civilized living, too easily go undernourished.[2]

Consequently, the social significance of the novels with which this thesis is concerned is not in itself sufficient to warrant reflective attention by one concerned with literature. The social object of the novels may give them validity as sociology or economics, but it alone does not give them validity as literature. If the novels have validity as literature, they must provide nourishment for a deepseated capacity for vicarious and symbolic experience, nourishment for a capacity for insight into human motive and emotion, nourishment for the capacity for the understanding and appreciation of the complexity and vitality of

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[1]Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 146.

[2]Ibid., p. 147.

human experience--"that heightened sense of life."

The question is, then, are The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy literature, or are they merely sociological or propaganda documents? The material set forth in this chapter, together with the material of Chapter II, bears on this question, which will be answered in Chapter IV.

The Gilded Age

Occasionally in the world there appears an individual who has more regard for his own excellence than for rules drawn up by other people, one who is, in effect, impatient with rules not drawn up by himself. Such a man was Mark Twain. Consider the result when such a man undertakes to write a novel with a man who has little more to offer than a high regard for rules and a firm knowledge of them. Add to this the fact that the man of high excellence is inexperienced at novel writing and a little unsure deep down of his own excellence and ability. Imagine the result and you have The Gilded Age--uneven, chaotic, awkward, yet as a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

The book has too many characters, especially since the development of many of them is neglected. The principal characters, Senator Dilworthy, Laura Hawkins, Washington Hawkins, Philip Sterling, Harry Brierly, and Ruth Bolton, serve their purposes well enough in illustrating or symbolizing various abuses of the Gilded Age. As for their development as literary characters, some are as flat as figures on wall paper, but most of them assume the dimensions of real people. Hence they make the novel interesting. But insofar as characterization contributes to the greatness of The Gilded Age, it is the character of Colonel Sellers which makes the greatest contribution.

Of all the memorable characters which Mark Twain created during his career, Sellers is the first and one of the finest, not only in the work of Twain, but also in the whole of American literature. In a physical way Sellers dominates the novel from beginning to end in that he serves as the connective for the many episodes which comprise the plot and the numerous other characters in the book. But he also dominates the book in a more important way. It is in Sellers that Twain finds the highest expression for his talents. DeVoto has characterized it as "the gusto of [Twain's] imagination at ease in the superlative."[3]

The often heard criticism of Sellers as a type, a caricature, a mere symbol of the speculative spirit rather than a full dimensional character is easy to accept if one examines Sellers out of the context of the times and mind which led to his conception. It is true that Sellers may sometimes tread close to the line between character and caricature. Indeed, he may sometimes step over it. But he remains on the right side of the line most of the time. Sellers has certain human qualities, apart from his flighty schemes and outlandish pretense, which make him interesting and engaging as a human being. First of all, he has a genuine regard for the well being of other people. For example, he actually believes he is doing the Hawkins family a favor when he entices them to Missouri; he honestly believes that the Knobs University would benefit humanity as well as himself, Dilworthy, and the Hawkins family. He is neither evil nor malicious. When his schemes and maneuverings bring grief to other people, as they nearly always do, no one is sorrier than the Colonel; and no one is more anxious to contrive a remedy, even if the remedy may promise

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[3]Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Cambridge, 1932), p. 288.

more grief than the problem. The Colonel sees the good in every man and tries to overlook the bad. Witness his remarks, cited in Chapter II, about the honesty of politicians. He seldom thinks evil, let alone speaks it, against those who wrong him, e.g., the Wall Streeters in the Columbus River affair. Sellers invokes genuine, unsentimental sympathy, not only for his many failures and his failure to recognize failure, but also for his small embarrassments such as when he goes to sleep in the Senate Gallery or when he has to feed dinner guests turnips. He makes the reader feel almost self-conscious, as if the reader were there. A type or a caricature could hardly do that.[4]

The real reason for the charge that Sellers is a type goes to the core of his success as a character. It is that Sellers is an "expression so native to America that he has become a type,"[5] in the same way that George Babbitt, perhaps a weaker literary character, has become a type. Sellers typifies the character of the Gilded Age. His weakness is his belief in material values and in the extremes to which it is honorable to go in order to obtain one's ends. He is impressed with the gaudy and the sensational. He is blinded by optimism and prevented by acquisitiveness from taking pride in and enjoying the more enduring, more real, and ultimately more satisfying values which arise from humanity rather than

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[4]In his autobiography Twain plaintively argues that when he put James Lampton into the novel as Sellers he did not "overdraw him a shade, I set him down as he was...," and he gives interesting evidence in support of this statement. The Autobiography of Mark Twain, ed., Charles Neider (New York, 1959), pp. 20-21. It is, of course, dangerous to accept anything Twain says as gospel, and it is neither necessary nor relevant to do so here. Nevertheless, the tone of the passage does indicate that Twain was genuinely hurt and surprised by the "caricature" charge.

[5]DeVoto, p. 288.

from the machine or science or business. That Colonel Sellers clearly has the potential for more substantial values and does not call upon it provides him with the substance which makes him a fully developed, vital, revealing character. That he is so native to America makes him appear to be a type.

DeVoto and others have noted that Sellers is a deflection of satire, that he is, unlike others in The Gilded Age, a comic figure--not a target of satire.[6] The reason for this accounts in part for the artistic success of the novel. Meredith said that

> You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less. ...If you detect the ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.[7]

Twain ridicules Sellers but does so without anger. He condemns him without ceasing to delight in him. And he does all of this without apology. He knows that human race is the "damned human race," but in The Gilded Age, at least, he is fascinated and delighted with it. This quality contributes to the success of the novel because it is so compatible with the "gusto of Twain's imagination." Without it the gusto would become angry invective.

Of course, the comic nature of Sellers is an exception; the book is primarily satire. If Meredith's definition is taken seriously, the reason for this is that Twain's "kindliness" was "chilled" by his detection of ridicule in his and Warner's other characters. It is probably near the truth to note that the line between comedy and satire is not as pronounced

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[6]Cf. DeVoto, p. 287.

[7]George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit (Ithaca, 1918), p. 133.

as Meredith has claimed, and for this reason, Meredith's statement has more validity as an illustrative device than as a truism. Yet the grain of truth which remains in it is sufficient to explain as well as to illustrate the difference between Sellers and the other characters in the novel, which is the thing that sets Sellers above them.

The plot of The Gilded Age is at times poor to the point of being ridiculous. It appears to have been manufactured as the authors wrote, as indeed it probably was, owing to its peculiar conception and authorship. The use late in the novel of the two homeless waifs which the Hawkins family adopts on its way to Missouri illustrates well the contrived nature and the unevenness of the plot. Laura, whom the Hawkinses rescue from a steamboat explosion, is gotten into the plot nicely; in fact, a major part of it centers about her misadventures. On the other hand, Clay, whom the Hawkinses adopt after witnessing his parents' funeral, is forgotten until the end of the novel, at which time he is brought in for no other reason but that the reader (of remarkable memory) might wonder what ever happened to him. He is brought in from an Australian sheep farm to be conspicuous in his worthlessness as a character.

The part of the story which deals with the efforts of Sellers and Brierly to develop the town of Napoleon serves well enough as a vehicle to expose the speculators, capitalists, and politicians; but in itself it is formless. He ends abruptly, and there is no transition to the next set of incidents, other than what the characters provide. The best that can be said for it is that it lends a picaresque quality to the book. The portion of the novel which relates Philip's efforts to make his coal mine speculation pay off analyzes the mechanics and disease of speculation clearly, but it suffers from a sentimental, Horatio Alger treatment, which

is totally inconsistent with the principal flavor of the book. Most of the attempts at satire, such as the incident in which Philip and the miners mistakenly believe they have discovered coal, are half-hearted and artificial and, what's worse, dull. The entire portion, in fact, is the dullest in the entire novel.[8] The dullest thing about it is its connection with the love affair between Philip and Ruth Bolton, which is deadly because it is told in trite, sentimental terms, in the fashion of the second rate popular novels of the day.

The major plot of The Gilded Age, which centers about Dilworthy's efforts to sell the Hawkins' Tennessee land to the government as a site for the Knobs Industrial University, is more successful. Not only does it serve extremely well as a means of exposing graft, lobbying, hypocrisy, etc., but it also gives the novel what little unity it has, in that it relates to incidents in the beginning and at the end of the novel. More important, by placing most of the important characters in one setting--Washington--most of the time, the plot serves to better acquaint the reader with the characters, and the authors are able to comment on situations and characters growing out of the Washington setting without doing a great deal of violence to the unity and coherence of the novel. Its one other important good quality is that it has discernible and almost natural form. The culmination of the plot is marked by the failure of the Knobs University Bill. This failure is led up to by the public exposure of Dilworthy as a crook, and by the shooting of Selby by Laura, which rather skillfully (although somewhat sentimentally) rounds out the development of Laura as

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[8]It is remarkable that Brooks considered this the main plot of the book, but it does help explain his negative attitude toward the novel. Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain (New York, 1944), pp. 67-68.

a character.

As has been pointed out in the first chapter as characteristic in a study of The Gilded Age, the novel has been discussed in the last few pages almost as if it were Twain's alone; Warner has seldom been mentioned. Mighty is the inclination to ignore him, and frustrating is the knowledge that he cannot be ignored. It is tempting and perhaps even possible to blame Warner for the defects of The Gilded Age. But as DeVoto so very honestly points out, it is hardly just.[9] Even if Mark Twain had nothing to do with the cumbersome story, which is unlikely, he must assume some blame for it by virtue of the fact that he agreed to it. Moreover, if Warner is to be condemned for the defects in the book, he must also be given some credit for the book's virtues, even for Sellers.[10] In general, however, it is probably safe to assume roughly that Twain was responsible for the "facts" in the book, the satire, the dialogue, and such characters as Sellers and Dilworthy; and that Warner was responsible mainly for the general plot, the romance, the general minor "romantic" characters such as Ruth Bolton, Philip Sterling, and other minor "romantic" characters. All the while, however, it should be kept in mind that the authors probably collaborated more closely than Paine asserts. For example:

> Wherever Mark Twain could enliven the narrative by dialogue he did so; where he had special knowledge...he supplied that; and when there was opportunity to expose abuse, he asserted his view, though the narrative had to be halted for a moment.[11]

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[9] Pp. 284-285.

[10] Cf. Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction (New York, 1936), p. 247.

[11] Ernest E. Leisy, "Mark Twain's Part in The Gilded Age," American Literature, VIII (1937), 447.

The regrettable fact is that the only conclusion which can be reached about the problems presented by the dual authorship of The Gilded Age is necessarily tentative and, in some degree, speculative. Still, it is reasonable, in the light of scholarship and of Twain's other work, to assume that much of the dialogue which contributes so much to the success of the book is Twain's. The "talk" of the book is just one facet of the vivid impression of reality--"that heightened sense of life"--which the novel gives to the reader. If one quality in Twain can be said to account for this, it must be his "gusto." For this quality gave him detachment: "His boundless delight in [characters] is not softened by apology nor deflected by anger."[12] It allowed him to hold his characters and their foibles in contempt without ceasing to delight in them. As a result, "...The Gilded Age is lively with the stench and tumult of its era..." and in spite of its many serious defects, "...its creatures...exist in three dimensions and the north light of contempt illuminates them."[13]

The theme of The Gilded Age has been explored in Chapter II; a passage from the Preface of the novel sums it up well:

> It will be seen that [this book] deals with an entirely ideal state of society; and the chief embarrassment of the writers in this realm of the imagination has been the want of illustrative examples. In a State where there is no fever of speculation, no inflamed desire for sudden wealth, where the poor are all simple minded and contented, and the rich are all honest and generous, where society is in a condition of primitive purity and politics is the occupation of only the capable and the patriotic, there are necessarily no materials for such a history as we have constructed out of an ideal commonwealth.[14]

Now this is clear enough. The question it brings up is that of the

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[12]DeVoto, p. 284.

[13]Ibid., p. 287.

[14]P. v.

moral intent of the novel. For example, Cowie brings up the question when he suggests that the humor or "fun" of the novel is more important than any reform intended by it.[15] Very well, but the moral is not so subordinate as to be unimportant. To be sure, to recall the earlier discussion of satire is to conclude that one is the servant of the other. The fun is the glove of the moral; it gives it form and structure, and it cushions the blow which the authors deal the Gilded Age, thereby making it more effective. Who can read the above passage from the Preface of the novel and maintain that the novel is not meant to amuse as well as to expose? But to ask if it meant to expose in order to amuse or to amuse in order to expose is as pointless as asking whether the squirrel on William James' tree moves around the man or whether the man moves around the squirrel.

Honest John Vane

The Gilded Age forms a natural contrast in tone with Honest John Vane, a more serious satire. And here again Meredith's definition is useful as an illustrative device. Unlike Twain, De Forest could not ridicule his characters without ceasing to love them.[16] Therefore, the charge to which Honest John Vane is open is not that it is comic exaggeration, but that it is angry invective, that it is merely a propaganda novel. But as Twain with gusto saves his novel from chaos, De Forest with honesty, restraint, and clarity saves his from being mere invective and propaganda.

The most striking thing about De Forest as a novelist is his pioneering realism. The characters in Honest John Vane reflect this. With one deliber-

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[15]Pp. 607-608.

[16]Cf. Cowie, p. 519.

ate exception, De Forest is unflinchingly honest in his intention to portray people as they really are. For a hero of a novel, John Vane has some most unheroic qualities: Not only does he manufacture refrigerators for a living, but he is also encumbered with two children. Not only is he not bright enough to be a public school teacher, but he is also common in speech and especially given to trite, slang expressions. Except for a "commonplace fluency of utterance," he is ignorant of all save business and unoriginal in that. The fact that he is rather handsome (although somewhat portly) is offset by the fact that he is a bit pompous and extremely vain. De Forest's honesty coupled with his talent for realistic detail makes the character of John Vane come alive in the pages of the novel. Olympia Smiles Vane is portrayed with no less honesty. Her sudden regard for John after he has some status to offer her, her nagging and pouting in order to move John to provide her with better living quarters in Washington, her selfish concern for herself and her own problems--all these things brought out with workmanlike skill by De Forest and played against the fact that she is attractive and possessed of a certain surface charm (especially in the eyes of some of John's congressional colleagues, particularly Senator Ironman), make her a well drawn, alive, and interesting literary character.

But De Forest's skill in characterization is not shown as well in the other important character in the novel: Darius Dorman, the lobbyist and jobber, fails because De Forest went beyond his realistic technique by trying too hard to characterize Dorman as Satan, or at least as an emissary of that creature. He describes him as having the same traditional visage, physique, and mannerisms as the master of the netherworld and as having a griminess which cannot be removed by soap and water. "In truth,

if you examined his discoloration closely, you distinguished a tint of ashes mingled with the coal smirch, so that a vivid fancy might easily impute to him a subterranean origin and a highly heated history."[17] De Forest resorts to similar devices in connection with Dorman throughout the book. It is obvious that De Forest is trying to characterize the evil of Dorman's kind, but his method is unfortunate; for it is inconsistent with his otherwise skillful and realistic characterization. The reason for it is that De Forest's anger and contempt robbed him of his detachment, as it does not in the case of other characters. He becomes over-anxious to show the reader precisely what he thinks of the likes of Dorman.

Normally, however, De Forest holds his feelings of contempt, anger, and disillusionment in check and with commendable restraint and mature patience sketches his characters and unfolds his story, leaving much to the reader, yet with firm and quiet craftsmanship leading the reader to feel that same contempt, anger, and disillusionment. One of De Forest's few friendly contemporary critics described his method in the following way: "The reader's imagination works more than the writer's; the latter's strength is to observe closely, keenly, and humorously, and then to recount easily, picturesquely, and conscientiously."[18]

De Forest adds to this narrative technique of presenting the characters through their actions and through their dialogue, as one would in a drama, by chatting with the reader about them and about things connected with their character, much in the manner of Thackeray in Vanity Fair.[19] These

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[17]P. 21.

[18]Clarence Gordon, "Mr. De Forest's Novels," Atlantic Monthly, XXXII (1873), 611-612.

[19]Cowie, pp. 518-519.

chats are not sermons characteristic of the "problem" novels of the day, and they add a good deal to the novel; for the device is peculiarly fitted to De Forest's talents and his materials in Honest John Vane. In his handling of the characters he can be ironical, but it is in his chats with the reader that he is wittily cynical, and intelligently perceptive, and here, too, his eye for realistic details adds much, especially in his chats about the characters and motives of the people in his novel.

The mingling of these techniques causes no indirection, no disturbance of the even pace of the novel; the narrative moves forward coherently under the author's firm control. The character of John is central throughout the novel; all of the characters and events in the novel influence his development on two levels. First of all, on the external level he moves from Honest John to Dishonest John, largely due to the temptation of Dorman coupled with the economic pressure brought about by his wife's shallowness and selfishness. At the same time, on the internal level, he changes from ignorant, amiable, well meaning, naive John Vane to cynical, hypocritical, corrupt John Vane. In a sense he grows. At least, by the end of the novel he has lost his illusions. The fact that he accepts the world as he finds it and conforms to it almost gladly reveals his basic weakness, and a basic weakness of the Gilded Age.

There is virtue as well as vice in the manner in which De Forest ends Honest John Vane. The vice is that in the last few pages he loses his restraint and turns to writing a Philippic instead of a novel, he neglects his satire and turns to invective, and he abandons his dramatic technique and his witty, cynical chats to rant and wave his arms to drive his moral home, even to the point of requesting silly and petty legal reforms. The virtue is in the way that he leaves his protagonist, John Vane. De Forest

was too honest a realist to resort to an artificial denouement. He leaves John precisely where he is, precisely where his corruption and hypocrisy have gotten him--in Congress. "...he will resume his labor...of enacting the national revenue into the safes of huge corporations and into the hats of individual mendicants, for the sake of a small percentage thereof to himself."[20] Instead of being a defect as some have contended,[21] it is an honest and logical ending; it stands as a final condemnation, a final testament of disillusionment. If De Forest had stopped abruptly at that point instead of going on for the next two or three pages to vent his indignation, the novel would have been the better for it.

The word that comes to mind in connection with De Forest's style is clarity. There is nothing abstruse either in ideas or style. There is no awkwardness or vagueness of expression. If in a few passages the language of Honest John Vane may sometimes seem a bit trite or stilted by modern standards, such passages are rare. De Forest tends to use balanced parallel structure in sentences and paragraphs, not enough to be artificial, but enough to aid the clarity. He also exhibits a fondness for metaphor, simile, and allusion,[22] but he is careful not to be led to obscurity by this fondness.

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[20] Pp. 257-258.

[21] "...The plot materials of the story...crumble away at the end." Cowie, p. 517.

[22] An allusion on p. 186 is especially interesting: "...he got rid of the venerable Dryasdusts [college professors]..." (Italics mine.) It is likely that De Forest was alluding to Carlyle's Sartor Resartus; he even capitalizes the word as Carlyle did. This is interesting because De Forest was very much like Carlyle in mind and temperament and in his reaction to the machine age. The last three pages of Vane remind one greatly of Carlyle's Sartor. It is speculative to conclude anything from this, but tempting.

In the dialogue there is a suggestion of the slangy expression prevalent among the middle class of his day, but this is not overdone. The straightforward style was the right one for De Forest, for "...He is not a painter of delicious colors and complexions, but a draughtsman of form and action; or he is a fresco artist doing boldly on large surfaces histories of average humanity."[23] His style because of its clarity, economy, and sense of purpose is a distinguished style.

As Cowie points out,[24] De Forest "...chiefly lacked a high imagination and a deeply rooted originality." He can be constrasted in this with Twain, who possessed these qualities. And De Forest also lacked Twain's "gusto"; what distinguishes Honest John Vane is not gusto, but vehemence. De Forest expressed his vehemence in competent literary form, marked by excellent characterization, a distinguished style, and a clear eye for realistic detail.

In the light of this, De Forest's lack of critical and especially popular acclaim illustrates, if nothing else, the degree of his realism; for it was his realism, in a time in which conscientious realism was rare, that probably accounts for his lack of acclaim. Even The Nation, although praising De Forest's "cause" and "fervid temper," in Honest John Vane, decries his realism, which the reviewer calls "designed vulgarity" and says is still blameworthy even though it is designed:

But the reader, duly overwhelmed, and laying down the volume with a sense of having been in irredeemably low company, may be excused for wondering whether, if this were a logical symbol of American Civilization, it would

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[23]Gordon, p. 621.

[24]P. 520.

not be better to let that phenomenon be submerged in the tide of corruption.[25] The Gilded Age had not a more caustic critic and exposer than The Nation, but even it could not abide realism in literature.

The role of the female reader in America after the Civil War must be kept in mind in this connection. Olympia Smiles Vane comes off lightly compared to some other female characters in others of his novels. Consider her treatment in Honest John Vane, and De Forest's reputation during his life becomes more logical still. Then, too, De Forest's use of commonplace incidents rather than crime and seduction, not to mention his lack of sentimentality, probably did not set well with his female readers in 1875.[26] The point is that the realism which so offended in 1875 is, in this age saturated with realism, still effective and distinguished.

Democracy

To lay aside Honest John Vane and pick up Democracy is to leave the realm of intelligence and enter the realm of intellectuality. The change, to be sure, is subtle, but nevertheless significant. And if Honest John Vane may be contrasted to The Gilded Age in tone, Democracy may be contrasted to it in disillusionment: "Compared with Henry Adams, his contemporary in disillusionment, Mark Twain seems an adolescent in the throes of his despair at discovering that the world is imperfect."[27] Adams' disillusionment was more resigned, deeper, and more carefully thought out.

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[25]The Nation, XIX (1874), 441-442.

[26]Robert P. Falk, "The Rise of Realism," Transitions in American Literature (Durham, 1953), p. 399.

[27]Cowie, p. 635.

Democracy, then, is a novel of a thoroughly disillusioned intellectual, or as DeVoto, despite pejorative connotation, has so colorfully put it: "It is a book of a Federalist who suffers from the fidgets."[28]

Adams, of course, was a historian-journalist and not a professional or dedicated novelist. In view of this, the results of his novel-writing endeavor are surprisingly good, which is not to say that they are by any means faultless. Democracy is witty, skillfully satiric, and adequately constructed, but the characterization is often weak; and, in general, it is clear that Adams is more interested in his material than in his art, which is not true in the case of Twain or, for the most part, of De Forest.

Adams' slighting of art in favor of purpose accounts in a great measure for the weak characterization in his novel. It is obvious that many of the characters exist primarily as symbols. Carrington symbolizes what had been good in old Virginia society; Mr. French symbolizes quixotic reform; Schneidekoupon (obviously German for coupon clipper), the rich vested interests; Baron Jacobi, the "jaded" European point of view. There is hardly a character in the novel which is not assigned some symbolic significance. This is, of course, a legitimate device in fiction. The trouble with it in Democracy is that Adams is too much of the time interested in his characters as symbols rather than as people. It is true that he is half-heartedly constructing a fable out of his materials about intelligent man in relation to democratic society,[29] in which these symbols play an important part. But the fable is too slight (or too subtle)

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[28]P. 287.

[29]Cf. R. P. Blackmur, "The Novels of Henry Adams," Sewanee Review, LI (1943), 281-304.

to carry the novel. Indeed, it only causes confusion by creating too many characters which are squeezed dry of purpose and then dropped, and by making the novel appear to be very talky in many portions. Several years passed after Democracy before Adams hit on the correct materials for fable and before he polished the technique for it, and then he did not work with fiction.

His characters are drawn well relative to their importance in the novel, as is usual in novels. Mrs. Lee is the most fully rounded character in the novel, and here Adams' intellectual bent is seen at work, from which Mrs. Lee's failings as a character result; for he is interested in Mrs. Lee almost solely from the point of view of the intellect. Her emotional experiences, when considered at all, are secondary or a by product of intellectual shortcomings or frustrations. For example, she rejects Senator Radcliffe's proposal of marriage ostensibly because of his "moral paralysis." But the crux of his moral paralysis is that he "talks about vice and virtue as a man who is colour-blind talks about red and green."[30] To Radcliffe vice and virtue, right and wrong are abstractions which he cannot intellectually conceive of. In Democracy, Adams does not recognize the difference between ethics and intellect. To him, apparently, everything springs from the intellect; emotions and manifestations of emotions are images, symbols, or energies conceived by the intellect and to be dealt with and analyzed by intellectual procedures. That there is another level of human experience he does not in Democracy make clear. Therefore, there is no basis for judging his characters on any level but the intellectual level.

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[30]P. 353.

This is the disturbing thing about the book. Consequently, any failing which Mrs. Lee, Senator Radcliffe, or Mr. Carrington, the three principal and best drawn characters, exhibit as literary characters is overshadowed by the fact that the reader is never certain whether or not they are meant to be people. That is, he is never certain that he should judge them by the usual standards. From the fact that Adams expends some effort at realistic description, the reader gathers that Adams was aware of an obligation to make them people as well as symbols. But he is also aware of the fact that Adams was too preoccupied with an analysis of his disillusionment to bother. He cast the plot into the form of a love story, and he provided a central conflict of virtue (Mrs. Lee) versus vice (Senator Radcliffe), and several minor conflicts, such as Carrington's struggle to reconcile professional ethics with duty to a friend. He made these concessions to the craft of novel writing, but he was not willing to give himself over completely to it. He was obsessed with his material, but he was not particularly obsessed with the art with which he meant to illuminate this material.

But that he was not willing is not all. The fact remains that he was not <u>able</u> to give himself completely over; for he lacked the skill, the inventiveness, and the enthusiasm of the raconteur, which Twain, for example, possessed. And he lacked the craftsmanship and eye for realistic detail which De Forest possessed. Therefore, after making certain concessions to the art of the novel, Adams made do with what he had. It is fortunate that he had much to make do with.

First of all, he had wit and he makes good use of it. If the reader is disturbed by the characterization or bewildered by the symbolism, his frustration is soothed by the pure enjoyment of Adams' wit, which maintains

a consistently high level throughout the novel. And Adams possessed the perception and disillusionment necessary for satire; these together with his wit make for strong satire, clear and trenchant. He possessed, too, psychological insight. But again, his concern is with the analysis of intellectual forces and concepts more than with emotional concepts. There is no reason to quarrel with this emphasis, only with the over-emphasis.

It should not be forgotten, here, that the symbols and fable of Democracy hold some interest. Nor should it be forgotten that Adams saw and reported his age clearly and accurately. But the symbolic interest is important primarily in connection with Adams' life and will be discussed in this connection in the next chapter. The clear reporting is important for historical and social reasons and has already been discussed and shall be mentioned in the next chapter. Neither is directly important as innate literary value.

The charge most leveled at Adams in connection with Democracy is that he assigned to the system the faults of the politicians: "Adams fails to differentiate between the methods of the politicians then in power and the institutions of democracy..."[31] In the first place, this is not a logical criticism; for it follows from the nature of democracy that the faults as well as the merits of the system will be reflected in the popularly elected caretakers of that system. Since democracy is of the people, the people can make it what they will--the system of democracy is the people: if the people fail the system fails. If a politician is corrupt or venal, the people who elected him are ultimately as responsible for this as is the politician. In the second place, logical or not, the charge does not

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[31]Quinn, p. 489.

get at the basic weakness of the book.

What very likely led Quinn and others to make the charge was their reaction to Adams' complete disillusionment. It is not easy to accept or even consider such utter disillusionment, even in a novel. It offends an inherent mechanism of optimism and illusion in most men. Twain and De Forest at least hold out some hope for future reform; they state that it is toward such reform that they aim with their writings. Adams has a moral, too--a reform to urge. It is that one not purify or reform politics or business, but that he reject them as unworthy and incorrigible and withdraw from them.

If this disillusionment alienates some by its force, what, if anything does it add to the merit of the novel? For one thing it grants Adams a detachment necessary for his satire and for his realistic portrayal of the problems of his time. For another thing, it is in itself perplexing and enigmatic; therefore, it provides the reader of Democracy material for reflection, although Adams often confuses the reader by his own preoccupation with it. It is not, at any rate, the basic weakness of the novel.

The basic weakness of Democracy is that Adams was in part unwilling and also in part unable to fulfill adequately his obligation as an artist, an obligation which he had incurred in undertaking to write a novel.

CHAPTER IV

Evaluation and Summary

Introduction

Social and historical material is normally the concern of the historian and the sociologist. But when such material occurs in a novel, it is also the concern of the student of literature; for he is concerned with all that comes in literature, and all of life, including social and economic problems, may come into literature. However, the most important value in a novel is its value as a work of art. If a novel is a third rate work of art, it is a third rate novel, no matter how important it may be as a historical or social document. But if a novel exhibits literary (artistic) merit as well as historical or social significance, it is an important novel. This thesis demonstrates the meaning and significance of these hypothetical statements in connection with The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy.

Worth as Social History

In 1875 a critic, speaking of Honest John Vane, said: "You have but to change the names and dates a very little and you have the Congressional Washington of 1874-75."[1] A reviewer in The Nation criticized Democracy

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[1]Atlantic Monthly, XXXV (1875), 338.

for "grave offenses" against good taste" manifest in the novel's "readily identifiable" characters, and he added that the novel is "...as sensational in some regards as if it had a blackmailing intention."[2] George Bernard Shaw once wrote to Twain: "I am persuaded that the future historian in America will find your works as indispensable to him as a French historian finds the political tracts of Voltaire."[3] There is no doubt that the picture of the Gilded Age which The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy give is a very accurate one.

Much of what they satirize is only transparently disguised. The Hen Persuader in Honest John Vane is a clear satire on one of the most notorious swindles in American history, the Credit Mobilier--which was the "inside" corporation of the Union Pacific Railroad. The scandal broke in 1872 as a result of a quarrel between participants (as in Honest John Vane), and it involved such men as Vice President Schuyler Colfax and Representative Oakes Ames of Massachusetts, one of the prime movers in the swindle. As in the novel, the ensuing investigation turned out to be a whitewash.[4] Senator Dilworthy's vote-buying difficulties in The Gilded Age are probably a satire on the misadventures of Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas. In 1873 during the balloting for U. S. Senator in the Kansas Legislature, "...a member named York /Twain's Noble?/ arose...and placed on the speaker's table seven thousand dollars which he said Pomeroy paid him for his vote.

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[2]The Nation, XXX (1880), 313. And perhaps it did intend something of the sort: see R. P. Blackmur, "The Novels of Henry Adams," Sewanee Review, LI (1943), 281-304.

[3]Cited in E. Hudson Long, Mark Twain Handbook (New York, 1957), p. 413.

[4]Stewart H. Holbrook, The Age of the Moguls (Garden City, 1953), pp. 49-51. See also Allen Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York, 1927), pp. 188-190, 294-295.

Everyone knew he spoke the truth."[5] A similar incident occurred in Missouri during the same year: "...the legislative balloting to fill a senatorship brought to light a brazen attempt by one candidate to use fifteen thousand dollars in bribery."[6] It is not difficult to trace the source of many of the incidents and people in the three novels under consideration. For even the smallest details in the novels, some corresponding incident in history can often be found. For example, the attraction of the seats on the corporation board of the Knobs University in The Gilded Age takes on significance from the fact that in 1873 the funds of the Iowa State Agricultural College were stolen by someone entrusted with their care.[7]

The material of Chapter II, as well as the few examples above, considered in the light of the historical and social background of the period, demonstrates that the novels accurately, perceptively, and sensitively reflect the age in which they were written. What is the value of this if historical and sociological works do the same thing? The value is that fiction deals with events through the eyes of imagined people who influence the events or are influenced by them. Literature deals with individual people and with individual emotions, as well as with facts. Therefore, at the very least literature is a complement to history and social studies.

The most it offers is a "truth" which historical or sociological studies cannot offer. One understands the speculative spirit of post-Civil War America much better for having read The Gilded Age than he would for reading all the historical and sociological discussions of it lodged in the Library

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[5]Nevins, p. 182.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

of Congress. John Vane, Abner Dilworthy, and Silas Radcliffe explain Gilded Age politics better than a university full of professors. Mrs. Lee looks harder at democratic Washington in the 1870's than do all of the journalist-pontiffs whose words lie gathering dust in newspaper morgues.

This suggests a particular value inherent in looking at the age from the viewpoint of the three novels of this study. Although the three are concerned with the same subject and roughly the same theme, there are three distinct points of view present. Twain looks at the age with the eyes of one saturated with the frontier conception of democratic humanitarianism as well as with the eyes of one who is in many ways a child of the Gilded Age;[8] De Forest, with the eyes of a competent, cosmopolitan, intelligent literary craftsman; Adams, with the eyes of a dispossessed, disillusioned patrician-intellectual who perhaps thought of himself as representative of the dilemma of "modern" man.[9] That they see the same things makes what they see more valid.

There is another value in the historical and social material in the novels which has not been stressed in this study and which should only be suggested here: the age with which the novels deal was the age from which emerged modern America. Many of the social problems which confront us today took root in our culture between 1865 and 1890. It would seem to follow that a knowledge of the Gilded Age could contribute a great deal to our understanding of the world of our own day.

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[8]Cf. Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942), pp. 117-146.

[9]Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston, 1918), p. X.

Literary Importance

The historical worth of the material in The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy is considerable, but the ultimate test of the novels is their literary importance, which can be summarized in three categories: their place in the development of American letters; their significance in relation to the careers of their authors; and, most important, their intrinsic artistic values.

The place of the novels in the development of American literature is marked first of all by their early realism. The strongest of the novels in this respect in Honest John Vane, but the critical realism of The Gilded Age and Democracy, although diluted somewhat by other elements, is readily apparent. For this reason, none of the novels is really typical of the popular and "accepted" literature of its day,[10] but each is important for its role in helping to begin and further the development of American realism, which by 1890 had taken a firm hold in American literature. The novels are also important for being among the very first of a specialized genre of political and economic protest novels which were published in great numbers between 1870 and 1901, a very significant body of writings in American literature.

Related somewhat to the above discussion is the importance of each novel to the career of its author.[11] The Gilded Age has a greater importance to Twain's career than that of being his first novel. It is also the only novel in which he deals directly and effectively with contemporary

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[10]For example, see the convenient listings in G. Harrison Orians (New York, 1940), pp. 191-215.

[11]Warner is excepted.

life and affairs. It is important, then, as a contrast to his "dominantly romantic" imagination, which "...moved more easily in shaping a pliable past than in conforming to the more rigid factual restriction of the present."[12] Honest John Vane shows but one facet of the diverse talents of De Forest, an important but sadly neglected figure in American literature. "In Honest John Vane De Forest was distinctly a pioneer in this field--the novel of political satire--as he had already been in the realistic treatment of warfare [in Miss Ravenel's Conversion]"[13] Democracy has more importance than either of the other novels in regard to the career of its author. Indeed, it is the career of its author which accounts in a great measure for the importance of the novel. For as Blackmur has pointed out, "Adams' two novels..., unlike those of professional novelists, do not show their full significance except in connection with his life."[14] At the same time, Democracy reveals a good deal of the nature and development of Adams' mind and personality.

However important a novel might be in literary history, the important criterion is still the intrinsic value of its art, that is, the value which is not acquired in connection with an author's importance or in connection with the novel's place in literary history. Chapter III of this study has been devoted to gauging the literary values of the novels. It shows that in many serious artistic respects the novels are wanting. But it also shows that the many defects and scars of The Gilded Age do not make

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[12]Taylor, p. 138.

[13]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 518.

[14]Blackmur, p. 281.

a bushel under which Twain could hide his light; that the excesses in Honest John Vane do not fatally soften the sting of De Forest's vehemence, cloud his lucid style, nor destroy the reality of his characterization; that the shortcomings of Democracy do not destroy the freshness of Adams' wit, dim the perceptiveness of his satire, nor obscure the depth of his intellect. In general, the criterion of art is met by the novels to the degree that when their significant historical and social material is considered together with their artistic achievements, they stand as very important American novels.

Conclusion: Interaction of Literature and Society

One of the first things a study such as this thesis shows is that a certain kind of environment gives rise to a certain type of novel, that, for example, a period of political corruption gives rise to a novel like Honest John Vane, which, through satire, both reflects and protests the political corruption. This is typical of comments about the interaction of literature and society because it is obvious. Much of what can be said about the subject is either obvious or speculative. However, The Gilded Age, Honest John Vane, and Democracy say something more general about the interaction of literature and society which, although it is obvious, is significant and bears repeating. They show that redeeming qualities in a shallow and vicious age like the Gilded Age may be found in the age's literature; that men with strong and sensitive minds perpetuate in literature the lasting values of honesty, integrity, and humanity which are lacking in the society; and that although literature may often be the last refuge of these qualities, it is a strong one and serves as a dispenser and teacher of genuine values as well as a refuge for them.

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